Book review

Arja Ropo, Perttu Salovaara, Erika Sauer, and Donatella De Paoli,
Leadership in Spaces and Places (Edward Elgar, Cheltenham,
UK and Northampton, MA, USA 2015) 275 pp.

Robert M. McManus

McCoy Associate Professor of Leadership Studies and Communication, The McDonough Center for
Leadership and Business at Marietta College, Marietta, OH, USA

A wise person once said, ‘Writing about music is like dancing about architecture.’¹ The editors of *Leadership in Spaces and Places* have choreographed a masterpiece. They have assembled a superb collection of scholarship that sheds light on the relationship between humans and their environments, specifically in regard to the socio-materiality between leadership and space. The contributors to this twelve-chapter volume include scholars who are on the cutting edge of thinking about the embodiment of leadership, specifically as it applies to the constructed environment. The book was developed as part of a four-year research project funded by the Academy of Finland, ‘aimed to develop a new understanding of leadership, emphasizing space, embodiment, and ascetics’ (Ropo et al. 2015, p. 2). The authors employ various approaches to understand the intersection between space and leadership. Experts in sociology, organizational studies, cross-cultural management, and architecture are just a few of those represented in this volume that lend their voices to the field of leadership studies. Another notable quality of the book is the painstakingly thorough research employed by the book’s editors and contributors. The bibliographies alone are superb resources for anyone interested in this area of scholarship.²

The idea that the space in which we interact affects leadership is not entirely new, as the editors point out in their introductory chapter. There is a long history of the study of space as emblems of a leader’s power and status (for example, see Remland 1981). Likewise, scientific management theorists such as Frederick Taylor with his ‘Taylorism,’ and Human Relations theorists such as Elton Mayo and the Hawthorne Studies, explicitly or implicitly studied space and its relationship to leadership. Certainly, newer approaches to space and leadership such as open-plan offices, unique organizational cultures, corporate branding, and virtual environments also provide the impetus for the study of space and leadership. The use of space in these contexts is well represented in *Leadership in Spaces and Places*, specifically in the early sections of the book – part I, ‘Workspaces in change,’ part II, ‘Open office spaces,’ and part III, ‘Virtual workspaces.’ However, the later sections of the book make a greater attempt to challenge readers’ thinking about the relationship between leadership and space. In these sections, the contributors

1. This quote has been attributed to several people, but its original provenance is difficult to establish.

2. The website for the project, www.leadspace.fi, offers the reader further fascinating supplemental information about the endeavor.

examine the ways spaces themselves lead in contexts such as ‘Service spaces’ (part IV), ‘Cultural spaces’ (part V), and ‘Institutional spaces’ (part VI).

The authors ground their investigation with four assumptions, two of which would be familiar to most scholars now operating in the field of leadership studies: the distinction between the ‘leader’ and ‘leadership,’ and the idea that leadership is socially constructed. However, it is the two remaining assumptions that truly distinguish the authors’ work: the idea that ‘leadership is an aesthetic, embodied phenomenon, a subjective “felt experience” rather than one person influencing another’; and the idea that leadership and space mutually construct and inform each other in both physical and virtual environments (Ropo et al. 2015, p. 2).

Perhaps the most heuristic theme that runs through *Leadership in Spaces and Places* is the idea that ‘[t]raditional leader-centric practices do not fit the changing work environment, and plural forms of leadership are increasingly being developed both conceptually and practically’ (ibid.). Two of the editors of the book, Arja Ropo and Perttu Salovaara, succinctly summarize this argument in their article that was recently featured in The International Leadership Association’s Building Leadership Bridges Series title, *The Embodiment of Leadership*. Ropo and Salovaara (2013, p. 198) explain: ‘[The term] *leader* [refers to] the quality of an individual and *leadership* [refers to] a quality of an organization and its culture. Leadership can therefore even be regarded as plural.’ A few of the chapters in *Leadership in Spaces and Places* that provide particularly compelling evidence for this idea are Höykinpuro’s ‘Front stage with no front-stage employees: customer perceptions of self-service hotels,’ Sauer’s ‘Cities lead’ (which compares the metropolises of New York City in the United States and Jakarta in Indonesia), Sauer’s ‘The hospital as space of power: ownership of space and symbols of power in the hospital setting’ (which calls upon Michel Foucault’s observations of Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon that Foucault discusses in his *Discipline and Punish* (1991)), De Paoli’s ‘Virtual organizations: a call for new leadership,’ and Grenness’s ‘Culture matters: space and leadership in a cross-cultural perspective.’ But all of the chapters in the book add insight to the way meaning and leadership are managed through the spaces we create and inhabit.

The key question the editors of *Leadership in Spaces and Places* ask is: ‘Why does space need to be taken seriously in leadership and organization studies and practice?’ (Ropo et al. 2015, p. 1). Their response is that leadership should be understood as ‘a mutually constitutive relationship between the human and the non-human’ (ibid., p. 4). As mentioned, chapters throughout the book provide compelling evidence for this claim; however, I turn to another author to add to the editors and authors represented in *Leadership in Spaces and Places*, namely rhetorician Barry Brummett and his book *Rhetorical Dimensions of Popular Culture* (1991).

In much the same way as the editors of *Leadership in Spaces and Places* re-conceptualize leadership as a ‘socially constructed, aesthetic, embodied phenomenon, and subjective “felt experience” rather than one person influencing another’ (Ropo et al. 2015, p. 2), Brummett re-conceptualizes rhetoric as ‘the social function that influences and manages meaning’ rather than an extended text with a well-supported line of argument (Brummett 1991, pp. xi–xii). Rhetoric, then, is conceived of as a ‘complex, multilevel social function that is carried out through correspondingly complex manifestations’ in three realms of social interaction, which Brummett conceptualizes as the exigent, the quotidian, and the implicative realms of rhetoric (ibid., pp. 37–46).

The exigent realm contains the traditional view of rhetoric; that is, a single text that is deliberately used to persuade an audience to action or belief. Brummett says this

realm is carried out through ‘interventionist manifestations’ (ibid., p. 40) characterized by at least two elements: a conscious awareness by the listener of the rhetorical function being performed, and a conscious responsibility on the part of the rhetor for the persuasive intent of his or her message. In the realm of the quotidian, public and personal meanings that affect everyday decisions are managed. This realm is dominated by ‘appropriational manifestations’ (ibid., p. 41) characterized by an audience who is less consciously aware that the management of shared meanings is under way, and an audience that is less likely to take or assign responsibility for the rhetorical effort. The realm of the implicative is dominated by ‘conditional manifestations’ (ibid., pp. 44–45) – or ‘shadow texts’ (p. 46) – characterized by meanings that are so far from our conscious awareness that a rhetor and an audience are not likely to take or assign any responsibility for the rhetorical function being performed.

My intention in introducing Brummett’s thinking is to note the implicit argument contained in *Leadership in Spaces and Places*: that is, leadership at its core can be conceived of as a rhetorical phenomenon – leader(s) influencing follower(s) to pursue a goal. Additionally, as *Leadership in Spaces and Places* illustrates, leadership works in Brummett’s realms of the quotidian and implicative as well as the traditionally exigent. Leadership may be taking place in the way workspaces, public spaces, and institutions are constructed and arranged. Hence leadership is often taking place in ways that may not be immediately evident or in ways that are far beyond our conscious awareness. And that may be a problem.

In the last decade we have seen a proliferation of scholarship that examines followers and the role of followership (for examples, see Chaleff 2009; Kellerman 2008; Riggio et al. 2008). These scholars call us to be critical and active participants in the leadership process. However, we may be led in ways that are beyond our conscious awareness. This observation is the true strength of *Leadership in Spaces and Places*. It shines a light on the way leaders and followers may be engaging in their constructed environment in ways that many of us have never considered. By understanding the ways we interact in our socio-material surroundings, we can better understand the larger world in which we live and be more critical and active leaders and followers.

This observation is not to imply that we have no agency with the way we interact with our material world. Remember, another major argument the authors make is that leadership is a socially constructed phenomenon. I recently had the chance to interview two of the editors of *Leadership in Spaces and Places*, Arja Ropo and Perttu Salovaara, and they were very careful to point this out. Ropo maintained:

When we talk about the spaces leading, whether they’re cities or other kind of spaces, we don’t say that those material things lead in a deterministic way. Instead, we say that this leadership aspect takes place through our embodied experiences; through our senses, through our memories, and imagination. It really needs this human engagement. (Ropo and Salovarra 2016)

This type of sophisticated and nuanced thinking, contained throughout *Leadership in Spaces and Places*, is one of the major strengths of the writing. It is a heuristic read that will challenge your thinking about leadership and the socio-material world.

REFERENCES

- Brummett, Barry (1991), *Rhetorical Dimensions of Popular Culture*, Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press.

- Chaleff, Ira (2009), *The Courageous Follower: Standing Up To and For Our Leaders*, 3rd edn, San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
- Foucault, Michel (1991), Alan Sheridan (trans.), *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 2nd edn, New York: Vintage Books.
- Kellerman, Barbara (2008), *Followership: How Followers are Creating Change and Changing Leaders*, Boston: Harvard Business Press.
- Remland, Martin (1981), 'Developing leadership skills in nonverbal communication: a situational perspective,' *Journal of Business Communication*, 18, 18–31.
- Riggio, Ronald E., Ira Chaleff, and Jean Lipman-Bluman (2008), *The Art of Followership: How Great Followers Create Great Leaders and Organizations*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Ropo, Arja and Perttu Salovarra (2013), 'Embodied learning experience in leadership development,' in Lois Ruskai Melina, Gloria J. Burgess, Lena Lid Falkman, and Antonio Marturano (eds), *The Embodiment of Leadership*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, pp. 193–215.
- Ropo, Arja, Perttu Salovarra, Erika Sauer, and Donatella De Paoli (2015), *Leadership in Spaces and Places*, Cheltenham UK and Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar.
- Ropo, Arja and Perttu Salovarra (2016), 'Interview by Robert M. McManus,' International Leadership Association, *Member Connector*, January 11–17, available at: <http://www.ila-net.org/members/directory/downloads/newsletter/Jan2016ILAMC.pdf>.