Introduction
The spatial turn in organizational studies

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*Organizational Spaces* engages various aspects of work-related settings and their relationships to their ‘inhabitants’, from employees at all levels to clients or customers, and from visitors to onlookers at a greater remove. Spatial settings are coming more and more to figure explicitly in analyses of organizations and organizational practices (Hernes et al. 2006), as seen in recently published works (for example, Gregson et al. 2002, Taylor and Spicer 2007, Dale and Burrell 2008). Studies of organizational spaces have ranged in focus from examining the role of organizations’ headquarters and other buildings’ spatial design in communicating organizational meanings to onlookers near and far, to the allocation and use of space for communicating organizational meanings internally (Berg and Kreiner 1990, Goodsell 1993, Yanow 1993, Kornberger and Clegg 2004, Van Marrewijk 2009a). Other studies explore more general, theoretical questions concerning the meanings of built spaces and the extent to which these meanings are central to an organization’s identity (Goodsell 1988, Lefebvre 1991, Preoffitt et al. 2006, Yanow 2006a) or investigate spatial elements that communicate the organization’s brands and goals (Bittner 1992, Gregson et al. 2002, Felstead et al. 2005, van Marrewijk 2009b). Still other works seek to articulate how organizational spaces and their meanings might be systematically studied (Yanow 2000, 2006b). These examples demonstrate the growing, explicit attention being given in organizational studies to the importance of engaging spatial settings.

The chapters in this book present new theoretical, empirical and methodological contributions to the field of organizational space studies. The idea for the book began during a gathering of organizational studies scholars in the stream ‘Settings and Space’ at the December 2005 Asian and Pacific Researchers in Organisational Studies (APROS) conference in Melbourne, Australia, convened by the book’s editors. The volume includes a selection of papers from that stream, with added contributions that we first heard in other conferences, capturing a sense of the wide range of topics and approaches of interest to scholars studying the intersections of space and organizations. All contributions, including the more theoretical or conceptual ones, are grounded...
in empirical research either conducted by the chapter authors or drawn from others’ work, based on field studies that used different methods and explored different aspects of the various roles played by built spaces in organizational life.

The book joins the so-called ‘spatial turn’ that is taking place in a number of fields, from philosophy (the work of phenomenologists such as Casey 1993; see also Goodman and Elgin 1988) to anthropology (as in the re-examination of settings by Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003). In rediscovering ‘place’ and ‘place-ness’, this new attention joins a long tradition of spatial studies in such fields as human or social geography (for example, Jackson 1980, Meinig 1979, Rapoport 1982, Tuan 1977; see Hubbard et al. 2004), urban studies and planning (such as the work of Appleyard 1982 and Lynch 1972), and sociology (for example, Soja 1989). The field of study is, in fact, vast. Along with other organizational studies scholars (Hernes 2004, Clegg and Kornberger 2006, Dale and Burrell 2008), we find spatial aspects in organizations of great academic and practical interest and think that they call for greater attention.

THE STUDY OF SPATIAL SETTINGS IN ORGANIZATIONS: A BRIEF TOPICAL OVERVIEW

We note, with some curiosity, the lack of attention to spatial elements in organizational and management studies over the last few decades, given that every employee, student, patient, visitor or researcher entering an office, school, university or hospital experiences the material and concrete dimensions of built spaces. This makes it somewhat premature, we think, to try to present a thorough historical overview of who has made what contributions when, and under what circumstances, to the study of organizational spaces. Although we allude to such a historical account in the next paragraph, to situate the book’s chapters we have chosen instead to sketch out some of the key themes that such studies have touched on and to suggest current issues in need of engaging.

Analyses of spatial settings of work actually have a longstanding tradition in organizational and management studies, going back over 30 years in some areas (for example, Steele 1973) and even further if one considers studies employing field research methods of whatever sort (for example, Mayo 1933, Blau 1955, H. Becker et al. 1961), where ‘space’ often forms part of the backdrop for the action. Although this focus was eclipsed in the 1970s by more behaviouralist work, it enjoyed something of a comeback with the burst of attention to organizational culture(s) in the 1980s and 1990s (for example, Steele 1981, Gagliardi 1990, Hatch 1990, Rosen et al. 1990, Nauta 1991, F.
Becker and Steele 1995, Yanow 1998, Strati 1999). In recent years the material aspects of organizational life have been enjoying a particular resurgence of attention, especially in cultural terms (for example, Hernes 2004, Kornberger and Clegg 2004, Binder and Hellstrom 2005, Rafaeli and Pratt 2006, Dale and Burrell 2008; on material objects specifically, see Orlikowski 2007), with many calling for space and other dimensions of the material world to be brought back into organizational theorizing.

Various explanations have been advanced for this absence, a theme taken up by Dvora Yanow in Chapter 7. Strati (1999, p. 180), for instance, attributes the exclusion of physical space from analytic domains at least in part to scholars’ research inexperience: ‘Organisational researchers usually see all visual artifacts when doing research in organisations but they do not usually mention these aspects of organisational life in their research reports, both because they deem them to be irrelevant … and because they do not know how to study them.’ But why should spatial elements be deemed irrelevant or be a blind spot in research methods? A historical look (albeit brief and truncated) suggests some answers.

During the Enlightenment, as Latour (1993) argues, human and non-human artefacts were established as two irrevocably sundered realms of knowledge and experience. From his perspective, such a separation imposes a binary on the world that is not in the world. He suggests that the social and the material both need to be studied from a holistic perspective. Theories of socio-technical systems, developed initially by London’s Tavistock Institute and articulated in the work of Emery and Trist (for example, Emery and Trist 1965; cf. Vickers 1983), argued, beginning in the 1950s, for their intertwining in studies of work and its settings, on the basis of empirical research, especially among teams of workers in Britain’s coal mines (Trist and Bamforth 1951). For some reason, that line of thinking appears to have been forgotten in contemporary organizational studies. Orlikowski (2007), Dale and Burrell (2008, p. 34), and Van Marrewijk (2009b) all call on scholars to stop treating the two domains as distinct and largely independent spheres of organizational life. Organizations – or more precisely, our conceptualization of them in and through our organizational theorizing – need to be re-materialized, so to speak. Moreover, it is less a matter of needing to study the social impacts of material features – a formulation that still treats them as distinct, separable domains – than that organizational life, as with social life more broadly, is a socio-material practice (Orlikowski 2007) in which the two domains are intertwined in mutually constitutive ways and need to be engaged jointly.

One part of the organizational space field does this by exploring management interventions in work settings as a tool for inducing changes in employees’ work practices (Kornberger and Clegg 2004). In this view, constructing a new corporate building, (re)designing interior spaces, and renovating existing
buildings all can be important ways of transforming organizations (Van Marrewijk 2009a). For instance, an empirical study of two Danish cases shows the interconnectedness of organizational change and architectural design processes (Våland 2010) in the case of open-space (or ‘turfless’) offices. The socio-spatial relations and aesthetic order of such workplaces are, as Felstead et al. (2005, p. 71) argue, designed specifically to generate intense social interactions among employees.

We have ourselves seen this kind of purposive use in two field settings, one in the new National@Docklands office in Melbourne, Australia, which Michael Muetzelfeldt arranged for APROS stream members to tour, the other in the Interpolis building in Tilburg, the Netherlands. National@Docklands, the headquarters of the National Australia Bank, was designed as part of a strategic and cultural change programme following its merger with another bank, one more traditional in organizational cultural terms. The physical plant consists of two low-rise, interconnected, highly transparent glass-walled buildings with sunlight-filled atriums. The National Australia Bank leaders intentionally designed a space that, they felt, would give expression to its more outward-looking, modern culture as a way of promoting that culture among all employees, old and new, and hastening the integration of the new ones.

In a similar vein, the headquarters building of Dutch insurance company Interpolis was intended to support the introduction of a new corporate culture of flexibility, transparency, and employee responsibility (Veldhoen 2005). Twelve floors of workspace were designed as open, ‘turfless’ offices in which employees take their laptops and rolling file-boxes with them to that day’s choice of workplace. The first two floors consist of trendy spaces where employees can work, meet and relax: bars, relaxation rooms, and lounges with music and comfortable sofas were designed to support the new corporate culture.

Both National@Docklands and Interpolis examples have their own vocabularies of building materials, size, scale, mass, colour, shape, design, and relationship with their environments, among other things (Nauta 1991, Yanow 2000, 2006a and b, Van Marrewijk 2009a).

Several of the chapters in this book echo these ideas about the use of spatial design to bring about desired behaviour among employees and others. Patrick Kenis, Peter M. Kruyen and Joan Baaijens (Chapter 3), for instance, look at the relationships between the design of a new prison building and the actions of employees and inmates. Such theorizing also needs to extend beyond the design of new buildings and spaces to examine the re-use of existing buildings, designed initially for other purposes. Marja Gastelaars (Chapter 4) explores an old building originally designed and used as a physics laboratory, that was given to a new social science faculty. The chap-
ter looks at how ideas passed along through the earlier design shape present organizational culture.

Not all spatial interventions derive from intentional, conscious design or redesign. Rick Iedema, Debbi Long and Katherine Carroll (Chapter 2) look at the ways in which a seemingly simple, bulging bend in a corridor enabled interactions across professional lines that established professional-culture-based practices might not have allowed. A useful outcome – one that may well have been desired by certain members of the organization – was achieved through spatial media, even though that could hardly be said to have been part of design forethought and planning. We note that the ‘back staircase’ in the old physics lab described by Gastelaars apparently enables similar encounters among its present occupants.

But let us not be too Pollyannaish in painting an overly, and perhaps unduly, optimistic view of the relationship between organizational spaces and the acts and behaviours of their residents and visitors. For one, in the diachronic processes of organizational and architectural design, outcomes are difficult to predict (Våland 2010). Spatial reorganizations can result in surprising uses of spatial settings, surprising in the extent to which what one finds in the field is different from what one expected to find. A treatment of the intentions of organizational leaders and their architects that assumes that design elements will shape employees’ and others’ behaviours without according them agency of their own, and without considering the possibilities of voice or exit, along with loyalty (to borrow Hirschman’s 1970 title), is, today, theoretically and intellectually untenable. As space commonly embodies relations of power, they, as well as possibilities of resistance to it, must also be engaged and theorized in organizational space studies (see Betts 2006).

Moreover, there is a downside, as Dale and Burrell (Chapter 1) note, in the treatment of organizational workspaces as homes with kitchens and recreation rooms, such as in National@Docklands and Interpolis. This ‘aestheticization’ of the workplace, they write, ‘is combined, almost ironically, with the disappearance of the workplace itself as a workplace [emphasis added], … displaced by quasi-constructs of town- or village-scapes … and break-out rooms … using colours, lighting and furnishings which do not evoke a place of labour and employment’. As this kind of ‘spatial rhetoric’ – invoking the spatial vocabularies of family and community, home and play in the workplace – becomes more and more commonplace, the administrative colonization of private life, supported now even more by non-stop Internet and cell-phone access, reaches ever further into what was once employees’ down-time or time off. At the same time, however, its intended meanings become easier to identify and potentially to resist by ignoring and working around (if not outright subverting) them, something that Kunda (1992) noted with respect to employees’ responses to the more explicit workings of Digital Equipment Company’s (DEC) ‘culture chief’.
The darker notes of design elements that communicate fortification, protection and surveillance are at play in the discussion of the prison design, as one might expect: Bentham’s and Foucault’s panopticon comes readily to mind. But interestingly, Alexia Panayiotou and Krini Kafiris (Chapter 9) found such notes as well in filmic portrayals of organizational spaces, financial corporations and law firms in particular, that do not appear, on the surface, panoptical but which enact certain of its elements. There, the possession of doors and windows, among other things, signals status or its lack, with accompanying degrees of power – or powerlessness. Being able to shut oneself off from the view of one’s colleagues by closing one’s office door is, however, not enough to establish workplace primacy; one needs at the same time to be able to look out at something beyond the walls of one’s building. Power comes not only from denying others’ surveillance of you, but in maintaining it on the world outside, even as you are removed from the constant all-seeing overview of those who work for you.

But those theorists who do study organizational spaces (as well as those studying other aspects of organizational life) need to start asking themselves whether their theorizing itself creates a kind of panopticism in controlling the terms of analysis: is spatial use, interpretation, and theorizing as neutral and universal as theories appear to claim? In looking at the spatial design that characterizes business meetings – both the rooms and the behaviours and acts within them – in the Arab Middle East, David Weir (Chapter 6) implicitly raises the question of whether our modes of understanding and researching spaces within organizational studies are highly ‘ethnocentric’, projecting ‘Western’ interpretations as universals. The need for awareness of and sensitivity to the non-universal understandings of built space has emerged for us in our respective ethnographic studies. In one, a Dutch multinational in Jakarta was about to move to a newly constructed, spacious office in the business district. The Indonesian staff, however, refused to move there as the new building was situated between Christian and Muslim cemeteries. According to the Indonesian staff, that geographic location would stimulate negative reactions, such as illness, quarrels and jealousy. The Dutch management organized a two-day ritual for all employees – Dutch and Indonesian – performed in the still empty space by an Indonesian shaman, after which the move could begin (Van Marrewijk 1999, p. 265). We think such cross-cultural perspectives are important to consider in theorizing organizational spaces, something we see beginning to emerge in phenomenological and linguistic treatments of space (see for example, the works of Casey 1993, 1997 and of Lakoff and Johnson 1980; but see also Hooper 2001). They serve as an important constraint on universalizing assumptions that are without empirical foundation.
METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

Spatial matters are not only of growing concern to organizational researchers, theoretically and practically. They also pose their own particular methodological challenges. To study organizational spaces, researchers need fuller understandings of the kinds of methods that are best suited to such studies, as well as a greater awareness of their methodological implications. How might researchers assess organizational meanings and their communication through spatial media (including, for instance, the objects used for furnishing and decor)?

The reading of built space and other physical arrangements from the perspective of the arguments in this book requires interpretive methodological questions: those that engage the meanings these spaces and other objects hold for those passing through and/or using them. In some cases, a historical sensibility also informs the analysis: knowing what has come before – earlier prison designs (in Kenis et al.’s Chapter 3), earlier uses of an existing building (Gastelaars’ Chapter 4), earlier arrangements and uses of the urban space in which the organization’s building is situated or of the characteristics of the work performed there (Van Marrewijk’s Chapter 5, as well as Gastelaars) – can usefully inform present-day analyses. Even Panayiotou and Kafiris’ analysis of films (Chapter 9) is explicitly aware of their historical and cultural specificity. And, as noted above, spatial designs and the movement and actions they enable can have different meanings in different national cultures (as in Weir’s Chapter 6).

Spatial studies draw on one of the central characteristics of interpretive work: the researcher’s use of his or her own body as the primary instrument of research (Van Maanen 1996, p. 380). One might even say that this characterizes these studies in the extreme, because studying space rests on the researcher’s heightened awareness of that body moving through space as a medium through which to articulate provisional understandings of that space’s effects on others’ bodies. This is a particularly phenomenological hermeneutics, resting on our own ‘knowing bodies’ (Casey 1993, p. 52; see also Casey 1997) to generate provisional interpretations of the spaces through which others move, as well, and the material objects and other kinds of artefacts – colour, ambient temperature, the ‘feel’ of a room (see for example, Turley and Milliman, 2000, on the so-called ‘atmospheric effect’ on the shopping behaviour of customers) – that they and we experience. These interpretations are, and must be, provisional in that researchers typically follow up on their own bodily based meaning-making by triangulating (Schwartz-Shea 2006), whether on other persons and their experiences (for example, through observations and interviewing, Warren 2008), other times and places (so central to comparative methods), or other sources and methods (for example,
organizational documents, architects’ and other designers’ reports and memos).

Importantly, this checking-in-on follow-up must also include, as its focus, the researcher him- or herself. Reflexivity, as this is called, is increasingly invoked in ethnographic and other interpretive methods; in studies of built spaces and organizational experiences and acts, it is, or should be, *de rigueur*, in light of the phenomenological aspects of spatial study. In order to support arguments or ‘truth claims’, researchers need to take account of the particular characteristics each of us brings to the field as a researcher and how those personal, intellectual, professional, and other characteristics shape what it is that we may see (or not), whom we might speak or interact with (or not), the events we can experience (or not). A researcher’s ‘positionality’ – all of those things that go into making us the observing and knowing persons we are, with our particular sense-making and meaning-making – also has a spatial-geographic dimension, as Pachirat (2009) so ably demonstrates in discussing how a promotion from the shop floor to the Quality Control catwalk physically enabled other lines of sight and insight.

From here it is not a huge leap to perceive that auto-ethnography (Humphreys 2005) can potentially play a key role in studies of space, as Van Marrewijk’s Chapter 5 demonstrates. Note, however, that reflexivity and auto-ethnography are not identical: although the latter rests on the former, it is possible for researchers to be reflexive about their knowledge creation without having their research focus primarily on their own experiences. However, being a participant-observer ethnographer and an organizational employee at the same time – the quintessential dual role of the participant-observer – can enable researchers to draw on their own experiences and visceral, emotional and aesthetic responses as they move their bodies through corporate spaces in ways that might have been shut off to other, non-employee ethnographers.

Awareness of the character of spatial design and its impacts can be facilitated by a comparative perspective, as several chapters demonstrate, whether this entails comparison across place or across time. Van Marrewijk (Chapter 5) shows us how two different spaces within the same organization can evoke radically different experiences among its employees. Kenis, Kruyen and Baaijens (Chapter 3) draw on another kind of spatial comparison, contrasting Prison P’s innovativeness, which they know from their field research, with traditional prison designs, which they know from the theoretical literature. By contrast, Gastelaar’s comparative analysis (Chapter 4) is historical, looking at earlier and later uses of the same building. Mobach’s chapter (8) draws on yet another kind of time-based comparison – that of looking into the future, enabled by ‘virtual’ computer-based techniques, in order to present a would-be spatial reality that users can contrast with their present organizational spaces.
Researchers who want to engage the spatial dimensions of organizations might pursue any of the foregoing topics, from the more methodological – how do people make sense of their surroundings, and how do researchers make sense of that sense-making? – to the more substantive: specific space-act issues raised by or in specific organizations or types of organization; and to the more theoretical – how? The chapters in this book present examples of each of these types, as we outline below. But let us also not forget that spatial study is not only static – it entails more than the identification of stationary spatial vocabularies and their meanings. Spaces are used; they involve movement. And so organizational scholars wishing to study spaces might also shadow executives, managers, employees, clients/customers, and/or visitors (as appropriate to the organization being studied) from the perspective of their movement through its spaces. Such mappings can identify interesting patterns of intersection or avoidance, suggesting in a physical way, for instance, the presence and location of power and powerlessness. The analysis can be gendered or ‘raced’, or linked with professional, occupational or work practice groupings, and so forth. Such study can draw on GPS and other developing technologies, including their use with old-fashioned walking around (for example, Jones, et al. 2008), or it can rely on ‘simple’ hand drawings (which rarely turn out to be simple). Analysis can focus on each of the five senses, in sequence, to see what these reveal about organizational members’ patterns of grouping and movement. Or it can be more ethnomethodological, exploring how spatial uses are continuously re-patterned, maintained, and/or changed (see for example, Ciolfi 2004, Hall 2009, Stavrides 2001). Adapting these methods for purposes of organizational study is the challenge presently facing scholars of the spatial.

THE CHAPTERS

The chapters are grouped in three parts, reflecting their respective engagement with the key concerns identified in the preceding sections of this introduction. Part I focuses on spatial organizations and reorganizations and their relationship(s) with the behaviour and acts of employees and/or clients of and in those organizations. Having delivered a major theoretical contribution to the study of organizations’ spatial settings with their 2008 book, Karen Dale and Gibson Burrell turn their attention in Chapter 1 to the growing popularity of the concept of community within architectural and design practices and rhetoric in the spatial reorganization of workplaces. They argue that changes in workplaces are aimed at the wholesale change of both social and individual motivation and commitment, for the purpose of producing improvements in teamwork and increasing the identification of groups and individuals with the
organization and its goals. The community rhetoric emphasizes collective effort within a harmonious context, positioned by Giddens (1998) as ‘the third way’, in between the state bureaucracy and the free market. Dale and Burrell argue that corporate attention to workplace design represents an attempt to draw the concept of community into the interior of the hierarchic structures of organizational bureaucracies.

Continuing the theme of the spatial ‘ordering’ of its users’ acts, Rick Iedema, Debbi Long, and Katherine Carroll, in their study of professionals working in hospitals (Chapter 2), analyse a space they identified that is surprisingly liminal: a corridor, usually a transit space connecting more formal spaces to each other, whose bulge created ‘space’ for non-formal negotiations among doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals of complex practice issues. The corridor bulge enabled conjoint reflections on practices in ways that might otherwise not have happened: they provided a ‘space out of space’ that facilitated cross-specialization consultations that crossed hierarchical power relations which professional practices would otherwise typically militate against. On a methodological note, the identification and use of the spatial surprise – the corridor bulge – to structure enquiry illustrates one of the central methodological aspects of ethnographic and other forms of interpretive research: abductive reasoning (Van Maanen et al. 2007, Locke et al. 2008, Agar 2010).

In Chapter 3, Patrick Kenis, Peter M. Kruyen and Joan Baaijens discuss the relationships between the design features of a new prison facility and officers’ and prisoners’ behaviours and acts. The original design was intended to influence prisoners’ and officers’ behaviour through the spatial settings of a panopticon-style design, the absence of a break room for guards, and the use of strict monitoring devices. This, it was thought, would result in a more efficient and safer prison. However, in dealing with design imperfections and other problematic attributes of the resulting setting, officers unintentionally developed solutions to the problems which were surprisingly – to the policymakers and researchers – creative. In contrast to the bureaucratic behaviour expected, creative behaviours emerged; and these changed the character of tasks, procedures and rules in prison P.

Part II of the book turns its attention to studies that emphasize the historical and cultural specificities of their analyses. In one reading, they might also be said to highlight methodological issues in the study of organizational spaces. These chapters are grounded in their authors’ own lived experiences of spatial reorganizations, sometimes as employees, sometimes as researchers, sometimes – as in two of the chapters – both at once. Marja Gastelaars (Chapter 4) looks at the institute in Utrecht in which she has taught since its inception. Using the ‘six S’s’ Stewart Brand (1994) proposed to conceptualize the durability of buildings, she explores the building’s Site, Skin (or façade),
Structure, Space plan, Stuff (furnishings and artefacts), and Service. We learn that the institute building, a former physics laboratory, provides its employees with an ‘inner sanctuary’, separating their teaching and research life from the goings-on of the busy Utrecht street outside in much the same way Utrecht’s medieval sanctuaries – *hofjes* – once protected their own inhabitants from the inner city. This is in contrast to the main Utrecht University campus, called the ‘*Uithof*’ – the *outer court*, which is at some distance from the bustling downtown. Her lived experience gives her a familiarity with the many ‘cultural’ and historical echoes that appear in the present re-design.

Whereas Gastelaars writes as a participant who happens also to be observing (Gans 1976), Alfons van Marrewijk (Chapter 5) writes from an explicitly established dual role as both employee and active ethnographer. His ringside seat in Dutch telecom operator KPN enabled him to engage the aesthetic experience of two organizational buildings, something that other non-employee researchers might have a more difficult time accessing. The chapter reflects upon these experiences and the methodological advantages of auto-ethnography for the study of spatial settings. Van Marrewijk’s work also adds to the literature on aesthetics in organizational life, as his insider’s seat enabled an intimate appreciation of the symbolic richness of physical and other artefacts, and their aesthetic dimensions.

In Chapter 6, David Weir, drawing on his own first-hand participatory experiences, explores the patterns of decision-making in a specific spatial design, the *diwan*. Commonly found in public and private settings in the Middle East and North Africa regions, *diwan* is most characteristically associated with a room with low seats lining the walls. Weir argues that the concept of *diwan*, perforce, intertwines spatial settings with management and employee behaviours and acts which are shaped by its design. His reflections on the *diwan* setting show the importance not only of a cross-cultural perspective for studying spatial settings but also for not assuming that interpretations of spatial experiences are universal: meanings attributed to spatial settings have to be located within their cultural contexts.

Moving away from empirical realities, the chapters in Part III look at representational aspects that arise in studying organizational spaces. In Chapter 7, Dvora Yanow asks what is lost in the silencing of space and other aspects of the organization’s material world when organizational analysis, especially that informed by many discourse analytic theories, privileges words over objects. This practice, she argues, can be explained by looking at the professional practices of academics, socialized to a world of words and the production of texts. Consequently, their bodily experiences of spatial settings and objects receive little attention, and are even excluded, from organizational analysis. This affects interpretive researchers as much as it does those taking more realist-objectivist approaches to their studies. Yanow argues that this results in the
loss not only of physical objects in the study of organizational realities, but of particular kinds of research questions and processes of study, as well.

Having recently published a book on organizational space (2009), Mark Mobach here turns his attention (Chapter 8) to an elaboration of the use of virtual technologies in the processes of design and construction. He argues that architects and managers, in cooperation, want to intervene in organizational space settings in order to influence the behaviours of their users: organizational members, customers and visitors. But end-users are hardly incorporated in this collaboration, resulting often in dissatisfaction with the design and even in resistance once the building is occupied. He argues that virtual reality could be used in a participatory design process in ways that give the end-user the opportunity to experience the new spatial settings before they are set in cement. They could then communicate any undesired attributes to the architects, who might then modify the design in ways that would make the overall process, and its outcomes, more successful.

Virtual reality is not the only medium for the visualization of organizational spaces. In the final chapter of the book, Alexia Panayiotou and Krini Kafiris turn to commercial films as a powerful medium for presenting visual images of organizational spaces. They analyse six well-known Hollywood films about financial corporations and law firms in which organizational spaces were a central ‘actant’, to use the term from actor network theory (see Latour 1993, Orlikowski 2007). Studying the geographic location, the size, scale and material of the buildings, the use of doors and windows, and the décor and furnishings of the organizations presented in these films, they found that stories of gender and power relations were expressed, symbolically, through spatial designs and uses. The films do not treat organizational spaces as neutral stages for the setting of action, but instead draw on a range of spatial vocabularies to actively construct or solidify existing gender relations and asymmetrical relationships of power.

Finally, in the afterword, Kristian Kreiner, co-author of one of the earliest critical assessments of organizational spaces (Berg and Kreiner 1990), reflects on the chapters and their contributions to the ongoing discussion of space, meanings and organizations in the organizational studies field.

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