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critical dialogues on organization

Dialectics of Dualism: The Symbolic Importance of the Home/Work Divide[*]

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abstract   Teleworking has been widely celebrated as a way to overcome the constructed division between home and work. I explore this concept through the stories of a number of teleworkers employed at a large UK bank. Far from celebrating the predicted blurring of this division, these teleworkers felt vulnerable and uneasy at the loss of this familiar point of reference. Without the divide they lacked a way to account for their behaviour both to themselves and others. They sought to cope with the loss of this boundary and the difference it creates by reproducing the divide within their own homes. Rather than going beyond the division, the teleworkers actively maintained it as a useful way to make sense of and order their lives. The experience of the teleworkers at Bedlam Bank indicates that working at home neither challenges the basis of the division or overcomes the division itself. The boundary between home and work may be weakened structurally, but the teleworkers willingly and actively seek to strengthen it symbolically.

Introduction

> That was a worry, that was a real issue with me. I said to them at work, 'Now, do I wear my shoes or my slippers at home?'…I know it's really weird, but I really found it a strange thing at first, to know whether to wear shoes or slippers. I know it's really pathetic …Because, I mean I've been working since I left school at 16 and I'm 50 next year, so I've worked for 34 years and I've always gone to work in my shoes haven't I? Then suddenly I'm going to work with my slippers on. I don't know why but it was a really strange feeling. When I first started I wore shoes in here. It took me a while to actually let myself put my slippers on. (Barbara, teleworker, Bedlam Bank)[1]

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1   The organization in which I conducted the research was a large UK bank. They requested that the organization's anonymity and those of its employees should be protected. I have therefore used the pseudonym Bedlam Bank to refer to the organisation and the names of the teleworkers and their partners quoted throughout the paper have been changed.

Traditionally, a daily commute to a centralised workplace created a clear geographical separation between two areas of activity. This spatial distinction between work and home also served to reinforce and perpetuate the different meanings that have been attached to each sphere. I will show that the difference is both socially constructed and widely shared, with the workplace seen to be rational, efficient and productive and the home as a source of emotional replenishment and reproduction.

For Barbara (above), bringing the workplace into the home has removed the spatial boundary between the two spheres, a boundary that for 34 years has provided a way for her to identify appropriate behaviour. Her colleagues, family and the wider society in which she participates made a similar distinction. By separating 'home' and 'work' she appeared to follow the social norms. In this paper I use empirical data to demonstrate that this dualistic notion of home and work is a reference point which individuals use to order and make sense of their lives. In accounting for their behaviour both to themselves and to others, people draw on both the difference that is created by the division, and the boundary that keeps them apart.

In both the popular and academic literature, the liberty promised by teleworking and enabled by modern technologies has been widely celebrated. In the absence of both the spatial and temporal boundaries, being able to work away from the office is predicted to lead to the blurring of the home/work divide and to end the synchronised and standardised pattern of living that has characterised industrialised societies.

However, for the teleworkers that I spoke to in the course of my research, the loss of the distinction between home and work was not necessarily a cause for celebration. The removal of this familiar boundary served to obscure the difference between home and work, and the blurring became a source of anxiety as the teleworkers sought to cope with what they perceived as an irregular working arrangement. Without the geographical distinction, Barbara and her colleagues had lost a division that had informed their social practices. This brought into question their everyday activities and was something that they found both unsettling and disconcerting. The method of coping relied on by the teleworkers at Bedlam Bank required the reproduction of the home/work divide *within* their own homes. Stripped of the usual spatial distinctions that had been a significant marker of the difference between these two spheres, the teleworkers willingly invested in the symbolic maintenance of the boundary. Through the use of props or other means available to them, they sought to replace the more usual geographic distinction. This symbolic reproduction of the home/work divide played an important role, helping to separate and define the various situations in which the teleworkers found themselves operating. It is through such distinctions that the expectations of a particular situation were clarified both to the teleworkers themselves but also their families, friends and work colleagues. As such, the divide continued to serve as a common reference point, a 'working consensus' that facilitated interaction (Goffman, 1959). Retaining the divide, albeit through symbolic means, was seen as a vital way for the teleworkers to legitimise their unusual working activity which they felt to be at odds with the dominant discourses of modern working life. The belief in the home/work divide remained a meaningful distinction to the teleworkers at Bedlam Bank and continued as a significant axis, around which they talked about their lives, defined themselves and constructed their identities.

Constructing Difference

Barbara's predicament over choice of footwear highlights the importance of difference in helping her make sense of her life. Shoes and slippers are different types of footwear appropriate for different physical settings and occasions. By recognising those differences, Barbara was able to decide what to do and how she was to behave. In other words she was able to make the situations in which she participated meaningful. The defining nature of difference is noted by Godfrey, Jack and Jones (2002), who argue that it is only through the identification of differences and distinctions that people can experience the unfolding of time. I suggest that this argument also applies to the meaning that people extract from their lives; without difference, not only is there no time but there is also no meaning. It is through the identification and maintenance of significant differences that they are able to structure, prioritise, make decisions and map out the world in which they operate (Cooper, 1993; Massey, 1996).

Distinctions between hot and cold, wet and dry or home and work are widely shared and serve to provide a common framework for our actions and thus facilitate our social interactions. They also prescribe to us the appropriate clothing, behaviour and attitude that are required in a particular situation. Hence, distinctions that are consistently and widely recognised within a society provide reference points that enable us to account for our own actions and those of others. The clearer and more obvious the differences, the simpler it is to define meaning and behave in an appropriate way. Difference is created through a process of separation and the construction of boundaries, and it is through reference to these constructions that a situation is transformed from one that is unclear and ambiguous into one in which a familiar order prevails (Cooper, 1993). The maintenance of boundaries is, therefore, a crucial social activity necessary to ensure that differences, meanings and order are retained.

The division between home and work is an example of a constructed difference that has provided a source of meaning to the working population. Within modern industrialised society the boundaries which have supported this distinction have been largely spatial and temporal. For those like the teleworkers at Bedlam Bank, who work from their own homes, the spatial distinction between these two activities has been removed. In the absence of this boundary the possibility of blurring the distinction between home and work exists. Whilst the possibility of this blurring is celebrated in much of the teleworking literature and seen as aspirational by government departments encouraging flexible work practices (Filipczak, 1992; Toffler, 1980; DTI-Work Life Balance, 2002; Flexibility, 2002), for the teleworkers at Bedlam Bank it meant the loss of a significant source of order and meaning. Without the geographical boundary between home and work the resulting ambiguity caused anxiety and concern. In short, they found themselves in a situation that they felt they had to find a way to 'cope' with.

I have split this paper into three parts. I will begin by tracing the origins of the division between home and work and argue that the division can be seen to have arisen as an 'effect' of the process of industrialisation. I acknowledge that this is a socially constructed distinction rather than an objective and naturally occurring division. However, I argue that despite its constructed nature, the division between home and work plays an important role in structuring lives. Its influence within modern life is

evident at many levels and, therefore, I argue that the division should not be dismissed. In the second section, I will introduce the concept of teleworking. This form of working utilises modern information and telecommunications technologies to enable people to work away from the traditional centralised office. Since the 1980s teleworking has been promoted as a tool to enable the better balancing and improved management of home and work. More radically, it has also been suggested that teleworking could challenge and ultimately destroy the division between home and work. I then introduce the stories collected from my research, considering the experiences of a number of teleworkers who work from their own homes as part of a call centre operation for Bedlam Bank. It will become apparent that, rather than dissolving the division, the teleworkers chose to actively reproduce this distinction within their own homes. I conclude by considering the implications of my findings for the treatment of dualisms within organization studies.

The Myth of the Home/Work Divide

The distinction between home and work as a principle for social organisation emerged as an 'effect' of the processes of industrialisation which took place during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Cott, 1977; Hall, 1995). The change in patterns of behaviour required by the new forms of organisation led to very different conceptions of time and space that have persisted throughout the modern industrial period. Under the feudal system of production the home was the main productive unit within a community; little distinction was made between the activities necessary to ensure the running and maintenance of the domestic residence (the home) and those which led to the production of items which could be exchanged or traded (Hall, 1995). Although living conditions were often meagre, they were the focus around which an individual's activities took place and activities within the household would often be interrupted by agricultural demands which in turn were determined by the weather or changes in the season (Sack, 1986). But apart from adjusting their tasks to the vagaries of the climate, people were free to determine how and when they carried out their productive activities.

This close interweaving of work, home and community (Baruch, 1997; Hall, 1995) was disrupted as the burgeoning factory system increasingly meant that production was centralised under the watchful eye of the capitalist (Marglin, 1976; Rosen and Baroudi, 1992)[2]. As workers exchanged their labour for wages in a centralised work place, time became firmly equated with money (Littler, 1985a; 1985b). These changes meant that temporal discipline increased in importance as the labour force was required to adopt a more synchronised approach to their lives. In the mornings they left their homes, spent their days working collectively in factories or offices and then, at the appointed time, were free to return to their individual residences (Thompson, 1967).

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2   Given that it allows people to work away from their employer's direct supervision, fear by managers of losing control is often cited as a reason why the practice of teleworking has not spread as quickly as had been predicted. For a detailed discussion of this issue see Surman (2002).

A different attitude to the use of space also emerged and led to the clear segregation of activity. Whereas one physical space had previously hosted multiple activities, distinct functions would now each take place within a specifically allocated area (Sack, 1986). Factories were built for the sole purpose of productive activity and would be inhabited only during set time periods. This spatial distinction occurred not only between but also within places with each part of the labour process being allocated a specific location within the factory. This compartmentalisation of space was also mirrored in the home (Sack, 1986). Residences that contained separate rooms for eating, sleeping, cooking, bathing and relaxation gradually replaced large communal rooms that had contained all domestic activity.

The newly centralised working environment was portrayed as rational, efficient and alienating (Braverman, 1974; Hatch, 1997), but the home, having become spatially and temporally separated was seen as something distinct. The wholesome values with which it was associated stood in direct contrast to the activities and values of the modern workplace. But although presenting these as questionable and undesirable, the domestic sphere did not directly challenge the modern organisation of work (Cott, 1977). Instead it was increasingly portrayed by the bourgeois middle classes as a place to accommodate and temper the vagaries of the modern world, a 'haven in a heartless world' (Cott, 1977; Lasch, 1977; Saraceno, 1987).

Far from being separate and distinct as these descriptions of 'home' and 'work' suggest, the two remained highly interlinked during the industrial period, flowing into and reinforcing each other (Du Gay, 1996). The exclusivity and distinctions implicit in the division have never been fully realised; although the home is often portrayed as a private sanctuary, it has never been a complete escape, free from the intrusions of work or the public sphere. In the eighteenth century, legislation was passed permitting entrance to workers houses to ascertain whether they were pilfering cloth from merchants (Sack, 1986). In the nineteenth century neither working class homes, which suffered from overcrowding, or middle and upper class homes, which employed maids, gardeners and other servants, offered the individual any privacy (Gilman, 1904). In more recent times the proliferation of e-mail and mobile phones make it difficult to find complete privacy within your own four walls. Such interconnections between the two spheres have been further highlighted in studies of family-run businesses and farming communities (Lightfoot and Fournier, 1999; Newby, 1985). Contrary to the popular portrayal of the differing character of these two spheres, Hochchild's study of females working the 'double shift' of home *and* work found that it was the workplace that was seen as both the place to escape to and the source of beneficial and satisfying relationships (Hochschild, 1997). However, despite these interconnections, the construction of home and work as separate and the differing meanings attributed to each have persisted throughout modernity.

Given the constructed, arbitrary and incomplete nature of this division many have sought to reveal the associated distinctions as false, as lies, or as a myth (Kobayashi *et al.*, 1994; Seron and Ferris, 1995). As with all binary oppositions, one side of this division has inevitably been privileged at the expense of the other (Knights, 1997). Thus, the public world of economics, politics and work has assumed precedence over the domestic sphere and provided the platform for the dominant groups in society to

maintain and enhance their position through the exclusion of and to the detriment of others (Kerber, 1988; McCulloch, 1997). The effect of this has been particularly significant for women, whose association to the home has restricted their influence within the public sphere and devalued their contribution to society (Hall, 1995; Mirchandani, 1998b). This has led some, including feminist sociologists (Pateman, 1983), to call into question the usefulness of focusing on the division as way of exploring human behaviour. While recognising the constructed and contested nature of the distinction between home and work and the way this can be used as a source of abuse, I would argue that it is important to recognise that its impact is not solely negative. In this paper I suggest that it is necessary to work with the division and to focus on the meanings derived from the construction in order to fully engage with the stories told by the teleworkers at Bedlam Bank. Therefore, instead of dwelling on the constructed nature of the divide, I will focus on the myth of the division between home and work as a persistent reference point which has structured social practice (Bradley *et al.*, 2000; De Cock, Fitchett and Farr, 2001; Law, 1992). I argue that it is *because* of the mythical nature of the division between home/work that the division has endured as a source of meaning, of prioritising activities and structuring lives.

So, although acknowledging the constructed and contested nature of the home/work divide, it is the *belief* in the division as real and the impact of this belief that is of interest to me here. The significance of this point was highlighted during my research whilst in conversation with Jenny, a teleworker at Bedlam Bank and her husband John. They maintained a strict segregation between work activity and their home and social lives. Neither of them socialised with work colleagues or attended social events or Christmas parties that were organised by their employers:

> Well, I've always felt that work and social things don't mix well. I mean I see people at work, I've worked at the same place for 27 years and I've known everybody for at least 15 of that, and they have a Christmas do and they pay for them to go out for a drink and stuff, ... but I wouldn't, I don't have anything to do with it. They're always saying 'Come for a drink', No thanks! If I'm on my fortnights holiday, if I see anybody from work, if I bump into them on the street, I get really annoyed because I don't wanna see them, I'm on holiday. (John, teleworker's husband)

The distinction between home and work feels both real and important to John and Jenny and as a consequence this difference has assumed a permanent presence in their lives. For John, the distinction is made easier by the spatial and temporal separation between his place of work and his home. He is a cabinetmaker and each day goes to a central workshop for a set number of hours to work alongside his colleagues. But although the teleworkers are without the geographical distinction, their stories reveal a belief in the same division.

> …when I'm working, I'm working, you know that is my work. I can't have my family interrupting my work, it's not a job where you can just move away [from the work station], or the children can come in and have a chat with you. So when I'm working my mind is 100% on work…I've made it really clear to people that when I'm working, I'm working, I can't do anything else, so they don't bother me at all [but] once I close those doors I don't think I'm at work at all. I forget about it. (Dalveen, teleworker)

> Once I've taken the last call that's it. I don't think about it again, just shut the door and that's it, full stop. It's the same with starting up for the day... I don't think about it before I actually start, you just shut yourself off from it. (Eileen, teleworker)

Because they maintained the distinction and adopted a different approach to each sphere, the teleworkers reinforced the divide and built the distinction into their daily activities (Benn and Gaus, 1983; Elshtain, 1981; Massey, 1996). For John, Barbara and their colleagues at Bedlam Bank the division between home and work was a useful point of reference and a welcome source of meaning and structure. Working from home and becoming teleworkers had the potential to disrupt this status quo.

Teleworking and the Home/Work Divide

The concept of teleworking is, paradoxically, both reliant on and at the same time claimed to challenge the home/work divide. While teleworking is often promoted as a route to aid the management of two distinct spheres, others (e.g. Toffler, 1980) claim that working free of temporal and geographical constraints can overcome the division altogether. The consequences are predicted to be the replacement of synchronised and standardised social patterns with distinctive and diverse ways of living. The division between home and work will, according to Toffler, be replaced with new points of social reference and lead to profound change in "the ground rules that once governed us" (Toffler, 1980: 264).

Any predictions of the erosion of the home/work divide were not evident from my discussions with the teleworkers at Bedlam Bank, for whom the 'balancing' of two separate spheres was seen as an aspirational goal. This reflects the findings of other research, particularly amongst women who saw teleworking as a way to manage their double day (Mirchandani, 1998a; Sullivan and Lewis, 2001). All of this discussion and rhetoric regarding the 'better management' or 'balancing' of two areas of peoples lives has only served to further cement the popular image that the two are separate (Mirchandani, 1998b). As a result, when voluntarily choosing to commence teleworking, those that do so are firmly committed to the notion that there is a clear difference between home and work.

For the management at Bedlam Bank, the attractiveness of teleworking lay in the possibility of expanding the call centre without incurring the cost of extra accommodation.[3] However, for the teleworkers themselves, the ease of being able to deal with the conflicting demands of home and work was a major motivating factor. During my discussions with the teleworkers I encouraged them to talk about the issues and events that were of significance of them. As a result the discussions did not follow a standard format and, therefore, no generalisations are possible either amongst the group of teleworkers at Bedlam Bank, or to the wider teleworking population. Instead I have

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3   At the Bank pilot teleworking projects had been introduced in two separate UK locations. Each employed 12 people who worked a combination of full and part time hours. All of the participants were female and the majority of these worked accepting incoming calls from customers as part of the bank's call centre operations. The teleworkers were recruited through a selection procedure and were required to have been working in the call centre for a minimum of 12 months prior to the start of the project. However, many of those selected had been working there for periods far in excess of this, in one case for 14 years.

simply sought to engage (Gabriel, 1995) with the stories told by the teleworkers and explore these stories in reference to the division between home and work.[4]

Emerging from many of the discussions was an ambivalent attitude by the teleworkers towards working from home. Teleworking had been given a high profile in both offices and the teleworkers felt they were incredibly lucky and privileged to have been selected to take part. When they reflected on the change in their working practice, they expressed a sense of disbelief and amazement that it was possible for them to do their jobs away from the office with one teleworker stating that had always been her 'dream' to be able to work from home. However, at the same time there was recognition that working from home broke a number of the conventions normally associated with work. This made it difficult for them to account for their behaviour both to themselves and to others. As a result the teleworkers also found that working from home was something uncomfortable and difficult, something that they had to learn to cope with.

The passage below, from my discussion with Lucy, highlights themes that were evident in a number of other teleworkers stories.

> Lucy: I think I've took it easier than I thought I would, I just sort of got on with it really, and just take it for granted now that I work from home, I don't really stop and think. You know, if I stopped and thought about it, and thought 'God am I really doing this?' [laughs], you know, when I started there a few years ago, I'd have never have dreamt I'd be working from home.
>
> Emma: Why, if you stopped and thought about it, would it be..?
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> Lucy: I don't know, I think, I'd think 'God', you know, 'am I really taking calls for Bedlam Bank, talking to these customers from home?', you know, and if other people are, we've had a lot of work done [to decorate the house] and stuff and there's a chap come the other week and he's talking to my husband saying that, he said 'Ohh, my wife will be working, she'll be upstairs', and he said 'Ohh, my daughter-in-law works for Bedlam Bank from home', and it turned out [that it was] one of the girl homeworker's father-in-law that was doing our plastering for us, and I thought 'God, what a small world', and they were chatting saying 'you know, God, you can't believe it really can you, you know, a big company like that got people working from their own homes and', I think if you stop and think about it, you think 'blimey, it is real' [laughs], you know, you're a massive company like that and you've got 12 people, well, obviously you've got the new project [another 12 people based from a different office], but 12 people sitting at home working. And I think, one of my son's friend's mum works at Bedlam Park [the company headquarters], she's quite high up there, one of the senior managers, and she didn't know I worked from home, she said, I'd got my uniform on one day going in, she went 'Oh, I didn't realise you worked for Bedlam Bank', I said 'Oh yeah, I work from home', and she went 'Ohhhh, you lucky thing', she said 'Ohh, you're one of the homeworkers, Ohh, I've heard all about you lot sort of thing', and I think people think we're so privileged to be working from home, you know and I think 'yeah I do', and you stop and you think 'God, I do work from home' and take it for granted really. And there's all these hundreds of people who think they'd like to be doing it.

This account reveals an element of wonder at the situation that the teleworker finds herself in, that from her own bedroom she is able to talk to and service the accounts of

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4   Stories were collected from all the teleworkers participating in the project through unstructured qualitative interviews, which lasted between one and one and a half hours. Twenty-two of the interviews were conducted in the homes of the teleworkers with the remaining two taking place in the office. In five cases the husband or partner of the teleworker was available at the time of the visit and also participated in the interview.

the bank's customers. This sense of amazement and disbelief is reinforced in her interaction with others, who highlight that what she is doing is seen as both unusual and desirable. Other teleworkers reinforced this point saying 'People can't believe that I work from home'. In both the eyes of the teleworkers and of those with whom they come into contact, the fact that they were still able to do their job despite being away from the office represented something special. It was something different to what they had previously known and something that was definitely unusual "It's so *different* to what going to work is all about" (my emphasis). This difference comes to particular prominence during interactions with others. On a day to day basis Lucy and the others don't dwell on the change that have taken place in their working life, they just 'take it for granted'. It is only when presented with the reactions of those who still work in traditional places that they consider the enormity of the changes that they have undertaken and when they do the magnitude of the change is almost too great for them to take in. These exchanges simultaneously highlight the attractiveness of working at home but also single out the teleworkers as odd and unusual.

This breaking of conventions is seen by the teleworkers as an undesirable side effect that they have to learn to cope with. One of them told how she only felt less 'abnormal' when she discovered someone who lived on the same road also worked from home. In the conversation above, Lucy described how she 'took it (teleworking)' better than she expected. Other teleworkers talked about the project 'coming at the right time' for them, at a time when they felt in a position to be able to deal with the consequences, at a time when they could cope. Although all the teleworkers volunteered to take part in the project in the hope that it would improve their quality of life, taking this step is not always seen as easy or necessarily pleasurable. The coping response to these changes have largely been behavioural; Jenny describes how she has come through the difficulties that her change in work activity has created by adapting her routine.

> It's just such a general change in routine to start with, it was quite a shock though wasn't it (directed at her husband)? ... Now, when we're five months into, we're quite settled, we feel old hands at it now, and you don't remember quite how, I thought it was quite abrasive to start with ... I think routine is more a part of your life than you realised, and you only find that out when it changes and then you realise how much of a routine you were in before.

The interest and envy that is elicited when the teleworkers discuss their working arrangements with others is likely to stem from the romantic ideas of temporal and spatial liberation portrayed by those promoting the whole scale social changes that have been linked to teleworking. Whilst removing the tie to a central workplace seems highly attractive to those who remain firmly in the 'system', the experiences of the teleworkers at Bedlam Bank would suggest that, whilst the improved management of two separate spheres is possible, a fundamental change in social practice and a challenge to the dualistic construction of home and work is not possible. The change in work location may have led to a change in geography and a change in routine, but they have not changed the way that the teleworkers think about home and work. In Barbara's words:

> I go to work, it's really weird. If I talk to anyone I go 'I'm going to work' and they go 'but you work from home'. I know but I have to say in my mind, I go to work … it's no different to me, coming in here to go to work, than to go into the office, in my mind. It's a discipline thing for me.

In the absence of the stark geographical divide that previously placed boundaries on their working day, the teleworkers sought to reproduce these boundaries with the resources available to them. For some, place was able to retain an important role in this, having a specific location such as a spare room or office into which they would only go when they were working, and on which they could close the door at the end of their shift. For others who worked in their living room, dining room or frequently their own bedroom, this was not possible. In these cases the actual workstations became symbolic in the boundary definition. The computer, phone and chair were contained in a cabinet, which when closed resembled a wardrobe or cupboard. A number of the teleworkers reported that the closing and opening of the cupboard was how they marked the beginning and end of their working day.

In addition to the spatial factors, temporal factors assumed a high importance in structuring the teleworkers days. The quote above indicates the importance to Barbara of splitting her time between work and other, presumably non-work activities. A similar position was evident in the stories told by others taking part in the pilot project. Despite expressing the idea that teleworking offered an alternative and 'totally different' way to work, they chose to enact the same practices as if they still worked in the office; in fact Barbara thought of it as 'no different' to going into the office. Time discipline was seen as crucial in order to be able to work from home, and as factor that would make the difference a poor and a competent teleworker.

> You've got to be very disciplined and it's very easy to think, 'oh, I'll just nip downstairs for 5 minutes and get a drink' and something like that. I think it's got to be the right type of person really. Somebody who can be trusted and will work and not think because they're at home and nobodies listening, looking over their shoulder, that they can do what they want. (Shirley, teleworker)

This temporal discipline which was previously assisted by the spatial separation was perceived to be important not only for the teleworkers but also for their families. A number talked of the change being hardest for their families and about having to 'educate them' into how to behave. The important distinction that families had to learn was between when their mum was at work and when she was not. Whilst working they had to make sure they were quiet, did not enter the room where she was working and did not otherwise disturb her. When she was not working she could be their mum again. During one interview I was shown a sign which one teleworker's daughter had made and hung on the door where her mum worked. On the one side was a happy smiling face that said 'not working'. On the other was a somewhat more miserable looking face that said 'working'. The sign was switched to the appropriate side as the mother entered and then left the room.

These spatial and temporal disciplines were employed to protect the division between home and work. Both Jenny *and* John were quite clear that the only reason that it was possible for Jenny to telework was that they had a spare fourth bedroom, which meant that it was 'self contained' and therefore, her work 'did not encroach on the rest of the house'.

To symbolise this division both to themselves and others the teleworkers developed rituals that symbolised the transition from one sphere to another. Despite working in her

own home and it being feasible for Shirley to come downstairs and boil the kettle when she felt like a hot drink, she does not allow herself to do this. When she goes into her bedroom to work, she is indicating to herself and others that she is not at liberty to behave as she would when she is at home but not working. The use of a teapot and tea cosy become symbolic of this self imposed restrictions.

> I never come down here [to the kitchen] and make a drink [when she is working]. I take my tea pot upstairs on a tray, I've got a tea cosy so it keeps it quite warm, so if I do want a drink in between [her breaks], even if I've made the tea half an hour or an hour ago it's still warmish.

Despite recognising the opportunity that teleworking presented to challenge the social practices associated with the modern workplace, those participating in the pilot project at Bedlam Bank chose to reproduce the distinctions with which they were familiar. Rather than blurring the boundaries between home and work, the physical proximity of the two resulted in an increased emphasis on temporal and symbolic factors in order to ensure clear and distinct boundaries were maintained between what were considered two very distinct activities. For these teleworkers the home/work divide remained a significant and meaningful device with which they could order their lives. In fact for some the distinctiveness of home and work was now greater than it had previously been. The ritual of going to work that entailed getting dressed, deciding what to wear generally making yourself presentable plus the time taken to travel to and from the office was considered an intrusion into what was seen as private time. However, when working at home this was no longer necessary, you didn't have to think about work until your shift began and you could stop when you signed off. As a result far from blurring the distinction between home and work, the dividing line between the two was much clearer and sharper than before:

> Rather than your whole life being taken over by your job, it does only occupy seven hours of your day. You can put it away and forget it. (Sally, teleworker)

The paradox of the above is clear. For teleworkers at Bedlam Bank one of the major factors influencing their decision to take part in the project was the opportunity to better integrate their work and home lives. However, once working at home they felt that in order to operate successfully, it was necessary to keep the two spheres highly separate.

Within a society in which time and space have become highly compartmentalised, I set out to explore the division between home and work and its relevance amongst a group of workers for whom the physical boundary between the workplace and home has been removed. Although the divide was identified as a social construction or a myth, I acknowledged its relevance as reference point in people's lives. The distinction between home and work and the boundary between the two is a widely recognised symbol that enabled individuals to derive meaning from their existence and account for their own behaviour both to themselves and others (Cohen, 1989).

While spatial changes have taken place in the lives of the teleworkers, such changes are not reflected in the lives of their colleagues, employers, families, neighbours or friends. The teleworkers at Bedlam Bank remain part of a social network in which home and work is seen as a clear and meaningful difference. The expectations and points of reference of others in their social network has not changed (Mirchandani, 2000), and as

a way of coping and feeling less 'abnormal' the teleworkers chose to use the dominant social values to create difference in their own lives. Although the structural bases of the boundary may have been reduced by bringing home and work together geographically in one place, the teleworkers sought to use other means to strengthen the boundaries symbolically (Cohen, 1989).

After the Politics of Dualism

In this paper I did not explore what home or work meant to the teleworkers who participated in this research. This may have highlighted differences amongst the group, however what was revealed was the common assertion by all of them that regardless of what the concepts of home and work meant to them, the two spheres were separate and distinct. The retention of this common reference point was important and it is the uniformity of the distinction rather than the uniformity of the meaning that was important in enabling them to both interact with others and account for their actions.

In a paper critical of those questioning the extent of the division between the public and the private (and therefore implicitly between home and work) McCulloch argues that if we view dualisms as a fiction then they lose any real analytical purpose. While I have acknowledged in this paper that the construction of the home/work divide is indeed a fiction, or myth, I argue that based on my research it is the *belief* in the dualism that is significant. The destruction of the dualism predicted by Toffler and others did not occur amongst this group of teleworkers. At Bedlam Bank teleworking has not served to challenge the mechanisms on which the dualism is based nor overcome the dualism itself.

Within the discipline of organisation studies, there has been an ongoing debate over the way scholars should treat dualisms. In a paper arguing for their 'eradication' David Knights (1997: 16), while recognising the importance of distinctions in facilitating communication, claims that the undesirable result of division is that "what is distinguished as 'this' or 'that' is reified as an ontological reality rather than merely a provisional, subjectively significant and hence contestable, ordering of 'things'", this, he states, will result in 'mis-placed concreteness' (*ibid.*: 4). While his discussion is restricted to the academy in this article, I assume that his desire to remove dualistic modes of thought also extends to life beyond the confines of academic debate. For if this were not the case, would he not be guilty of recreating the very dualistic thinking (academy/real world) he is arguing should be abolished?

In setting out this position Knights' views are directly (dualistically?) opposed to the position of Reed (1997) who defends the value of dualistic thought in organizational analysis. Reed's contention is that ontological positions, such as that held by Knights, which focus on the 'immediate' and the 'everyday', prevent both the explanation and understanding of the broader context in which activity is located. Reed emphasises the need to look beyond the 'local' because "this need to contextualize and explain social interaction by locating it within the broader social structures of which it is a part is vital

to rekindling the persistent exercise of a sociological imagination that always connects 'the personal troubles of Milieu' with the 'public issues of social structure'[5]" (1997: 38).

The exploration within this paper of the division between home and work reveals sympathy with both sides of this argument. My presentation of the divide has revealed it to be, in Knights' words, a 'contestable, ordering of 'things'' and it also recognises his claim that in accepting binary oppositions we "elevate one side at the cost of suppression or marginalization of the other" (1997: 15). However, on the basis of the material I have presented in this paper, I also recognise the position taken by Reed. The dualism of home and work has been of value in understanding the experiences of the teleworkers at Bedlam Bank and in identifying the broader framework from which their accounts are drawn. It was also necessary for me to both accept and to work with this division in order to engage with and understand the stories told to me during the course of my research. Knights may see the belief in the home/work divide by the teleworkers as 'mis-placed' but to concur with this would prevent us from seeing that the symbolic reassertion of this divide is a useful way to retain meaning and order. It is my view that, as scholars of organisation, it is important that we maintain an open mind in respect of dualism, that we neither treat them as something to celebrate nor call for their elimination.

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5   Reed quotes here Mills (1959: 6-8).

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