



Matter that embodies: Agentive flesh and working body/selves

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	the materialities and materialization of working bodies. The study takes forward Judith Butler's and Karen Barad's theories of performativity by reading them through each other, and introducing flesh as an agentive actor in each moment-to-moment move. In paying close attention to the speech of supposedly 'dumb flesh' we show how flesh resists its negation and itself imposes control on the worker. We coin the term 'body/flesh' and illuminate how bodies are active and agentive, constituting corporeal/izing working selves in somewhat unexpected ways.



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*Matter that embodies:
Agentive flesh and working body/selves*

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Abstract

The post-Cartesian ‘material turn’ in management and organization studies understands that bodies are far more than vehicles that enable work to be undertaken, but are agentive actors in the constitution of work and working selves. This leads to the need for more empirically-derived understanding of the agency of flesh in the performative corporealization of working, embodied selves. We met this challenge through adapting feminist, posthuman research methods for a study of the materialities and materialization of working bodies. The study takes forward Judith Butler’s and Karen Barad’s theories of performativity by reading them through each other, and introducing flesh as an agentive actor in each moment-to-moment move. In paying close attention to the speech of supposedly ‘dumb flesh’ we show how flesh resists its negation and itself imposes control on the worker. We coin the term ‘body/flesh’ and illuminate how bodies are active and agentive, constituting corporeal/izing working selves in somewhat unexpected ways.

Keywords: Bodies, embodiment; working bodies; flesh; Judith Butler, Karen Barad, materialities, performativity.

Introduction

This paper explores the agency of flesh in the performative constitution of working bodies/selves. Such a task became possible only after Descartes’ long shadow was no longer cast over management and organization studies (MOS). The separation of mind and body was challenged successfully by social constructionist approaches that showed

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3 masculine minds did not transcend male bodies and women were not inferior because of
4 their supposed immanence to essentialized female flesh (e.g. Witz, 2000; Alcoff, 2013).
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6 Grosz (1994, p.x) is perhaps germinal. Bodies, she wrote, ‘cannot be adequately
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8 understood as historical, precultural, or natural objects in any simple way; they are not
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10 only inscribed, marked, engraved, by social pressures external to them but are the
11
12 products, the direct effects of the very constitution of nature itself’. Note the reference to
13
14 bodies as ‘direct effects’ and thus somehow passive places for inscription. Sinclair (2005,
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16 p. 92) similarly praised feminism’s influence in rejecting concepts of bodies as ‘bundles
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18 of bone, muscle and organ’ and understanding them ‘as culturally constructed or
19
20 constituted’ (but note, not agentive). A body of theory running from Hassard, Holliday
21
22 and Willmott’s (2000) edited collection, book-marked by reviews in Kupers (1995) and
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24 Gartner (2013), integrated embodiment into comprehending organizations’ operations,
25
26 while Acker’s (1990) influential work emphasised understanding the organization of
27
28 bodies at work. These broadly constructionist or phenomenological perspectives
29
30 understood bodies as having a material base (‘the body’) upon which meaning was made
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32 possible through discourses.
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41 Judith Butler’s (1990; 1993) ground-breaking texts argued body’s ‘matter’ or materiality
42
43 is itself constructed: there is no body prior to the discourses through which it emerges.
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45 Poststructuralist interpretations thus rejected concepts of bodies as more or less passive
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47 matter onto which are inscribed social and cultural discourses (Styhre, 2005). Hockey and
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49 Allen-Collinson’s (2009) call for more phenomenological, embodied and ‘fleshy’ studies
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51 of workplace embodiment signalled a move towards, and development of, increasingly
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53 rich poststructural theories of bodies/embodiment in MOS. This included analyses of
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3 bodies' materialization through 'body work' (Swan & Flowers, 2017), disciplining
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5 through managerial practices requiring conformity with certain (imagined) expectations
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7 (Rajan-Rankin, 2018), involvement in sense-making (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012), and as
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9 foundational to organizational ethics (Dale & Latham, 2015; Phillips, Pullen & Rhodes,
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11 2014). Hindmarsh and Pilnick (2007) analyzed how organizational members make sense
12
13 of and orient to others' embodied conduct at work, while Fotaki and Harding (2017)
14
15 explored embodiment as experiential resistance. Gatrell (2008) and Bevan and Gatrell
16
17 (2017) showed there is much to resist: female bodies appear as career-inhibiting, always-
18
19 already pregnant 'maternal bodies' (Gatrell, 2008).
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25 With regard to working bodies, Yates, Riach and Johansson's (2018) study of police
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27 officers' broken bodies illuminated work's influence on how bodies are experienced,
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29 although academic's working bodies have perhaps been most studied. Probyn (2010, in
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31 Gherardi, 2019, p.217) emphasised the embodied nature of academic work. We work
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33 ideas through our bodies; we write through our bodies, hoping to get into the bodies of
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35 our readers, and our academic bodies are on display while we teach (Sinclair, 2005; Bell
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37 & Sinclair, 2014). Academics' disembodied approach to writing was attacked for its
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39 complicity in perpetuating economic, political, social and cultural disparities and
40
41 inequalities (Pullen, 2018), and for constituting oppressive organizational hierarchies and
42
43 allied academic practices (Höpfl, 2007; Helin, 2015; Pullen, 2006). Remedies were
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45 sought through 'writing from the body' (Phillips, Pullen & Rhodes, 2014; Fotaki, Metcalf
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47 & Harding, 2014; Gilmore, Harding, Helin & Pullen, 2019).
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3 Poststructural approaches are now merging into posthuman accounts of embodiment,
4 influenced greatly by Barad's (2007) insistence on non-sentient actors' agency.
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7 Posthuman theories challenge poststructuralism's neglect of materialities while retaining
8 understanding of the constitutive work of discourses. Haraway (1988, p.595), whose
9 work transcends the periodization of this review, envisaged bodies as 'material-semiotic
10 generative node[s] [whose] boundaries materialize in social interaction'. Her observation
11 (1990, p.222) that bodies are 'maps of power and identity' anticipated posthuman
12 understanding of bodies as agentic, material actors (Gruber, 2019). Here, bodies are not
13 just pieces of meat awaiting enlivenment by an agentic mind, but are constituted through
14 performative acts in which material flesh and discourses of bodies are intertwined.
15
16 Bennett (2010) theorizes a vitality intrinsic to materiality as such, detaching materiality
17 from 'the figures of passive, mechanistic, or divinely infused substance' (2010, p.xiii), so
18 that bodies' matter plays a direct part in the worlding of the world. In Braidotti's (2013)
19 terms, the (posthuman) body is neither biological nor sociological but a point of overlap
20 for the sociological, symbolic and material, a transversal materiality always in movement
21 and always becoming. Gherardi (2019, p.42) recently suggested the shift towards
22 posthumanism requires understanding of bodies as 'composed of multiple and divergent
23 potentialities emerging in the body's encounter with other bodies in a process of
24 differentiation of the body itself'. This 'posthuman material turn' intrigued us and
25 inspired the study on which this paper is based. We ask: how could agentic flesh 'world
26 the world of work'? Indeed, what are 'bodies' and what is 'flesh'? We confront below
27 our own, too-easy slippage between these terms.
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3 Answering the question of how agentic flesh worlds the world of work is fraught with
4 challenges. Our brief history of bodies/embodiment in MOS glosses over the issue that
5
6 bodies, as vital, sensory, material and ephemeral intensities exceed language (Butler,
7
8 2015). Their ‘vast quantity of sensations, movements, reactions, and affects’ that are
9
10 often ‘unrepresentable’ (Merchant, 2011, p.58), both exceed comprehension and
11
12 influence thought in ways not understood (Hester, 2005). They are at the boundaries of
13
14 knowledge. What is it, then, that is written about in the studies cited above? Could Butler
15
16 somehow be in error and is there a way of approaching the matter of bodies through
17
18 language? Or is there a way in which it is possible to translate flesh’s ‘speech’ into
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20 words? These are the questions that stimulated the study we report on here, whose aim
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22 was to explore the agency of flesh in the performative constitution of working bodies.
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24 The planning of this study was influenced by posthuman theory that thinks from the
25
26 borders of speakability. Waterton and Yusoff (2017), for example, recommend
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28 approaching embodiment through conceptualizing bodies not as bounded entities but as
29
30 assemblages and processes. Springgay and Truman (2017) draw on ‘transcorporeality’ to
31
32 posit that humans and non-humans are enmeshed in a messy, shifting ontology: bodies
33
34 are ‘situated realities of historical and spatial sedimentations of power’. Bodies become
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36 regarded as permeable (Bosworth, 2016), indeterminate (Gruber, 2019; Waterton
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38 & Yusoff, 2017), entangled in becoming (Barad, 2007), and fleshy (Binkley, 2018). Such
39
40 approaches provide little guidance on carrying out posthuman empirical research.
41
42 Thanem and Knights (2019) describe the complexities of bodies, that they are ‘never
43
44 merely physical’ (p.3), but their advice on doing embodied research is already exceeded
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3 by posthuman approaches. Intra-acting entanglements of matter and its individuation as
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5 bodies and organs is philosophically insightful but empirically daunting.
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8 We overcome these hindrances through building on our previous work that combines
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10 Judith Butler's and Karen Barad's theories of performativity (Ford, Harding, Gilmore &
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12 Richardson, 2017; Harding, Ford & Lee, 2017). We suggested that where Butler (1990;
13
14 1993) helps understand the constitution of subjects through moment-to-moment
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16 performative movements, Barad (2007) provides means of studying each of those
17
18 constitutive moments. However, we explored material presence but not the matter of
19
20 bodies. We saw potential in developing our earlier approach by inserting flesh into each
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22 moment of the performative, to understand flesh's agency in the constitution of working
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24 bodies. By 'flesh' we mean the physical matter of bodies – skin, blood, bones, hair, fat,
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26 organs, etc. - not as passive substance but as 'a sentient, sensural and sensible ensemble
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28 of materialized capacities and agency that literally and figurally makes sense of, and to,
29
30 both ourselves and others' (Sobchack, 2004, p.2). This led us to realise the falsity of the
31
32 distinction between 'flesh' and 'bodies' and we collapsed them into the neologism
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34 'body/flesh'. The 'body' part of this term refers to the corporeal seat of the ego, onto
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36 which is inscribed cultural meaning (Butler, 2015), and 'flesh' refers to the matter that
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38 materialises as 'my body' (Barad, 2007). In what follows we show how that intervening
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40 slash, '/', marks a false, agential cut (Barad, 2007).
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47 In summary, in the relatively short history of studies of bodies/embodiment in MOS, the
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49 matter of bodies once jettisoned, its flesh left clinging to the raft of discourse, returns in
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51 posthuman theory. Bodies become conceptualized as material/discursive agential flesh,
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53 body/flesh. This leads to the study we discuss here, that contributes an empirically-
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1 supported understanding of body/flesh's agency in the performative constitution of the
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3 corporeal(izing) working self. Its second contribution is a development of theories of
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5 performativity arising from inserting agentic body/flesh into Butler's and Barad's
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7 theories of performativity and reading them diffractively through each other.
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12 We next outline the paper's theoretical location, in Butler's and Barad's work, before
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14 discussing the feminist methodology of our empirical study of the corporeal(izing)
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16 working 'I'.
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19 **Philosophical location**

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21 Van Maanen writes that choice of theoretical or philosophical location is subjective rather
22
23 than rational, resting 'as much on taste as on fit' (van Maanen, 2011, p.233). We are
24
25 drawn to Butler's and Barad's theories of performativity because they offer insightful and
26
27 innovative ways of interpreting organizational life. Butler's approach is influential within
28
29 MOS, notable examples including Tyler and Cohen's (2008) analysis of 'spaces that
30
31 matter', Riach, Rumens and Tyler's (2014; 2016) forging of new approaches to empirical
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33 research, Rittenhofer and Gatrell's (2012) critique of dominant teleological and binary
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35 thinking within academia and, particularly, Tyler's (2020) development of a Butlerian
36
37 theory of work. Barad, in taking forward Butler's theory of performativity, emphasizes
38
39 materialities. It is increasingly evident in MOS in studies such as Orlikowski and Scott
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41 (2015) and Hultin and Mahrng (2016). In this paper we build upon earlier work in which
42
43 we attempted to reconcile the two approaches (Ford et al, 2017; Harding et al, 2017).
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49 We first outline Butler's theory of performativity, augmenting it with a less familiar text
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51 concerning the matter of bodies (Butler, 2015). We then describe Barad's approach,
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3 before discussing our merger of aspects of the two that provides the theoretical location
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5 for our analysis of flesh's agency in the performative constitution of working bodies.
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8 Butler's influential theory of performativity argued that gender has 'no ontological status
9
10 apart from the very acts which constitute its reality' (1990, p.136). Those acts consist of
11
12 micro-movements that 'constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self' (1990, p.140):
13
14 one 'becomes a subject through performativity, which is not an act, nor a performance,
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16 but constantly repeated 'acts' that reiterate norms' (Butler, 1993, p.12; 240 ff.). This
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18 repetition is not performed by, but *enables*, the subject. Governed by norms,
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20 performativity occurs within and through discourses. That is, 'the subject who speaks is
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22 also constituted by the language that she or he speaks, [so] language is the condition of
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24 possibility for the speaking subject, and not merely its instrument of expression' (1997a,
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26 p.28). The body, Butler argued (1993, p.13), is not a 'mere instrument or medium for
27
28 which a set of cultural meanings are only externally related, but is itself a construction'.
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33 Performativity thus challenges a metaphysics that presumes categories are culturally
34
35 constructed, and undermines ontological effects that bring into being various realities
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37 (Butler, 2010, p.147)

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40 Feminists thinkers such as Alcoff (2006) and Colebrook (2008) argued Butler's work
41
42 ignored the indissociability of matter and discourse. They charged her with failing to link
43
44 bodies' materialization to social and economic structures, and of conforming with
45
46 poststructuralism's refusal to acknowledge some form of 'real' beyond discourse. An
47
48 intriguing philosophical debate developed, too broad to summarise here (see Jagger,
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50 2015). Butler's response was publication in 2015 of a collection of essays exploring
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52 bodies' matter/ing.
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3 This later text argues it is difficult to discuss bodies' physical matter because philosophy
4 flounders 'time and again on the question of the body, it tends to separate what is called
5 thinking from what is called sensing, from desire, passion, sexuality, and relations of
6 dependency' (p.15). Locating this failure in Descartes' influence, she draws on a
7 formidable array of philosophers to ponder matter's participation in the 'I's' formation.
8 Her text illuminates a palpable struggle to represent matter: it can be attempted only
9 through that language which it exceeds (an aporia that haunts our analysis below).
10 Butler's focus in these essays is upon how matter, materialities, discourses and norms
11 facilitate the on-going, reiterated emergence of an embodied self. 'Touch' is fundamental,
12 as we now summarise.

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26 The sea of sensations that is the very young baby (Klein, 2006) becomes individuated, an
27 'I', Butler argues, through 'touching/being touched' by/with/within enmeshment in
28 matrices of sentient and non-sentient others. In babyhood 'we feel things, undergo
29 impressions, prior to forming any thoughts, including any thoughts we might have about
30 ourselves' (p.2) (there is as yet no "I" that could have those thoughts). Through these
31 'impressions' the "I" emerges. In other words, flesh founds the subject, the 'I' or 'me'.
32 These early fleshy experiences of being 'impressed upon' remain with us, ever recurring,
33 for 'I am not formed once and definitively, but continuously or repeatedly. I am still
34 being formed as I form myself in the here and now' (p.6).

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47 Most insightful for our study is Butler's interrogation of Merleau-Ponty and Spinoza. The
48 former facilitates discussion of how touch first animates the subject, awakening the
49 senses and making possible a 'sentient apprehension of the world' (p.8). Relations with
50 multiple others 'form a matrix for subject formation' where touching/being touched
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3 almost literally ‘impresses’ norms and discourses on the flesh of the individuating
4 subject. From Spinoza comes insights regarding how bodies individuate – apparent
5 occupancy of a bounded body determines at whom the scene of address as a ‘you’ is
6 directed, but this is a misapprehension, Butler argues. The body cannot be singular as it
7 exists only through the agency of ‘technologies, structures, institutions, an array of others
8 both personally and impersonally related, organic and life processes’ (p. 14). There is
9 thus no individual(ized) body. Similarly, body and language are not separate and distinct:
10 the ‘great deal of bodily signifying that happens prior to vocalization and speech’
11 continues alongside vocalization: the body continues to ‘talk’, to signify (p.15).

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24 These essays explore matter’s matter/ing within each iterative, performative moment.
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26 Norms and discourses that govern subjects’ formation are apprehended in the psyche and
27 language and also, crucially, through bodies’ very matter. That matter is stamped with
28 norms and discourses; they are embedded within and are part of it. Flesh ‘speaks’ as it
29 were, although in a language not accessible to conscious thought or through words
30 (bodies exceed what is speakable within language). This takes us to Baradian
31 performativity.
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40 Barad (2007) aimed to make good Butler’s apparent omission of matter. ‘A rigorous
41 materialist theory of the body’, she writes (Barad 2007, p.93, quoting Hennessey, 1993)
42 ‘cannot stop with the assertion that the body is always discursively constructed. It also
43 needs to explain how the discursive construction of the body is related to non-discursive
44 practices ...’. Barad locates the roots of Butler’s (presumed) eradication of the matter of
45 bodies to her engagement with Foucault’s analytic of power that similarly ignored the
46 intimate relationships between discursive and non-discursive practices. Barad aimed to
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3 redress that failure through introducing to performativity a theory of how material forces
4 (including the body's anatomy and physiology) 'actively matter to the process of
5 materialization' (Barad, 2007, p.65).
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10 Where Butler pointed to moment-to-moment moves that performatively constitute a
11 subject, Barad (2007), influenced by quantum mechanics and Donna Haraway's work,
12 uses Butlerian performativity theory 'as a diffraction grating' for reading feminist/queer
13 texts and science studies through one another to propose 'a materialist and posthumanist
14 reworking of the notion of performativity' (Barad, 2007, p.811).
15
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17 That is, where Butler pointed to the ongoing iteration of performative moments, Barad
18 (2007) seeks to discern entangled material agencies' 'intra-actions' (not 'inter-actions'
19 because 'interacting' implies two separate and distinguishable entities) within that
20 moment. The performative is 'intra-actions that reconstitute entanglements' (p.74).
21 'Entanglements' references that inseparability of mutually informative subsystems
22 (p.283) that intra-act. 'Matter' agentively participates; it is produced and productive,
23 generated and generative; agentive and not fixed essence or property.
24
25

26 In Barad's thesis there are no boundaries between entities, only what *appear to be*
27 boundaries and separate(d) entities. Rather than envisaging distinctions between entities,
28 such as, say, body and shoes, they are blurred at the edges, bleeding into and participating
29 in each other's performative constitution. Foot and shoes meanwhile intra-act with other
30 entities, each of which bleeds into all others around it, and is bled into in its turn. Thus,
31 shoes' leather and dye's chemicals, shoe-maker, factory and shoe-shop, shop assistant,
32 discourses of labour and of 'the female', all collude at the site of 'the' shoe that, when
33 worn, constitutes the wearer as 'woman', caught up and entangled within discourses and
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3 materialities of sex, bodies, laws, time, space, and fashion. Thus, Barad's extension of
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5 Butler's work brings to performativity theory the possibility of understanding how
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7 materialities, intra-acting within discourses and space and time in each iterative,
8
9 performative moment, constitute (in our example) 'body', 'embodiment' and 'woman'.

10
11 We here build on and develop our earlier diffractive reading of these two theories (Ford
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13 et al, 2017; Harding et al, 2017). Diffractive readings (Barad, 2007) permit use of
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15 seemingly incommensurate philosophical perspectives – ideas can be productively
16
17 bounced off each other. Ford et al (2017) and Harding et al (2017) bring Butler's focus on
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19 power, lacking from Barad's account, into Barad's facility to glimpse intricate
20
21 entanglements occurring in each performative moment. This facilitates insights into the
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23 micro-movements of the performative, where there is inseparability of all 'things':
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25 everything is constituted within and through its intra-actions with numerous other
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27 'things'.
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33 In many ways flesh, but not bodies, remains formless, perhaps necessarily, for meaning
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35 may be imposed only retrospectively (Butler, 2015), after apprehending a presence.
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37 However, some grasp is needed of what we refer to when mentioning the 'flesh' that has
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39 agency in the constitution of working bodies, what we call 'body/flesh'. Most directly,
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41 flesh includes the 'vulva, vagina and labia' discussed by Pullen (2018) as a metaphor for
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43 writing, but also the 'subcutaneous fat' described in Mol's (2002, p.147) description of a
44
45 surgical operation. More elusively, it is that which experiences the racing pulse and sense
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47 of terror when immersed in a film, that is often absent from thought (Leder, 1990), but
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49 makes itself felt when sick or injured (Scary, 1987). It is that which is missing from
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51 indices of books exploring *bodies* as symbols (Bolso, Svendsen & Sorensen, 2018) for
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3 there's nothing symbolic about *flesh*: it intervenes, gurgles, embarrasses, it makes life
4 possible and ultimately, its precarity ends individual life. It may be visible (e.g. skin) or
5 invisible (e.g. organs). It is radically materialist (Sobchack, 2004), existing 'provisionally
6 both as a permeable, shifting physical perimeter, a limbic surround of virtual
7 containment, and as the visible trace of the human body' (Jones, 1998, cited in Sobchack,
8 2004, p. 99). It is both metaphorically and materially an envelope that inscribes the
9 demarcation between inside and outside but also the site of their joining (ibid). It is, in
10 short, something that both exists inside and outside of language, that is separate from the
11 'I' who might claim it as 'my' property, 'my' flesh, while concurrently an intrinsic part of
12 that 'I'. We aimed in our study to develop some understanding of this illusive materiality
13 that is both always there (for without it there is no 'I') and always not-there.

14
15 In summary, we aimed to understand the agency of flesh in the performative constitution
16 of corporeal(izing) working bodies through inserting flesh into performative moments
17 made apprehendable through combining Butler's (1991; 1993) and Barad's (2007)
18 theories of performativity. We needed a methodology for identifying the mattering of
19 matter in performative, iterative moments in which flesh moves, feels, thinks, discourses,
20 occupies space, experiences time, senses, is afflicted and affected. This is discussed next.

21 22 **Methodology and methods**

23
24 Understanding of flesh's involvement in performative moments is inaccessible via
25 interviews – it requires deep, phenomenological insights apprehended through intense
26 analysis of bodies' moment-to-moment moves (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). We overcame
27 these methodological difficulties by utilizing feminist approaches to memory work in
28 which a research collective (1) recalls instances of specific events and (2) explores them

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1
2
3 in recursive rounds of communal interrogation (Haug et al. 1987). Davies and Gannon
4 (2006), labelling this ‘collective biography’, describe it as an ethical, reflexive research
5
6 practice used to ‘write and reflect on moments of being, on the ambivalent, slippery
7
8 subject-in-process captured in the remembered *moment of being*’ (p.x, emphasis in
9
10 original). This facilitates an onto-epistemological mapping of performative moments in
11
12 which something new emerges (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p.2). It conforms with Barad’s
13
14 (2007, p.129) insistence on research apparatus’ agency. In our study our bodies, our
15
16 body/flesh, are both research apparatus and that which is researched.
17
18

19
20 This posthuman methodological approach aligns with our theoretical location. It rebels
21
22 against the disciplinary and normative constraints of ‘textbook’ approaches to qualitative
23
24 methods (Lather, 2013), to engage with language’s materiality, its force and
25
26 entanglements in bodies and matter. It critiques representation as the dominant image of
27
28 thought, preferring a ‘flattened’ logic that renders words incapable of standing in for ‘the
29
30 world’. There cannot be a critical, intentional subject standing separate from or outside
31
32 what has conventionally been called ‘the data’. Indeed, ‘data’ can no longer be regarded
33
34 as ‘an inert and indifferent mass waiting to be in/formed and calibrated by our analytic
35
36 acumen or our coding systems’ (MacLure, 2013, pp. 660-661); rather data moves
37
38 researchers to ‘somewhere unpredictable’.
39
40
41
42
43

44
45 Given our focus on the corporeal(izing) working body, and needing to use ourselves as
46
47 our research instruments, we chose to focus on ourselves doing our own academic work.
48
49 Our next dilemma was: which aspects of the array of work we do would give best
50
51 insights into the corporeal(izing) of our enfleshed academic selves?
52
53

54 We found inspiration in Stern’s (2004) methodology of moments, that complements
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2
3 performativity theories because it involves recall of experiences lasting only seconds. Un-
4
5 narrated at the moment of experience, the present instant of recall brings them into
6
7 language for analysis. Combining collective biography and methodology of moments, we
8
9 asked each other: ‘Can you remember occasions while working when you became acutely
10
11 aware of your body?’ This resolved the problem of which aspects of our work to analyze:
12
13 the evoked memories made that choice for us. In becoming our own objects of study, our
14
15 narratives allow speaking about transgressive acts otherwise kept hidden (Parker-Fuller,
16
17 2000: 26), invaluable in our mutual interrogations about times of being shocked into
18
19 sudden awareness of our bodies. It facilitated ‘bricolage of a fragmented consciousness, a
20
21 body of knowledge and a way of knowing that spring not from something imposed from
22
23 outside but from what is rooted within’ (Kuhn, 1995, p.708), and helped articulate the
24
25 almost unspeakable. It assists in understanding lived embodied experiences (Wacquant,
26
27 2014), surfaces self-reflections on bodies’ materialities (Brewis & Sinclair, 2000), and
28
29 ensures everyday experiences of lived practices form the basis for knowledge (Onyx &
30
31 Small, 2001). Collective biography and bricolage (Levi-Strauss, 1962) have similarities.
32
33 Each offers ways of exploring experiences sensitively and iteratively. The bricolage
34
35 process adds depth to collective biography through ‘dialogue’ in which actors collect and
36
37 review individual and joint ‘repertoires’ (Levi-Strauss, 1962) consisting of material
38
39 objects, memories, embodied responses – anything that assists the research.

40
41 That account glosses over the repeated rounds of intense discussions during the data
42
43 analysis process, that is:

44
45 Round One: short-listing the most insightful remembered moments. Each researcher
46
47 wrote a detailed account of ‘their’ remembered moment;

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2
3 Round Two: group interrogation of each remembered moment. For example, the
4 Ethnographer's sense of shock: we asked: what is in the room? What were you wearing?
5 How far above your face was the mirror? Describe the mirror. Were you wearing make-
6 up? What did it feel like not to be wearing make-up? Etc. Very rich descriptions
7 emerged;

8
9
10 Round Three: turning each vignette into a play that imagined what non-sentient actors
11 would say if they could speak. For example, the Consultant's account became a play in
12 two Acts, in which furniture, clothes, arms, legs, sweat glands, all were given imaginary
13 lines; (See the analysis for a brief example);

14
15 Round Four: these very rich descriptions facilitated our immersing ourselves in deep
16 engagement with what our flesh was 'doing' in the remembered moment. We asked: what
17 is your flesh saying to you – translate its sense-making into words. For example, the
18 Autoethnographer described both how boxing gloves, bench and bus seat felt against her
19 hands and legs, and their moment-to-moment intra-actions with those objects;

20
21 Round Five: theory development. We asked: how does Butler/Barad explain this?
22 Throughout we made copious notes, sometimes breaking off to ask what bodies and flesh
23 were experiencing as they made those notes.

24
25 Round Six: this later round involved responding to reviewers, who we positioned as new
26 interrogators. We identified the over-influence of some readings and our deafness to
27 others.

28
29 This exhaustive approach requires open-mindedness and trust. Analysis was recursive:
30 the chosen elements were 'recast' through the lens of the emergent theory. Different
31 facets of each remembered moment emerged over time – faces, arms, legs making their

1
2
3 presence felt, and sensations of flesh behind and beyond body parts peeking through.
4
5 Eventually these collapsed into body/flesh.
6

7
8 Throughout we aimed to remain cognizant of posthuman research's requirement 'to
9
10 engage more fully with the materiality of language itself – the fact that language is in and
11
12 of the body; always issuing from the body; being impeded by the body; affecting other
13
14 bodies yet also, of course, 'always leaving the body, becoming immaterial, ideational,
15
16 representational, a striated, collective, cultural and symbolic resource' in an intra-acting
17
18 'collective space' (MacLure, 2013, pp.663-4). This took the form, here, of an organic
19
20 writing process in which our accounts emerged, evolved and, eventually, became frozen
21
22 in the final draft, to which we now turn. We begin with the Ethnographer's account,
23
24 before discussing the Consultant's and finally the Autoethnographer's.
25
26

27 28 **Analysing the repertoires**

29
30 The first explores an experience when body/flesh made itself present during fieldwork.
31
32

33 *The Ethnographer's absent-minded body.*

34
35 *It is my first day of field-work at the football club. I am all alone, sitting in the canteen at*
36
37 *the training ground drinking a cup of tea, waiting for their Performance Coach so we can*
38
39 *progress my work. The daily training session is taking place and I can hear muffled*
40
41 *sounds of shouting, the thud of the ball and laughter. Suddenly the door leading to the*
42
43 *practice pitches opens and the players swarm into the previously deserted area. There*
44
45 *are about 15 or so of them but it feels like they are legion. They are tall, many of them*
46
47 *over 6ft and they physically exude strength and confidence. There's a smell of grass, of*
48
49 *outdoors and sweat; the silence is replaced by boisterous joking and loud conversations.*
50
51
52
53
54 *I feel my own body contract and I gasp with shock as I am sharply aware that I am their*
55
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3 *polar opposite and I contract into my own sex, my own self.*
4

5 Butler provided the key to understanding this incident, by way of her reference (2015, pp.
6 2-3) to a Nietzschean aphorism: ‘the bell that has “boomed ... the twelve beats of noon”
7 startles the self-reflective person who only afterwards rubs their ears and, “surprised and
8 disconcerted” asks, “what really was that which we have just experienced?”’ This
9 ‘surprise’, she writes, is a reliving of a foundational experience of infancy: recognition of
10 being an ‘I’ rather than an entity merged with its caregiver. Such ‘incipient passages’
11 (p.4) recur throughout life, through what Freud called Nachträglichkeit (Freud, 1895) or
12 the revision and later reworking of experiences, impressions and memory traces that are
13 felt to be difficult or traumatic. The Ethnographer, lost in thoughts and summoned rudely
14 out of them, re-experiences that early shock of self-recognition – as an ‘I’ who emerges
15 into/within/through norms that precede and exceed her, that both subject (govern) and
16 subjectify (constitute the subject as an ‘I’) (Butler, 1997).
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33 Before that sudden awakening to consciousness in the canteen, body/flesh sits, absent
34 from self-awareness (Leder, 1990). It moves (drinks tea) without conscious thought.
35 There is no ‘I’, only body/flesh moving in space. The invasion of a ‘swarm’ of men
36 summons self-awareness. The space-invaders effect the Ethnographer’s surprised and
37 shocked jolt out of absent-bodied reverie into a corporeal self that, self-aware, can narrate
38 an account of herself as ‘me’.
39
40
41
42
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45
46

47 Butler’s (2015) glossing of Merleau-Ponty’s work (2015), diffracted through Barad’s
48 concept of entangled intra-actions, helps us peer into body/flesh’s agency in this
49 performative moment. Merleau-Ponty understood flesh as a web enmeshed within other
50 complex webs of (what Barad would identify as) intra-actions with other flesh: flesh
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3 touches. Without touch, Butler argues, ‘there is no object, no elsewhere, no outside’
4 (p.47) and no ‘I’. ‘Touch’ here is not the material contact of bodies but a ‘tactility that
5 exceeds any given touch’ (p.36): flesh touches flesh through affect. Affect here is the
6 electric charge of energy occasioned by the invasion of young, ebullient male bodies.
7
8 Body/flesh’s sensorium registers and responds to that energy, agentively acting within all
9
10 the entangled intra-actions of that performative moment (Barad, 2007) when the
11
12 Ethnographer was summoned into self-awareness. That which she experiences as *her*
13
14 flesh/body extends outside itself and touches those other bodies and theirs touch hers.
15
16 Where mind had been absent from body/flesh moving without conscious volition, the
17
18 agency of flesh touching flesh summons ‘the mind’ and sense of self.
19
20
21
22
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25

26 Seeing, touch and language intra-act in Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology (Butler, 2015).
27
28 He collapses distinctions between subjects and objects, and ‘the perceiving “I” acquires a
29
30 flesh that implicates him or her in a world of flesh’ (Butler, 2015, p.162). This heralds a
31
32 second moment in The Ethnographer’s account, involving the eyes’ performative agency.
33
34

35 *Friday morning. It has been a long week. I’ve just finished a gym workout with two*
36
37 *footballers and their coach. I’m exhausted. There are no suitable shower facilities for me*
38
39 *at the training ground, only hand basins in the women’s toilets. I lower my face to the*
40
41 *bowl, wash away the sweat, rinse off the soap and bury my head in the towel. Dry again,*
42
43 *I catch my reflection in the mirror above the sink. I do not see what I had expected to see.*
44
45 *It is me but it is somehow not the me whose reflection I had anticipated. What gazes back*
46
47 *at me is a recognizably female face. I have been working with men all week, and I had*
48
49 *somehow forgotten what face I would see in the mirror. I do not know what I expected to*
50
51 *see, only know that I was shocked and puzzled by the reflection.*
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3 The first four statements of the 'I' in this account enact flesh/body's speaking about itself,
4 as flesh, blood, bone, skin and aching muscles that move to the hand basin; it washes
5 itself without, it seems, conscious propulsion. The mind is again absent from body/flesh
6 that, exhausted, and turned in on that exhaustion, needs to clean itself. We see again how
7 the 'I' is instigated. In Butlerian terms (2015, p.52) body/flesh that moves without
8 conscious propulsion is a 'point of departure for sentience'. That departure point here is a
9 glimpsed reflection. Barad helps explain the puzzle of how the reflection represents
10 (takes on the representation of) 'me, a woman' as mind plummets into what had been,
11 literally, absent-minded body/flesh.
12
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23 Barad's 'posthuman performative approach' (2007, p.135) in which language and
24 materials are entangled and neither given precedence, incorporates the optical. Physical
25 boundaries that seemingly carve out distinct entities are rejected: attention turns to
26 understanding how boundaries (here that between female and male) appear to appear. To
27 paraphrase Holmes and Jones's (2016) analysis of how eyes distinguishes handles from
28 doors, a 'commotion' of texts, images and materialities unfolded into and onto each other
29 assault sight. We learn in infancy how to disentangle and name them: we acquire the
30 skills of distinguishing that bump that is given the name 'nose' from the bumps we learn
31 to call 'ears'. Throughout life, that subtle, unthought skill we forget we had needed to
32 acquire untangles shapes, identifies some as skin, others as lips, teeth, etc. That is,
33 'objects' are not given directly to the eye: the eye learns in infancy to dis-cern shapes,
34 distinguish one from another, and apply appropriate labels. This boundary-making work
35 distinguishes bodies and bodies' parts, and 'male' and 'female'.
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3 The Ethnographer, surrounded all week by masculine bodies, had, it seems, seen herself
4 in their image, forgetting her own face's representation until it, literally, re-appeared in
5 the mirror. Barad asks 'Can we trust visual delineations to define bodily boundaries? Can
6 we trust our eyes?' (2007, p.377). The Ethnographer's experience answers: eyes are
7 boundary-making apparatuses that carve out difference. The mirror is an active agent that
8 touches body/flesh; body/flesh becomes understood, in a flash, as 'me'. In that moment
9 body/flesh makes meaning first, and conscious, reflective thought follows (Sobchack, 2004,
10 p. 59). In one micro-performative moment gender-less body/flesh is re-recognized, the mind
11 returns, and a sentient female appears in front of the mirror.
12
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23
24 This first repertoire shows body/flesh in the performative moment as the point of departure
25 for sentience and evocation of the 'I'.
26
27

28 *The Consultant's struggle to control body/flesh*

29
30
31 *I have been an academic for 23 years and before that a manager, latterly at board level.*
32
33 *Why then do I have a fear of being caught out and found wanting when delivering*
34 *workshops to managers? I prepare meticulously for this particular workshop. I dress*
35 *with care in a black sleeveless dress and black and white tailored jacket and smart black*
36 *shoes that instantly make me feel business-like and professional. I start to feel much more*
37 *the part as even my hair and makeup pull together to complete the look of someone who*
38 *knows what she is doing. Once I'm in the room and the equipment set up and working I*
39 *start to relax into my role of knowledgeable expert. I feel myself filling out my tailored*
40 *jacket, adopting what I sense is a masculine position. I'm disguising as many of the*
41 *signifiers of the female as I am aware of but as the day wears on and the room becomes*
42 *warmer, I'm itching to remove my jacket to try to cool down. Even opening the tiny*
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3 *boardroom windows makes no difference and I am really overheating. But I just can't*
4 *entertain the idea of taking off my jacket and exposing my bare arms and fleshy batwings*
5 *to the executive team. It would expose me – not only as a female and an impostor in this*
6 *masculine subject position but also would show my wobbly biceps and triceps. I have to*
7 *suffer the heat and keep my jacket intact.*

8
9
10 We start in the bedroom-space. A Cartesian ontology would imply there is a consultant
11 choosing clothes and a suit awaiting wearing but Barad's agentive realism understands
12 that neither pre-exists the active, on-going entanglements of actants (Higgings, 2016).
13 Barad (2007 p. 170) writes: 'Bodies do not simply take their place in the world ... rather
14 "environments" and "bodies" are intra-actively constituted'. In this private space the
15 body appears initially as transport for the assemblage of materials whose agency sets in
16 motion 'the consultant'. Note the use of pronouns in the fourth sentence: the eye who
17 feels 'much more the part' is passive, acted upon by hair and make-up that 'pull together'
18 without, it seems, the Consultant's active participation. A 'she' emerges lacking the 'I's'
19 nervousness. Body/flesh is disguised, hidden by clothes and other materials. To
20 paraphrase Butler's (2015, p.28) interrogation of Descartes, there can be no worker
21 without body/flesh, but the individuating 'consultant' negates that body/flesh, covering it
22 over, making its corporeal reality invisible. The Consultant is, at other times, an athlete
23 who runs long distances every week. While running, we speculate, the 'she' that knows
24 what it is doing is the well-toned, disciplined and honed running body/flesh-itself. The
25 Consultant is its opposite, obeying a general organizational interdiction against
26 body/flesh, as we see next.

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2
3 In the boardroom's public space, body/flesh makes itself known. The space is constituted
4 as rational (hard wooden table, upright chairs, closed off from nature) and thus masculine
5 public space (Brewis et al., 1997). The room, it seems, demands that its occupants collude
6 in the construction of a professional space – even though the men present took off their
7 jackets, they did not loosen their ties, those phallic marks that signify 'organization'.
8 We originally thought the history entangled within this account is of public space where
9 women are still interlopers (Benn & Gauss, 1983): revealing her body/flesh as female
10 would transgress masculine/rational organizational space and undo the Consultant. But
11 reviewers' words kept taking us back to the men in the boardroom. Our feminist
12 interpretation may still hold, but something exceeds it.
13
14

15 We cannot know how the men present experienced that situation, but the Consultant
16 recalls that they too were hot (they took off their jackets). Can it be therefore that the law
17 requiring The Consultant keep her body/flesh hidden applies also to male body/flesh?
18 That is, is all body/flesh taboo in organizations? A moment's observation suggests it is:
19 male body/flesh is covered from just below the chin, seemingly negated, by suit, tie,
20 uniforms, overalls. Women's body/flesh is leaky (Shildrick, 2015; Trethewey, 1999), but
21 men's body/flesh also; it is a pretence to affect it is not, a pretence that needs
22 interrogating (see Riach & Warren, 2015). If men *must* transcend their body/flesh and
23 women are barred for being body/flesh/nature, then it is body/flesh, male and female, that
24 must be hidden: body/flesh is taboo in organizations. If so, then organizational rationality
25 and attendant professional norms rest on the negation of body/flesh – to Trethewey's
26 (1999) account of the disciplinary norms faced by professional women workers we add
27 that men too appear disciplined by similar norms.
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3 Body/flesh, tabooed, is shameful, although we lack accounts of the dis-grace of male
4
5 flesh. Ringrose and Renolds (2016, p. 228) report how the functionality of female teenage
6
7 girls' legs is over-written by shame and humiliation in their 'becoming-meat" (p.228).
8
9
10 The performativity of time (Barad, 2007) renders another part of the female anatomy
11
12 shameful: her arms. The narrator writes that her 'fleshy batwings' and 'wobbly biceps
13
14 and triceps' are disgraceful. Body/flesh will undo her, she fears, turning her into a crone,
15
16 an historical assemblage that renders older women invisible, irrelevant, burdensome and
17
18 unwelcome in workplaces. This is her conscious thought. The language not to hand at
19
20 that time arrived only during our discussions, difficult but also full of laughter invoked by
21
22 breaking a taboo through discussing it. The Consultant therefore tells that women's (and,
23
24 we posit, men's) body/flesh is matter out of place in organizations. Body/flesh is animal,
25
26 is meat, is irrational, can undo us through its desires (Angel, 2014). Body/flesh is messy:
27
28 it must be denied and controlled (Riach & Warren, 2015). Body/flesh has smells, liquid
29
30 and solid matter, shit, urine, menstrual blood, leakages, gases, messes and smells: these
31
32 words are mimetic of material body/flesh itself; both corporeal matter and words shock
33
34 when appearing in public space.
35
36
37
38
39

40 The Consultant deliberately, will-fully, strove to prevent eruptions of body/flesh into that
41
42 organizational encounter. Shame and embarrassment are control mechanisms (Butler,
43
44 1997), necessitating the Consultant's hard, panicky work to keep body/flesh invisible.
45
46 The Consultant's account illuminates how taboo body/flesh requires strict control, but
47
48 also how control of body/flesh is performative: it limits what forms the corporealizing,
49
50 embodied working subject can take.
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3 Our analysis so far suggests body/flesh is the stepping-off point for becoming an 'I', but
4 that 'I' both controls and is controlled by body/flesh. The remaining vignette reveals
5 body/flesh as judge and jailer.
6
7

8
9
10 *The Autoethnographer's brief liberation from norms governing female body/flesh*

11
12 *I am wearing boxing gloves and being ordered by a small, young woman to thump the*
13 *padded target she is holding. 'Harder', she shouts, 'harder'. I am in the gym making*
14 *weak little upper cuts. My trainer tires of my efforts and shows me what to do. I have to*
15 *raise my fist to my shoulder and thrust it out, hard, over-arm. Suddenly my fist hits the*
16 *target with a loud 'thump'. Over and over, thump, thump, thump. It is exhilarating. I am*
17 *laughing. My trainer is laughing with me, encouraging me to ever harder punches. I am,*
18 *I realize, 'thumping like a man'. In the changing room later, reflecting on the*
19 *exhilaration of the experience, I remembered an episode in my early adolescence that*
20 *puzzled me at the time. I'd been on a rare trip with my mother, aunt and sister to Cardiff,*
21 *to see the Queen, or perhaps it was the Dead Sea Scrolls. On the journey home, my sister*
22 *and I had run to sit on the long front seat of the bus where we sat with our backs to the*
23 *engine, in contrast to the other seats that all faced forwards. My mother had given me*
24 *direct instructions (Mother: 'sit with your legs closed'; Daughter: 'but why? It's not*
25 *comfortable'). That was my first conscious lesson in having to control my body.*
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44 The Autoethnographer recalls an incident from an auto-ethnographic study of how older
45 women work on body/flesh. As discussed in the methodology (above) in one round of
46 data analysis we drew on Barad's license to use anthropomorphism, or the attribution of
47 sentience to phenomena otherwise deemed to be non-sentient, to construct dramas in
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3 which we imagined what non-sentient objects would say if they could speak. Here is that
4
5 imagined play based on the Autoethnographer's account.
6

7
8 The furniture: I foster different ways of sitting, and different ways of comporting bodies;
9

10 The bus seat: I made the child sit facing the gaze of the other passengers. I dictated where
11
12 its body should fold itself into a sitting position.
13

14 The child: I was told to sit without spreading my body or taking up space;
15

16
17 The mother (now long-dead): the passengers would be gazing at my child: I had to induct
18
19 her into conformity with unwritten norms I only knew half-consciously myself.
20

21 The boxing gloves: I shook my wearer out of long-upheld ways of doing her body, and
22
23 sent her on a journey into a past that takes on a particular significance in the present'.
24

25
26 We introduced Barad into the play.
27

28 Barad: the non-sentient objects are an apparatus, or a specific material-discursive practice
29
30 that produces differences that matter. They are phenomena, i.e. material
31
32 re/con/figurations of both spatiality and temporality (Barad, 2007, p. 146).
33

34
35 Even Lacan may have intervened, perhaps from the wings: the reconfiguring of
36
37 temporality can be summed up as 'what is realized in my history is not the past definite of
38
39 what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what I am,
40
41 but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of
42
43 becoming.'" (Lacan, 1977, p. 86)
44

45
46 The analysis required interpretation of this imagined play. We started with Lacan's
47
48 contrasting verb tenses: these suggest memories are concerned not so much with
49
50 remembering as with the constitution of the self in that moment of telling (Barzilai,
51
52 1999). This 'I', thrown back into its history through the agency of non-sentient objects
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3 projects itself forward into a future where it says ‘this is how I learned to become aware
4 of the norms that govern female embodiment’. We revisited Butler’s analysis of norms -
5 norms ‘are enacted (at least in part) through the gaze: one must be ‘seen’ to be
6 conforming within them’ (Butler, 1990). Norms call into being the internalised judges
7 who police them (Foucault, 1975; Butler, 1990). This returned us to familiar
8 understanding of the performative constitution of the gendered self through conformity
9 within gender norms (Butler, 1990; 1993). Was there nothing more to say?
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19 We found insight in the future anterior of that remembered child who moved from the
20 female space with the mother into traditionally masculine territory. Boxing is a sport
21 underpinned by a hypermasculine ethos (Wacquant, 2014). Occupancy of this masculine
22 space made palpable the author’s awareness of being gendered as female. Required to
23 wear boxing gloves, ordered to use them in ways that necessitated traducing learned
24 bodily norms, gloves’ and gym’s agency were together strong enough to shatter the half-
25 known rules practised since childhood, bringing conscious awareness of throwing
26 [punches] like a girl (Young, 1980). But why such jubilation at breaking the boundaries
27 of norms governing female corporeality?
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40 Baradian agential realism offered an answer. The Autoethnographer’s body is not the
41 (Cartesian) vehicle that carries the Autoethnographer into fieldwork: it is of the field, part
42 of its on-going reconfiguring (Barad, 2007, p.168). We had occasion above to draw on
43 Butler’s (2015) observation of how, through *Nachträglichkeit* or reliving the past in the
44 present, the agential cut (Barad, 2007) between past and present dissolves. This vignette
45 illustrated how norms impressed upon body/flesh in ‘the past’ govern its comportment in
46 ‘the present’. This illuminates how corporealizing working body/flesh is engaged in
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3 helter-skelter, time-travelling journeys where the past is very present in the present. In
4
5 other words, body/flesh is a recording device that contains instructions, learned in
6
7 childhood, of how to comport itself.
8
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10 The Autoethnographer's exultation in transgressing those norms thus suggests body/flesh
11
12 is a jail one does not know one is in until suddenly one is freed. Body/flesh is also the
13
14 warder patrolling that jail. That is, a culture's norms are impressed upon body/flesh in
15
16 infancy (Butler, 2015) and body/flesh transmits those norms, requiring our half-aware
17
18 obeisance to them. Body/flesh thus polices body/flesh, judging any transgressions,
19
20 punishing them with electric charges of shame. Body/flesh is arresting officer, judge and
21
22 jailer.
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26 **Discussion and Conclusion**

27
28 Our analysis collapses body (cultural) and flesh (material/biological) into body/flesh, thus
29
30 disavowing an arbitrary agentive cut that attempted to separate an indivisible whole into
31
32 parts. It illuminates how body/flesh is the point of departure for sentience. Body/flesh can
33
34 move, absent any mind, the self returned in some ways to the original infantile state of
35
36 undifferentiation (not yet aware of its individuality and its body/flesh), until it is shocked
37
38 back into that sense of a self re-cognized as me. With sentience comes requirement to
39
40 conform with half-apprehended norms (that is, we know how we must behave but are not
41
42 consciously aware of the laws that require such behaviour). Amongst the norms are those
43
44 that state body/flesh is taboo in organizations – if body/flesh makes itself apparent a norm
45
46 is transgressed and the discomfort of embarrassment follows. Body/flesh must therefore
47
48 be controlled – kept silent and invisible. Its eruptions cannot be spoken of except perhaps
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3 in jest¹, laughter sometimes disguising body/flesh's power to shame and undo
4
5 organizational subjects. That very requirement for control, becomes, in a classic Butlerian
6
7 reversal, itself a means of control, because if body/flesh requires monitoring and
8
9 guarding, then we must expend time and energy undertaking those tasks and monitor
10
11 ourselves in the acts of monitoring. Indeed, body/flesh demands hyper-alertness, if one is
12
13 not to be betrayed by its unruly wants as Angel (2014) writes of desire, which runs
14
15 riotously through women's 'unruly, lustful' bodies, whose 'unbridled, guilty febrility' (p.
16
17 200) must be 'hacked at the root'. Body/flesh, we showed, is judge (if we transgress the
18
19 rules of embodiment the punishment is shame and embarrassment), jury (if found guilty
20
21 we are infused with shame) and warder (monitor of our success at controlling
22
23 body/flesh's desires and eruptions). We are jailed by body/flesh; imprisoned 'within' it
24
25 we must obey those rules that are impressed within and upon it. At the same time
26
27 body/flesh is vital to existence: there can be no sentient subject that is not enfleshed.
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32
33 What, then, is this body/flesh with such powers? The substantial literature on bodies and
34
35 embodiment in MOS provides few answers: flesh, by which we mean the very material of
36
37 the body, is under-examined (Boncori et al 2019). Grosz (1995, in Styhre, 2005, p.104)
38
39 observed that 'Analyses of the representation of bodies abound, but bodies in their
40
41 material variety still wait to be thought'. Substituting body/flesh or 'carnal materiality'
42
43 for 'material variety' perhaps makes clearer what our study suggests: flesh needs to be
44
45 understood not as 'the body' but as that which is both prior and co-constitutive of 'the
46
47 body' that becomes organized into 'embodiment'. Styhre's (2005) review of bodies in
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54 ¹ For a joyful analysis of one such eruption, see Travis' (2004) analysis of the fart's
55 power as a political sign. (Travis, P. (2004). Thirteen ways of listening to a fart: noise in
56 Chaucer's *Summoner's Tale*. *Exemplaria*, 16:2, 323-348.)
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3 organization theory showed that in our discipline corporeality is ‘reduced ... to a texture,
4 a discursive formation that can be interpreted, decoded and examined as such’ (p. 111).
5
6
7 ‘Flesh’s’ carnal materiality here remains invisible. Our study illuminates how discourses
8 are imposed upon bodies, but bodies only make sense if that ignored, tabooed flesh is
9 reinstated within language. Gartner’s (2013) later review of much of MOS’s ‘substantial’
10 literature indicates its haunting by Cartesian dualism, but, again, ‘flesh’ appears only in
11 the title of that review paper, the carnality of bodies remaining undefined and
12 unexamined. Most recently, Yates, Riach and Johansson (2018) show that the literature
13 on the corporeal in MOS still tends to focus on perceptible or otherwise ‘available’
14 aspects of embodiment such as comportment or pain. At the same time, carnality is there
15 in many of these accounts, but unaddressed, hidden behind bodies.
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28 In sum, if regarded empirically, humans are carnal, material, enfleshed subjects; but if
29 regarded theoretically then flesh eludes understanding, always exceeding the boundaries
30 of representation (Butler, 2015). Bodies know through sensing, and through what is
31 inscribed within/on/as flesh, and that knowledge may not be available in language (op
32 cit). However, our study, in peering intensely into the moment-to-moment moves of the
33 performative, both identifies that moment in which indescribable flesh becomes
34 articulable body and collapses this arbitrary distinction into body/flesh.
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44 To make sense of this, and thus to understand the agency of body/flesh in the
45 performative corporealizing of the working self, we returned to our diffractive reading of
46 Butler and Barad, reading their insights productively within and through each other. The
47 first task was to reverse the title of Butler’s book ‘*Bodies that Matter*’ to describe the
48 puzzle we are exploring, that is ‘*Matter that Bodies*’. This recognizes, but at the same
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3 time helps resolve, Barad's (2007) accusation of Butler's work that it re-inscribes matter
4 as a passive product of discursive practices, with only the body's contours, rather than its
5 fleshy materiality, its body/flesh, emerging. To understand *how* matter 'bodies', we
6 develop a model that uses Barad's recognition of matter's dynamism and the agential cut
7 that instigates bodily boundaries, and Butler's extension of Althusser's theory of
8 interpellation to explain the operation of the agential cut. This allows us to peer more
9 deeply into the moment-to-moment movement of the performative that can be seen in our
10 empirical materials.

11
12 Barad (2007, p.155) notes science's dismantling of what appear to be bodily boundaries:
13 they are culturally and historically specific. Bodies are thus 'phenomena that acquire
14 specific boundaries and properties through the open-ended dynamics of intra-activity'
15 (Barad, 2007, p.172). Humans, and bodies, are part of the ongoing reconfiguring of the
16 world, that is, emergent phenomena that, like all other physical systems, emerge through
17 agential cuts that enact boundaries, properties, and meanings (P. 340). 'Flesh' in Barad's
18 terms is 'matter', that is, an undifferentiated mass awaiting an agential cut that delineates
19 bodies as seemingly discrete entities having seemingly discrete limbs, organs, skeleton,
20 neurological, digestive, reproductive and other systems.

21
22 What enables an agential cut? Barad's focus is on laboratories, and on measurement,
23 something not so immediately apparent in the everyday world of work, but there is a clue
24 in her emphasis on apparatus' agency in making agential cuts: the 'crucial point' is 'that
25 the apparatus enacts an agential cut – a resolution of the ontological indeterminacy –
26 within the phenomenon' (2007, p.159). 'Apparatuses' are discursive practices, i.e.
27 'specific material reconfigurings through which "objects" and "subjects" are produced
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3 (p.148). What discursive practices/apparatuses operated within our vignettes to enact that
4
5 agential cut? Butler (1997) offers a way of identifying apparatuses in the act of making
6
7 the agential cut through which body/flesh becomes demarcated as 'my' working body
8
9 separate and distinct from flesh-in-itself, in her extension (1997) of Althusser's (1971)
10
11 theory of interpellation.
12
13

14
15 Althusser's famous theory of subjectivity involves a mythical scene of a police officer
16
17 calling out to an innocent passer-by, 'hey you'. The person, in turning to respond,
18
19 identifies itself as a criminal. Butler (1997) asked: but who is it that precedes that call?
20
21 There is no-one, she answered. Our study shows that that no-one is the flesh-in-itself of
22
23 body/flesh. That is, absent-minded, non-self-aware matter that is vital for the emergence
24
25 of a human awaits the interpellative hail. Butler helps illuminate the complex process that
26
27 occurs in the momentary act of bare matter's turning towards that voice. Prior to the call
28
29 there is no subject, only body/flesh. The call is heard, body/flesh turns, and in the very act
30
31 of turning becomes an embodied subject with an identity, who is subject to the norms and
32
33 laws governing behaviours. The figure of the police officer in this foundational scene is
34
35 no accident; Butler uses it to illuminate how the subject that emerges is not only
36
37 consciously aware of itself, but is also imbued with the powerful restrictions of a
38
39 conscience. That is, body/flesh, hailed, turns and a subject becomes inaugurated,
40
41 subjected and subjectified.
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46
47 In other words, Butler brings to Baradian theory an alternative boundary-making
48
49 apparatus: the interpellative call/apparatus is both 'discursive practice' and 'specific
50
51 material (re)configuration of the world through which the determination of boundaries,
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3 properties, and meanings is differentially enacted' (Barad, 2007, p.148), that allows 'a
4
5 genealogical analysis of the material-discursive emergence of the human' (p. 150).

6
7 We saw such apparatuses in our empirical materials, when body/flesh materialized as 'my
8
9 (gendered) body': the interpellative call was heard and agential cut made, as we now
10
11 briefly summarise.

12
13
14 The ethnographer's account introduced agentive body/flesh, moving without conscious
15
16 thought, until she was plummeted into conscious awareness of a self through, at the
17
18 beginning of the week, an invasion of noisy young men into her space, and a glance in the
19
20 mirror at the week's end. Those young men, even without speaking or getting physically
21
22 close to her reached out and through the power of affect touched her. They, in effect,
23
24 called, 'hey you there'. That interpellative hail is (as posthuman theory argues of
25
26 discourses) material: the sound of the call touches body/flesh, wraps it in its embrace and
27
28 turns it around, subjectivity coursing through body/flesh as it completes the turn.
29
30 Body/flesh, in that moment of turning, becomes cultural, corporealized 'I'. The mirror at
31
32 the week's end performs a similar call, but now it imposes gender. That is, body/flesh is
33
34 prior to gender: gender is imposed on it later, only after the interpellative hail: 'hey you,
35
36 you woman'.
37
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42 The Consultant, on the other hand, attempted to negate body/flesh, to keep it hidden, but
43
44 it insisted on its presence, requiring that she struggle with it. The interpellative hail here
45
46 comes from body/flesh itself, but now it is not calling the self into mind-ful existence but
47
48 into the norms that govern the constitution of working (professional) embodied selves. As
49
50 Butler's (1997, p.118) exposition of the interpellative turn observes, 'To become a
51
52 "subject" is...to have been presumed guilty, then tried and declared innocent. Because this
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3 declaration is not a single act but a status incessantly *reproduced*, to become a “subject”
4
5 is to be continually acquitting oneself of the accusation of guilt’. If body/flesh is taboo
6
7 then any emanation marks one as guilty, and the Consultant illuminates the panic that
8
9 ensues as body/flesh calls out, using perspiration as its language, ‘hey you, you with the
10
11 body’. The prospect of breaking the taboo looms. The interpellative hail, as Baradian
12
13 agential cut-making apparatus, is imbued with power: it not only makes matter into
14
15 (gendered) bodies in the act of turning, it infuses body/flesh with sensations, requiring
16
17 that sensations that inform working body/flesh are restrictive, uncomfortable, painful.
18
19 Body/flesh is not something that can be enjoyed while at work, or perhaps it is office-
20
21 bound body/flesh that cannot be enjoyed (the footballers who invaded the Ethnographer’s
22
23 space may offer a different reading).
24
25
26 Finally, we identify the interpellative hail in the Autoethnographer’s account as that made
27
28 by the trainer: ‘punch harder’ – ‘hey you, see what might happen when you break out of
29
30 gender’s jail’. This offers an alternative reading to interpellation: there may be ways out
31
32 of rather than into jail in the turn. The jubilation of breaking free of the norms within
33
34 which she manifested and policed body/flesh, that turned it into a jail, the self into judge,
35
36 jury and warder, lasted only momentarily, but it happened. This points towards the
37
38 possibility of interceding in the interpellative turn to refuse the police officer’s hail, and
39
40 thus to resist entry into the norms that await one as the turn is completed. Body/flesh
41
42 turns, becoming perhaps rebellious, pleasurable, sybaritic, demanding it experiences
43
44 embodiment differently. We cannot envisage these possibilities – we are too socialized
45
46 into the norms of our academic profession – but the opportunity exists for exploration –
47
48 from disciplined to sybaritic body/flesh perhaps.
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3 To conclude briefly (for organizational limitations on the becoming flesh/body are
4 replicated in the strict word limits on journal papers), we aimed to make two
5 contributions in this paper. The first, to explore the performative constitution of
6 corporeal(izing) working bodies, has introduced an understanding of flesh as the matter
7 through which bodies become constituted as body/flesh. Body/flesh resists the arbitrary
8 cut between flesh (corporeal matter) and body (the corporeal substance on which culture
9 is stamped). It (and thus gender) is prior to what we apprehend as 'bodies'. This points
10 towards possibilities of different constitutions of working body/flesh. Secondly, we read
11 Butlerian and Baradian theories of performativity within and through each other, using
12 body/flesh's materiality in the performative moment to illustrate the power that can come
13 from reconciling their perspectives.
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28 Much more can be done both theoretically and empirically. Of the former, our diffractive
29 reading of the works of two powerful intellects, Butler and Barad, offers possibilities for
30 further development. Empirically, we offer a methodology for exploring the
31 materialization of body/flesh in other contexts and with different subjects. How this can
32 be done remains to be explored, but the possibilities are exciting.
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53 **Author Biographies**

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2
3 Nancy Harding is Professor of Human Resource Management at the School of
4 Management, University of Bath. Her research interests include working lives, gender,
5 critical management studies and ways of researching and writing 'differently'. Her
6 articles have appeared in journals including *Human Relations*, *Organization Studies*,
7 *Organization*, *Journal of Management Studies* and *Gender, Work & Organization*. Her
8 two sole-authored books explore the construction of management and the manager, and
9 ways of being at work. Her joint-authored books are on bringing feminism into 21st-
10 century management studies (with Marianna Fotaki), a critical perspective on leadership
11 (with Jackie Ford and Mark Learmonth), and the social construction of dementia (with
12 Colin Palfrey).
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17 Sarah Gilmore is a Reader in Organization Studies at Cardiff University Business School.
18 Her research interests are wide-ranging but her empirical work focuses on elite sport and
19 reviews aspects of working lives through a range of lenses such as precarious work,
20 emotion/emotional labour. She has a long-standing interest in psychoanalysis and has
21 used this to explore reflexive accounts within ethnographic work; the positionality of the
22 manager within football as well as her current research concerning socialisation. Her
23 work has been published in *Organization Studies*, *Human Relations* as well as a range of
24 sport science journals.
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29 Jackie Ford is Professor of Leadership and Organization Studies at Durham University
30 Business School and has held various professorial posts since 2008 at the Universities of
31 Leeds and Bradford. Jackie's research includes the study of working lives, notably in
32 exploring critical approaches to leadership; gender, diversity and inclusion; and ethics,
33 management and organization studies. She has co-authored a monograph entitled
34 *Leadership as Identity: Constructions and Deconstructions* (Ford, Harding and
35 Learmonth, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); co-edited *Making Public Services Management*
36 *Critical* (Currie, Ford, Harding and Learmonth, Routledge, 2010); co-edited the text-
37 book *Leadership: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (Carroll, Ford and Taylor, Sage,
38 2019, 2nd edition); and has published in a range of journals including *British Journal of*
39 *Management*, *Human Relations*, *Journal of Management Studies*, *Leadership*,
40 *Management Learning*, *Organization*, *Organization Studies*, *Sociology*, and *Work*,
41 *Employment and Society*.
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