

‘I wear red lipstick to stand out from the sea of black’: Fashioned space and fashioning space by women in Architecture firms

Abstract submitted for Haute Couture

Ruth.Weatherall@uts.edu.au and weatheruth@gmail.com

Sumati.Ahuja@uts.edu.au

The moment we enter a workplace, the location, the architecture of the building, the design of the interior space influence how we understand an organization and how we fit within it. From assembly lines to board rooms, our workplace sense of self, our identities, are fashioned through space. And we can fashion the space in return. Unfortunately, in organization studies, the spatial elements of organizational life have largely been treated as a backdrop for studies of work. Scholars of organizational space, however, argue that space is not a container, but that its design and use shapes power relations, behaviours, and identities in the workplace. Identities, such as gender identities, can therefore be understood to be fashioned by the ‘fit’ of space (both materially and conceptually), and a focus on fashioned spaces can offer rich insights into how the interaction between people and space operates to include or exclude identities that fall outside organizational norms and boundaries. Our empirically grounded study of several architectural firms in Australia, draws together these concepts of fashion, space, and gender identity. The idea of ‘fashioned spaces’ is particularly suited to the architectural firms, as they actively invite attention to how spaces are fashioned for work. As Vaunjany and Vaast, (2014) point out, architecture firms are often at the forefront of adopting spatial trends, such as the open-plan office, and have a sophisticated understanding of the intended uses of the space, such as increasing collaboration.

Our aim for the study is to explore the dynamic interaction between fashioned space and gender identity in the context of architecture in order to understand the influence of fashioned spaces on exclusions and inclusions of women. Importantly, our emphasis is on the *intersection* of people and space where we can gain the richest insights into the impact of fashioned space on different groups of workers (e.g., women, disabled) and the behaviours disrupt or maintain that space. Accordingly, we have three key layers of analysis. Firstly, a focus on how the space was fashioned provides us insight into the norms of the work of architects, who is considered to be an architect, and the behaviours the space fashions. Secondly, we turn our attention to how women were both fashioned by and fashioned the spaces with which they interacted. This included repurposing the space for care work, by hiding children under their desks, or restricting behaviours seen as ‘unacceptable’ to women only spaces (the toilet). Finally, we reflect on the dynamic interaction between fashioned space and women in architecture. We outline how the norms of the fashioned space operate to exclude women and how women had mixed experiences of fashioned spaces in which they sometimes hid their behaviour and sometimes made themselves highly visible. Ultimately, we discuss how the concepts of ‘fashioned

spaces' and 'fashioning of spaces' provides us insight into fashioning inclusive workspaces through material space.