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Flexible Learning, Spatiality and Identity

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ABSTRACT *Descriptions and definitions of flexible organisations and flexible learning programs seem to imply that the processes of teaching and learning can be liberated from the constraints of time and place. This flexibility results in a supply of lifelong learning opportunities where learners can learn at a time and in a place convenient to them. In this article we examine the spatial aspects of flexible learning. Drawing on the work of Foucault, Deleuze, Guattari and actor-network theory, we seek both to explore the significance of the spatial in the provision of learning opportunities and examine its significance for knowledge production and identity. For some, the notion of a deterritorialised lifelong learner, consuming learning opportunities where and when they desire, might have a certain attraction. We argue for a more cautious and analytical approach and the development of cartographical imaginations in continuing education research.*

Introduction

Space and spatiality have received growing attention in many branches of the social sciences in recent years (e.g. Massey, 1994; Pile & Thrift, 1995). In some senses, this seems to fulfil Foucault's (1986, p. 22) argument that

the present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein.

The spatial has received some attention in educational research. For instance, work has been undertaken on the use of space in school classrooms (Comber & Wall, 2001), students' experience in higher education (Nespor, 1994) and the spatial representations of educational change (Paulston, 2000). There is also the obvious spatialising developments associated most noticeably with the increased use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) and more general globalising processes (Edwards & Usher, 2000). The spatial mobilisations of education associ-

ated with forms of open, distance, and distributed learning are more than apparent. Yet there have been few attempts to examine specifically the spatial dimensions of education and the spatialising metaphors through which education is mobilised. Thus Peters (1996, p. 106) has pleaded for “educational theorists to take seriously questions of space”.

In this article, we take up this plea. We propose to explore some of the spatialising practices associated with what has been termed a governing metaphor in policy towards post-school education and training around the globe; the notion of flexibility (Nicoll, 1997). National and international policy documents for post-school education and training abound with calls for flexible forms of learning and assessment, for the development of flexible skills for work and flexible responses to rapid and unpredictable change (DfEE, 1998; Edwards *et al.*, 1999; OECD, 1997). Increased flexibility has become fundamental to the responsiveness of educational systems and their capacity to deliver lifelong learning and a learning society. Notions of flexible organisations and flexible learning programs seem to imply that the processes of teaching and learning can be liberated from the constraints of time and place. Indeed, in some ways it is this liberation that is the hallmark of flexibility, with a resulting supply of lifelong learning opportunities where learners can learn at a time and in a place convenient to them. This is attractive to those concerned to support adult learners. Research into the use of time by part-time students (Morrison, 1996) demonstrates that flexibility can open up opportunities for those who would be excluded by traditional educational timetables.

However, attention also needs to be given to the spatial aspects of flexibility. In addition, we need to be cautious about the precise forms of liberation *and* constraint that different strategies for flexibility might produce. Within this article, therefore, we begin to explore a range of issues arising from our interest in spatiality. If flexible learning is part of the strategy to develop lifelong learning and a learning society, what are the spatial aspects of this? This is a large question, which cannot be answered comprehensively within one article. Here we only indicate some of the possibilities based upon our own research in this area and that of others.

The article is in four sections. First, we outline some key ideas from recent thinking about social space. We point to the possible, if problematic, association of flexibility with what might be argued to be a historical move from modernist “spaces of enclosure” to the “limitless postponements” of postmodern “societies of control” (Deleuze, 1992). In addition, we briefly outline the contribution that actor-network theory (ANT) can make to exploring these issues. These ideas provide reference points for the discussion in the second and third sections of the article, which are illustrative of the forms of analysis possible drawing on differing perspectives on space. In the second section, therefore, we examine the changing spatial arrangements associated with one particular strategy to promote greater flexibility—modularisation. In the third section, we draw upon interview data from our own study of flexibility in further education colleges in the UK¹ and explore the ways in which places are spatially conceptualised in the language used to tell stories of experience. The final section concludes with suggestions for the development of what might be termed a cartographical imagination.

Opening the Spatial

We have already indicated the significance of Foucault in opening up the spatial for examination. His influence is widespread in the discussions of spatiality within the social sciences. For instance, in his description of the “spaces of enclosure” of the factory, prison, hospital, school or family, Deleuze (1992) draws on Foucault’s analysis of the disciplinary function of such spaces. These environments of enclosure are held to serve the modernist project of the past two centuries. The individual moves from one closed space to another—from family to school, from school to barracks or factory—and each of these spaces has its own laws and disciplinary constraints. Just as these disciplinary societies replaced earlier societies of sovereignty, Deleuze argues that, since the mid-twentieth century, we have entered a period of transition from disciplinary societies to “societies of control”. In the disciplinary space of the modernist factory, individuals are constituted as a single body by the bosses, who control their movements, and by the unions, who organise mass resistance. The postmodern corporation, on the other hand, is more like “a gas, a spirit” which

... constantly presents the brashest rivalry as a healthy form of emulation, an excellent motivational force that opposes individuals against one another and runs through each, dividing each within. The modulating principle of “salary according to merit” has not failed to tempt national education itself. Indeed, just as the corporation replaces the factory, perpetual training tends to replace the school, and continuous control to replace the examination. Which is the surest way of delivering the school over to the corporation. (Deleuze, 1992, p. 4)

Thus, rather than being organised into masses, postmodern spaces focus on the control of the individual, part of which is through perpetual training or lifelong learning.

In disciplinary societies, the transition between the separate spaces of enclosure is experienced, according to Deleuze (1992), as an “apparent acquittal”. However, the individual is soon condemned to another period of containment in another space. In societies of control, on the other hand, there are no clear transitions, since the mechanisms of control are experienced as a variety of “limitless postponements”. In other words, there is no sense of relief, either through acquittal or through acknowledgement of the clear constraints of disciplinary space. In turn, resistance is more ephemeral. This does not mean that resistance is impossible. Deleuze (1992, p. 5) points out that “liberating and enslaving forces confront one another” in any regime, whatever the mechanisms of control, and argues that, “there is no need to fear or hope, but only to look for new weapons”. Disciplinary societies and societies of control represent two orderings of society with different forms of possibility and constraint.

For Deleuze, each of these types of society represents a different kind of assemblage, each promoting a set of concerns and dangers, as it is through the development of certain exclusions that inclusion and confinement is constructed. Although

there is a sense in which Deleuze does this himself, spaces of enclosure and societies of control should not be read as a dichotomous view of two kinds of spaces fixed in distinct historical periods. A university, for example, might still be represented as a space of enclosure, in which people are subject to disciplinary constraints and in which they enjoy a sense of belonging. The same place, at the same time, might also be represented as one or more elements in a “postmodern corporation”, a supermarket for self-managing individual lifelong learners to pass through, collecting the resources they need to develop themselves in a society of control. In the postmodern spaces of societies of control, flexibility might thus be construed as a denial of the material significance of place in people’s lives as the boundaries around various aspects of one’s life—e.g. home, work, community—become more diffused and blurred.

The spatial is therefore not univocal. It should rather be considered as overlapping and interweaving, modern and postmodern spaces, to which we would argue strategies of flexible learning contribute. We might also wish to include the notion of sovereign space as well, a historically persistent formation of space as territory controlled by sovereign powers (Dean, 1999). This is relevant for analysis of globalised and globalising forms of flexible learning.

Rather than treating space as immobile, or frozen—a background against which history is played out—the notion of assemblage challenges the divisions between reality, representation and subjectivity. An assemblage is not merely a collection of phenomena, but refers to the symbiotic relationship between content and expression, in which “content is not a signified, nor expression a signifier; rather, both are variables of the assemblage” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. 91). These variables comprise, on the one hand, the “machinic assemblage of desire”, in which bodies, actions and passions are mingled in particular relationships in the material world and, on the other, the “collective assemblage of enunciation”. The latter refers to the words, acts, statements that transform the corporeal world in a particular “regime of signs”. For example, there is a regime of language and signs available for us to represent the material world of bodies, practices and desires that comprise the assemblage of flexible learning. These words and images order how we can think about these as physical places, as people moving around, as a set of ideas about the nature of continuing education, learning, organisation and work. Drawing on Foucault’s (1979) notion of power-knowledge as manifested in and through discourse, the dual meanings of *order* combine both the sense of classifying and that of commanding. Thus, in any “collective assemblage of enunciation” we are simultaneously implicated in the creation of order and the exercise of power. Forms of flexible learning can be seen as an assemblage, ordering the material and discursive possibilities for all those involved.

The notion of assemblage is consistent with some of the notions developed in actor-network theory (ANT) in the subject of science, technology, and society. We do not wish to elaborate the ideas of ANT fully here, but, once again, drawing on Foucault, writers have sought to explore the spatial aspects of, in this case, scientific knowledge production. Over the last 15 years, ANT has become influential in science studies and some branches of the social sciences concerned to develop a

“sociology beyond society” (Urry, 2000). At one level, ANT is part of the shift from individualised, psychological views of knowledge building to more social and cultural interpretations. Knowledge building is taken to be a joint exercise within a network that is spread across space and time and includes inanimate—e.g. books, journals, pens, computers, desks, cars, tape-recorders—as well as animate objects. Here “the associations between human and nonhuman actors or elements builds networks. The more actors mobilised, the stronger and more durable the networks” (Miettinen, 1999, p. 172). Knowledge building, learning and identity are therefore ordered through the range of networks within which we are interconnected; knowledge is relational. These networks “expand, contract and shift configuration over time, and even the most stable and predictable of them are constantly being reappropriated and redefined by the nature of the flows that animate them ...” (Nespor, 1994, p. 12). These flows are crucial to the formation of networks and there is an interest in examining the micro practices or “translations” through which knowledge is mediated (Latour, 1986).

Actor-networks constitute objects where “an object is an effect of an array of relations, the effect, in short, of a network” (Law, 2000, p. 1). Thus, in examining, for instance, a learning episode, we need to examine the network of actors through which it is constituted. Thus flexible learning can be examined as actor-networks in which participants—subjects and objects—and participation are choreographed, thereby constituting particular orderings of space and time through particular mediations. ANT reflexively provides a theory of interconnectedness through which to re-imagine educational practices as spatialised knowledge-building practices. Thus, for instance, rather than a learner being constructed psychologically or sociologically, we might imagine them spatially as a “knowing location” (Law & Hetherington, 2001). Here the learner comes to know, because they are “at the right place in a network of materially heterogeneous elements” (Law & Hetherington, 2001, p. 3). Such locations are also points of surveillance and therefore subject to discipline, normalisation and examination (Foucault, 1979; Nicoll & Edwards, 1997). Flexible learning might be seen as endeavouring to extend and widen the possibilities for interconnection, to foster a greater range of knowing locations. This produces possibilities as well as extending the exercise of power.

The views we have been exploring are based on the notion that space is not a backcloth against which action takes place, but is itself enacted. This is an idea that has been developed influentially in the work of Massey (1994). Her concern is “... to understand space (and space-time) as constituted *through* the social, rather than as dimensions defining an arena *within which* the social takes place” (Massey, 1999, p. 262; emphases in original). This is an open conception of the constitution of spatiality that would apply to both modern and postmodern spaces, and which

... is not stasis, it is not defined negatively as an absence of temporality, it is not the classic “slice through time”. Indeed, the closed system/slice-through time imagination of space denies the possibility of a real temporality—for there is no mechanism for moving from one slice to the next ... the spatiality that I envisage would be open, would be constantly in the process

of being made ... and would have elements of both order and accident ... (Massey, 1999, pp. 264–265)

The view of time that is required for this open and dynamic conception of space is one which is “... irreversible and the vehicle of novelty” (Massey, 1999, p. 272). It is a historical notion of time that, with its open view of the future, contrasts with those stories of progress and development in which “... the future is already foretold”. Modernist stories of progress often dissolve the spatial differences between places, regions or countries by arranging them in temporal sequences expressed in terms like *backward*, *developing* or *advanced*. From a northern hemisphere perspective, the differences between places often become nothing more than their different “place in the queue” within a single story. This fails to acknowledge that there is more than one story to tell, and Massey advocates an understanding of spatiality that acknowledges a multiplicity of possible, relatively autonomous, trajectories. Of course, any idea of a historical move from spaces of enclosure to societies of control is in itself a story of both material and conceptual change, which does not do justice to the diverse practices through which there is an assemblage of space and place. Interaction and change need multiplicity, however, and “for multiplicity there must be space”, and

such a space is the sphere in which distinct stories coexist, meet up, affect each other, come into conflict or co-operate. This space ... is constantly, as space–time, being made. (Massey, 1999, p. 274)

It is for these reasons that we believe ANT provides important additional theoretical resources for the study of spatiality in continuing education and flexible learning. Spaces of enclosure and societies of control, combined with a relational and dynamic conception of space–time, contribute to different desires and the varying enunciations through which actor-networks are made. We now move on to two analyses of aspects of flexible learning to illustrate what such an approach brings to an understanding of practice.

Modularising Space

One of the ways in which providers of learning opportunities have sought to increase the flexibility of their provision is by modularisation. This involves creating “chunks” of learning that can be taken on their own or accumulated over time—and space—by learners. These modules, or units, can be of various sizes in terms of time and amount of credit, and come in a variety of delivery formats, e.g. face-to-face, online. By contrast with a linear curriculum built over time, modularisation involves a non-linear re-ordering of space–time. But with what consequences?

In his exploration of curriculum in undergraduate studies in physics and management in an American university, Nesper (1994) draws upon actor-network theory to examine the ways in which students are organised in space and time. He explores the implications of this both for knowledge and knowledge-building practices, and also for subjectivity. In particular, he argues that the different practices associated with

the subject areas result in different subjectivities, network and representational practices. What is significant for our purposes is that one of the subject areas—physics—is run on a traditional linear pattern, while the other—management—is non-linear, modular and flexible.

For physics students, there is a compression of space and time as they spend all their time together and work long hours into the night in groups. However, the management students have a more disaggregated experience because of their modular program. While the space–time compression results in students with a very firm disciplinary identity and tightly knit networks within the physics community, the management students have a far more diverse set of networks to which they belong. These networks are within management, but also outside it and indeed outside the university, as the Business School has strong links with employers for both teaching and employment purposes. For the physics students, the curriculum is a site for forming ongoing friendships, with academic and social life merging. Nespor argues that this is because the physics students have to take required courses in a specified sequence, while the management students have far more electives in their course. Thus, the fact that there is more flexibility and student choice in the organisation of the curriculum results in a reconfiguration of space–time and with that the range of networks within which the students are interconnected. Student choice is itself mediated through student-organised advice networks, even though the Business School provides a formal advice service. Thus, “instead of having their spatial and temporal trajectories shaped by programme requirements, students organised the space–time relations among their courses. Schedules were composed for reasons unconnected with the substance of the courses” (Nespor, 1994, p. 89). The learning experiences varied not simply because of subject matter, but also because of the different ordering of space–time.

The physics students, with their compressed spatial-temporal relationships and dense networks, are associated with one of the more traditional disciplines. The management students have more of the characteristics of lifelong learners and it may not be accidental that their looser and wider networking is ordered in a newer subject area, where course structure is modular, flexible and mediated by student choice. The actor-network of physics is more tightly bound than that of management and the mobilisations of time and space in some ways more restricted. A strong disciplinary identity is developed, but it would seem to be somewhat insular and introverted. By contrast, the more flexible organisation of space and time associated with the modular management program and the extensive networking beyond the university can be seen to mobilise a learner who is more active and enterprising.

Nespor (1994) provides a detailed analysis of the use of space and time by the students he studied, which suggests the need for more extensive study of the architecture of learning for the understanding of pedagogy. Indeed, we can see in certain educational buildings the attempts to build in greater flexibility, e.g. in the development of learning resources and open learning centres. Nespor contrasts the isolated, almost bunker-like spaces of the physics building with the newer, lighter, more open spaces of the business school. This indicates the ways in which subjectiv-

ities are formed through the spaces to be utilised as well as through the utilisation of that space. The possibilities for flexibility in a new, open-plan building by contrast with one 500 years old are obvious and thus the learners and learning they make possible. “Unlike the austere physics building, the business school wasn’t geared solely to academic or scholarly activity ... [The] public interior space was organised in large part to simulate corporate spaces and function as a stage for the display of sociability” (Nespor, 1994, p. 111). This provides the possibility to develop the self-marketing skills and acquaintance networks necessary for success in the business world.

Thus in the physical space they occupy and through the flexibility of the modular curriculum, the management students develop different subjectivities to the physics students. It is not simply that they are learning different subjects, but that they are learning to be different subjects through the spatial-temporal networks of which they are part; to learn is to be positioned and position themselves in specific ways in space-time. We would suggest, therefore, that the concern to develop more flexible forms of learning and loosen their spatial-temporal organisation in support of lifelong learning represents the attempt to mobilise different actor-networks. In the process, different subjects are mobilised—new areas of the curriculum and active, enterprising subjects. Here learning itself becomes more diverse as different knowledge-building networks are flexibly formed through, for instance, the use of information and communications technologies or the development of work-based and workplace learning.

In exploring flexible learning spatially, we can examine the changing actor-networks in continuing education. We have focused primarily on modularisation here, but the argument points towards a whole arena of research opportunities. As learning is fostered outwith formal institutions, so the practices through which specific networks are formed diversify. Researching the spatial aspects of those practices and their implications for learners and learning represents a significant challenge.

Desiring Places

We now turn to the second component of our exploration. The context for the study upon which we draw is that of a move to make further education colleges in the UK more flexible in order that they might contribute more effectively to lifelong learning strategies. At one level, this would seem to be consistent with the creation of postmodern spaces, with greater flexibility reducing the requirement and possibilities for enclosure. However, as Massey’s (1999) work suggests, there is more than one story being told, and multiple strands to this assemblage. Further, following Deleuze (1992), we would caution against any simple progressive narrative being read into the postmodern.

Here, therefore, we draw upon the interview data from the two case study colleges to explore the inside/outside metaphors within the transcripts. In particular, we draw upon Deleuze and Guattari to examine the extent to which students spatially construct their relationship to the colleges concerned and whether or not that

signifies the shift they identified from disciplinary society to a society of control. As colleges attempt to become more flexible, do they lose the forms of enclosure associated with disciplinary societies or not?

In our interviews, both the physical location and the opening questions of the interviews, “tell me how you came to be in the college”, established a perspective from the “inside”. However, when Simone talks about going “back into education again”, she recalls her position on the *outside*. Simone left school when she was 14 and had her first child at the age of 17. While bringing up her son, Simone had a number of “little mundane jobs” like “bar work, stacking shelves, you know, cleaning ...”. She had “put education on the back burner” until

Four years ago I had my second child and I thought to myself, right, what do I want to do? Do I want to keep doing these, like, little jobs that are getting nowhere? Or shall I, sort of, you know take the plunge and go back into education again?

Thus “education” is represented as an object that can be “put on the back burner”, but also as a container which might threaten to engulf you if you “take the plunge”. Going back into education is contrasted with “getting nowhere”, and the idea of education as a space of containment is echoed in Simone’s description of the places where she has been since she decided to “take the plunge”. Simone enrolled for a Fresh Start for Women course at a local “community-based” centre, which was “a lovely sort of easing me back into it”. She described this place as “a very close knit little college and I felt very cocooned there”. The comfort and safety of the “cocoon” belongs to, but may also be in tension with, the same metaphorical idea of the container, in which you can “plunge”, but in which you are also in danger of being overwhelmed. At the time of our interview, Simone had just begun a full-time course at one of the main sites of the college, and she described her initial anxiety at the thought of coming to this “bigger college”:

I thought oh my gosh, maybe I won’t be able to cope, maybe I’m not academic enough and you know, it’s all going to be overwhelming for me.

Having gained confidence in her academic ability, Simone went on to describe her plans to acquire a professional qualification. This will entail a move from the horizontal plane of *further* education to the vertical dimension of *higher* education. It is interesting to note how this is expressed in a move from metaphors that describe university as “another daunting place”—potentially of containment—to metaphors of linear movement along both space and time:

I’ve got a long way ahead of me ... that is another step ... whatever avenue I will have to travel, I’ll go for it but it means I have another four to five years ahead of me which I am determined to do.

This image of time, conceptualised as space stretched out “ahead of me”, adds a temporal dimension that can threaten to overwhelm the student who has decided to “take the plunge”. It also points to the processes of becoming in the movements through space and time and that assemblage takes place through the actions of

students as well as, and often in contrast to, those of people working within the colleges.

A material factor in the construction of further education colleges as “greedy institutions” (Edwards, 1993) is a funding methodology that, as well as rewarding specific outcomes, rewards the “retention” of students on courses for specified periods of time. Thus lecturers come to evaluate aspects of teaching and learning in terms of the extent to which they can hold on to—contain—students. For example, Ruth, a lecturer at Techcity College, describes her course as one in which “the retention is actually quite good”, and goes on to explain

What holds them there is the fact that they’re in a group and they’re working with others and that they’re sharing their learning ...

From the lecturers’ perspective, there is a tension between the vocational goals of further education and the pressure to retain students on courses. As a lecturer on courses for students like Simone, who are committed to several years of study, Ruth is glad that “we don’t just feed people into jobs”. Thus, the labour market is represented as another container, into which students can be fed, and therefore engulfed or swallowed up.

There is some degree of fluidity in the idea of a space into which students can *plunge*, or from which they might *drift away*. Nevertheless, the places in these accounts are clearly spaces of enclosure which people come into, where they can be held, cocooned or overwhelmed. Thus, the spaces of enclosure can themselves signify different things for those moving into and through them. For Lucy Browne, a senior manager, further education is a place she has “hung on in” since moving from teaching in secondary schools. When asked which aspects of her working life had been most important to her, Lucy responded:

Why I’ve hung on in FE is because I do have feelings about what FE used to represent at least which was a second opportunity for people.

The place where Lucy Browne has stayed extends beyond the particular college to the whole of further education. In a one-dimensional view of space, Lucy is unequivocally located on the inside. However, in the constant shifting of tenses used to describe the space and her feelings about it, Lucy draws our attention to the temporal dimension of a shifting space in her articulation of ambivalence and uncertainty about what kind of a space it is now. She tells us what it used to “represent”, rather than what it used to be—leaving open the question of whether this space ever existed beyond Lucy’s feelings about it. Whether it is real or imaginary—and social imaginaries can have very real effects—the representation of further education as a “second opportunity for people” depends on the notion that there has been a first opportunity. Indeed, the use of the term “second” suggests that this is a repetition of the first opportunity, rather than a new and different space. However, it is possible that Lucy may include herself among the people for whom further education used to represent a second opportunity. Remembering Lucy’s own transition from school to further education, and from teaching to management, the addition of “at least” to the idea of a “second opportunity” promises the possibility

of something more. Lucy's view echoes Simone's idea of education in general as a container that can be *kept on the back burner*, while further education provides a particular point of entry *back into education*. This re-entry may signify a turning up of the gas burner ...

Later in the interview Lucy talks about flexible working hours, and discussions in the management team about "being open most of the year":

And we do that on some income generating courses. What we don't do is bring school students in if you like in the gap between leaving school and actually doing something, doing a course and I think there might be some mileage in that actually, in terms of basic skills and IT.

The description of further education representing a second opportunity in the previous extract seems quite different from this idea of the place Lucy occupies now. Here she speaks consistently in the present tense and identifies herself with the organisation in her account of the things "we" do and do not do. Lucy uses the term "gap" as a space-time metaphor, as an empty space between two places, which represents a particular period of time. This looks very like Deleuze's (1992) account of the transition between two spaces of enclosure, as school students, having left school, are represented as being nowhere until they are "actually doing something, doing a course". However, Lucy proposes filling the gap with something that she does not describe as a course, but as a set of skills "basic skills and IT".

Now we see a glimpse of the different assemblage of "limitless postponement", "perpetual training" and lifelong learning, and a paradox whereby the process of filling the gap between places opens up the boundaries that held them apart. In the context of a conversation about flexibility and "income-generating courses", that "gap" can also be interpreted within the discourse of the marketplace. "Gap", in this discourse, signifies a potential for consumption, a gap, or niche in the market. In commenting that "there might be some mileage in that", Lucy has shifted from her position of collective agency as "we", to invoke the idea of linear movement along a route that might be travelled in the future. With no agent attached to this notion of "mileage", the "gap" is left as a vacancy, a place of possibility and of a process of becoming.

We see, then, in the metaphors that interviewees used the complex assemblage of the spaces they occupy and their relationships to those places. In these accounts, the discourses of flexibility appear to have had little effect on an enduring desire for spaces of enclosure. Education in general, and further education colleges in particular, are represented primarily as spaces of enclosure. Thus, while there may be attempts to assemble colleges as postmodern spaces through more flexible arrangements, the interviews suggest more a range of spatial-temporal containments and movements than a "freedom". The same senior managers who tended to embrace discourses of flexibility also endorsed the production of images in the college prospectuses that say "come inside—this is a place in which to be nurtured, stimulated, developed ...". While there are some indications of the "limitless postponements" of the postmodern corporation in the data from this project, we have also seen how spaces of enclosure, with their laws and disciplinary constraints, are

also constituted as desirable places in which to be. Place, closure and constraint would therefore seem to have a positive value for many of the interviewees. This suggests a tension between the notion of flexibility as a liberation from constraint and the desire to be inside a place, to be contained, to be part of something—however dangerous that might be.

Cartographical Imagings?

We have used the above to offer some indications of how spatiality can make a significant contribution to research in flexible learning, continuing education and lifelong learning. We have explored how different forms of flexibility produce different spatial-temporal orderings and in what ways that might be significant. The possibilities for research in this area are varied and extensive, both methodologically and theoretically. The different subjects and knowledge-producing practices associated with flexible learning require mapping. Whether this is the ordering of seats and ICT in a learning resource centre, distributed learning in the workplace, the use of community outreach centres, all entail the ordering of space-time and with that certain possibilities for knowing and being. Such studies would also give us the opportunity to empirically establish the strengths and weaknesses of spatial theories. While both ANT and the work on postmodern space are suggestive, they do not exhaust the work to be done in theorising space and learning in continuing education. It is in this sense that, rather than following in the footsteps of those who suggest the need for a sociological imagination (Wright Mills, 1983), we would call for more and more explicit cartographical imagings, through which to explore not only the spatial-temporal practices of flexible learning specifically but, more generally, all forms of continuing education.

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Note

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