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Solid Futures.

Office Architecture and the Labor Imaginary

David Adler

Abstract:

In organization studies, office architecture is mostly seen as an instrument for control and productivity. By taking into account the temporality of architecture within labor relations an imagined dimension of the organization's built space comes to the fore. For a better understanding of this dimension, this article turns to architectural theory, especially Walter Benjamin's Arcades Project. Using an approach grounded in discourse analysis and ethnography, four dimensions in which office architecture relates to the future are presented: 1. office architecture is discursively charged with promises, 2. it produces conflicting anticipations of the future, 3. architectural aspirations have to be performed locally, and 4. office architecture stages labor's outstanding potentiality. These aspects make clear that office architecture cannot be sufficiently understood only in terms of its functionality or instrumentality. Instead of simply assuring an objective technological rationalization, office architecture produces a shared imaginary of an ever more successful organization of labor.

In recent years there has been an increasing interest in the relevance of future for economic and political practices.¹ This has important consequences for the understanding of organizations. The financial crisis, which has shaken the world economy since 2007, has sensitized both the public and the scientific perception for the unpredictability of economic developments. Of course, economic calamities have not been unfamiliar to the 20th century. However, while modern organizations tended to deal with external imponderabilities by internal rationalization and structuration, even the most complex forms of dealing with the future in a calculative way seem to fail today. The technological means to “defuturize” the future – i.e. to transform the open uncertainty of the things to come into a manageable risk – fall short of their promise (Eposito 2010; Opitz and Tellmann 2015; Luhmann 1976). In this context the rationalist and functionalist image of organizations seems more and more problematic. Accordingly Jens Beckert (2016) has stressed the importance of the imaginary for dealing with the future in his recent account of the temporality of capitalist dynamics. I explicitly want to take up this interest in the

¹ I want to thank David Waldecker, Jens Maeße, Thomas Alkemeyer, Thomas Scheffer, Johannes Angermüller, the editors and the anonymous reviewer for critical remarks and helpful suggestions.

imaginary dimension. However, I see two shortcomings in recent debates. While there has been extensive work on the role of money for economic temporality and the handling of the future, two dimensions are largely absent from the analysis: labor and materiality. While Beckert and others assert the general importance of the imaginary, the organization of work seems to chiefly remain the domain of an instrumentalist perspective.

In contrast, I want to argue that the imaginary also plays a fundamental role not only in financial projections or in organizational decision making, but in the organization's everyday dealing with and performing of work. For this, I want to turn to office architecture. Against a predominant instrumentalist perspective on office space, I argue that it takes effect as a materialized imaginary. And it is precisely the temporality of economic practices and the openness of future, which render this dimension significant for an understanding of organizations and the material culture of capitalism.

Of course, this article cannot claim to sufficiently remedy the mentioned shortcomings. Also, with the organization's "futures" developed in this paper I do not raise a claim to completeness. I do not doubt the enduring significance of calculative modes of dealing with organizational future, and such modes can clearly be found in the professional discourses on office architecture as well as the organizational processing of architecture and space. However it can be problematic to ignore that these calculative practices are accompanied, supported or subverted by culturally sedimented and practically incorporated imaginaries.

I first want to address the close connection of office architecture with an instrumental perspective. Against this background, I introduce approaches from architectural sociology, which can help to better grasp the temporal and imaginary dimension of office spaces. After some short remarks on the methods used, I will turn to my empirical material, delineating four temporal aspects of contemporary office architecture, which help to make accessible the imaginary of contemporary work organizations.

1 Office space and the labor relation

The main currents in organization studies have traditionally seen organizations as parcels of a process of rationalization. Organizations are defined by more or less explicit goals, which are pursued with an ever more efficient deployment of resources (Thompson and McHugh 2009, 6–13). In this perspective, organizational architecture must first of all be conceived within an instrumentalist paradigm. In *work organizations*, human labor becomes the focal point of this instrumental endeavor. The appearance of the office as a specific building type is closely linked to the most prominent way of "governing" work activities: Taylorism. By minimizing the individual workspace and preventing unnecessary movement and communication, the office building was expected to increase the overall efficiency of administrative work (cf. Galloway 1922). Even though the design of offices has a long history, it is since the beginning of the 20th century that the construction and design of office spaces have become objects of a systematic interest, means of production of its own, which have to be deployed thriftily and efficiently (cf. Fritz 1982). This vision was gladly taken up by modernist architects, who sought to rationally organize social life based on the ideal of a smoothly running machine, abandoning the dissipation of traditional buildings along with their ornamentation. In

[illegible]

Source: Bibliothek Herbert von Dirksen, signature: DIRK219, <http://www.ub.uni-koeln.de/cdm/ref/collection/dirksen/id/101699>

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appropriation of surplus value. The tension between labor as commodity and labor as potentiality means that organizations must deal with labor as something, *which has yet to be realized*. The organization is dependent on the creativity and adaptability of labor, its realization cannot be guaranteed by a labor contract fixed in advance. This trait of the labor relation has been discussed extensively under the label of the “transformation problem” (cf. Braverman 1998; Deutschmann 2011). But how do we know about the absent potentiality of labor? Historical studies have pointed out that neither modernism nor Taylorism were just historical givens, but also counterfactual ideals that helped to structure and direct economic and architectural discourses as well as practices (cf. Gartman 2009). In this sense, organizational technologies themselves seem to imply constructions of the “future” of labor, making it practically relevant for present activities, providing meaning and orientation.

My argument is in short: work organizations have to establish an imaginary relation to the potentiality of labor. In this respect, office architecture plays an important role not only as an instrument molding work practices, but also as a materialized imaginary.

2 Architecture beyond instrumentalism

Traditionally, architecture has been seen as an expression of the social or economic structures, the knowledge and intentions of its time. In this vein, architecture is either a more or less passive “expression” of existing social conditions, or it is explained by given functional needs (cf. Delitz 2009). Against this, architectural sociology can help to stress the active, imaginary and temporal dimension of the built environment.

Against the representationalist approaches to architecture, recent debates have stressed the active quality of architecture (Müller and Reichmann 2015). For instance, science and technology studies and Actor Network Theory (ANT) specifically point out the constitutive role of material artifacts for social practices, thus leveling the difference between human and non-human “participants” and decentering the origin of action (Latour and Yaneva 2008; Johnson 1988). While this approach points to important blind spots of social theory, it entails on the other hand a danger to succumb to an instrumentalist perspective once again. This becomes most evident when Bruno Latour highlights the importance of the design process, inscribing constraining scripts into artifacts while at the same time minimizing the contingencies and the recalcitrance of human practices in favor of a “symmetrical” approach (cf. Latour 1994).

An interesting effort to integrate the symbolic and the constitutive dimension of architecture has been put forward by Heike Delitz. Drawing among others on Henry Bergson and Cornelius Castoriadis, Delitz understands architecture as a “media” of the social. In this perspective, society is not a positive “fact”. Rather, society comes into existence only when it is made perceivable in images and symbols. Society is thus constituted by an imaginary projection, which is based in an ongoing process of “becoming”, rather than being premised on self-identity (Delitz 2009, especially 111-126). This implies a temporal dimension as the imaginary constitutively transcends the self-sufficient present of the social. There is, however, another

cultural theorist who has made the relationship of built space and time much more prominent: Walter Benjamin.

In an ambitious project, Benjamin studied the emergence and transformation of the Paris arcades – iron and glass-covered interstices between buildings which became central scenes of commerce in the 19th century –, as well as department stores and the world exhibition structures. Despite Benjamin understanding architecture with its material “persistence” as a “witness” of the past (Benjamin 2002b, 1983, D°, 7; cf. Morton 2006), I want to argue that he delivers important tools for grasping the future-relatedness of architecture.



[Fig. X.2. Passage de l'Opéra, Paris, photography by Charles Marville, ca. 1866. Source: Digital restoration based from the negative, © Laurent Gloaguen / Charles Marville, www.vergue.com]

First, architecture cannot be understood as a simple representation of the past, because it is the product of an *active* engagement with its social preconditions. Architects are not just passive puppets of, say, the economic status quo, but they try to handle, use, change it, they follow ideologies and technological promises. As such, architecture includes imaginaries of what is to come. This aspect is most

succinctly expressed in the historian Jules Michelet's motto, which Benjamin includes in his exposé for the arcades project: "Each époque dreams the one to follow" (Benjamin 2002a, 4).

Second, Benjamin is interested in the "afterlife of buildings" (Morton 2006). He dissociates the objects from the intentions of their creators, and asks how their meaning changes over time and maintains an urgency for the present by forming a constellation with other objects, ideas etc. Benjamin emphasises the active and constructive character of this constellation, in which an interpretation is produced. Talking specifically of architecture, he points out that the main form of the reception of architecture consists of its *usage*, not its visual contemplation (Benjamin 2008, 40 f.).

Finally, according to Benjamin, the commodities exposed in the arcades not only contain an exchange value and a use value, as traditional Marxist analysis has pointed out, but also a "spiritual value". This value "endows the things of the everyday with an illusory glitter, an *aureole*: a weak remnant of the sacred" (Markus 2001, 16 f.). The arcades do not only harbor this spiritual value neutrally, they embody it in themselves, in their construction and their atmosphere (Benjamin 2002a, 3–5). With this insistence on the mythical dimension of capitalism, Benjamin contradicts the Weberian conception of modernity as a process of ever growing rationalization (Steiner 2011). Taking up these thoughts from Benjamin means thus to problematize one of the core assumptions of classical organization studies. For Benjamin, the "phantasmagoric" character of architecture first of all supports the dream-like reality of capitalism.

Of course, it would be fruitful to further pursue the context of Benjamin's writing and to delineate his philosophical and historiographic endeavors more faithfully.

However, I rather want to quarry out these thoughts from Benjamin and to position them in another constellation: that of contemporary office architecture and the organization of labor. Taking up Benjamin's interest in the dreamy and anticipatory dimension of architecture, I will approach contemporary discourses on office architecture, looking at its promises and threats. Subsequently, I tie the architectural discourse back in with its usage. I try to extend Benjamin's interest for the "afterlife" of buildings towards an interest for the "life" of buildings, i.e. the practices of planning, its performative effects as well as its transformations. Third, I want to propose that contemporary office architecture provides as a stage for the organizational exposition of labor.

3 Discourse, Materiality, Praxis – a brief remark on methodology

The following reflections on the interplay of space and time in work organizations are based on an ongoing empirical research on the role of office architecture in contemporary capitalism. My methodological outline strives to grasp the imaginary dimension of architecture without lapsing into a purely hermeneutic attitude, interpreting architecture's forms and symbols from a detached position. I therefore assume a reflexivity of knowledge, materiality and praxis. In this perspective, practical effects of architecture are symbolically mediated, as much as architectural discourses have to be related back to practices. Accordingly, for my analysis, I

propose a mixed methods approach, mainly drawing on discourse analysis and ethnography.

My discourse analytical empirical material consists of textbooks, professional and popular journals, newspaper articles, texts from leading architects and scientific articles. The documents are assembled into an open thematic corpus, with the main focus on German publications since the turn of the 21st century. These documents are supplemented by ethnographic protocols, tape recordings, field documents and interviews from a three month ethnographic study carried out in a midsize PR-agency. The material has been collected in a participant observation with daily presence from March to June 2015. The ethnography was marked by my own strong participation as a trainee, working in several projects. At the same time, the established presence as a scientific observer allowed me to participate in additional meetings, to extensively ask questions and to sporadically conduct additional interviews. Even though further ethnographic investigation into the process of designing, planning and implementing office spaces would have been desirable, I limited myself to additional interviews with architects, to get some access to the strategic and negotiating practices which mediate conceptual knowledge of office architecture with the singular building at hand.

4 The future(s) of office architecture

I want to present four dimensions in which office architecture is related to the future. First, I want to address how future is dealt with in contemporary architectural discourses on the office. Second, I want to ask how, in the process of planning office space, the colluding and contradicting temporalities of organization and architecture are dealt with. Third, I want to point to a specific practical temporality that is grounded in the performativity of office spaces. Finally, I want to argue that office space discursively, practically and materially supports a confidence in the fundamental future-ability of the organization at hand and, by extension, in the capitalist labor relation's capacities to set free the potential of labor.

4.1 The promise of office architecture

The discourse on office architecture is strongly marked by a temporal logic. The proclaimed aim is not an adaption to a current state of affairs, but, to use a common formula, the “office of the future”² (Rief 2014). The general temporal orientation becomes evident on the semantic level in a vast amount of future related expressions, such as “fit for future”*, “dreams of the future”*, “potential for the future”*, “guaranteeing the future”*, to mention but some of the wordings from one seminal textbook (Staniek 2005). The temporal infrastructure of the office discourse narratively constitutes it and infuses it with urgency, thereby normatively motivating it. This becomes evident in an article on the “quality of encounters”*. The article starts with two scenes, which are described as occurring simultaneously in different corporations: one employee sits secluded in a grey cellular office, attached to a gloomy corridor with an uncomely tea kitchen; the other works without a fixed desk, is in permanent exchange with his colleagues and has access to an espresso bar with an inviting ambience. The author concludes his micro-narrative by stating: “Two

² Quotes marked by a star are own translations by the author.

third of the office workers are still placed in traditional offices similar to the first example. The second example, in contrast, describes the typical workday in a corporation which has already chosen an office concept headed towards the future”* (Muschiol 2005, 201). Wolfgang D. Prix, co-founder of Coop Himmelb(l)au and architect of the new European Central Bank in Frankfurt, explains accordingly that an architect has to think ahead for “at least 10–20 years” (Prix 2013, 3). What is at stake in both cases is not only an anticipation of what the present will look like once the building is realized. What is sought is not only a future present, but also a future that will still be future tomorrow³. The aim is for the building to be permanently ahead of its time. On the symbolical surface this ambition can easily be observed in the “futuristic”* allusions of current IT social media corporations. For instance, the new Apple headquarters, a giant circular structure designed by the high-tech architect Norman Foster, is generally compared to a ufo (cf. for instance Wadewitz 2015, 80 f.).



[Fig. X.3. Has the “mothership” landed? The new apple headquarters in Cupertino are constantly compared to a spaceship.

Source: Rendering of the “Apple Parc”, Cupertino, © Foster + Partners.]

Future is however not only inscribed into the façade of contemporary office designs. In fact, organizations are faced with a complementary discourse of promises and threats. While the rhetoric is largely scientific, the “office of the future” is promoted

³ I make use of the terminology proposed by Niklas Luhmann in “The future cannot begin” (1976). Drawing on Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology of time, Luhmann distinguishes between a future present, a date in the future we will once call now, and the future as a horizon of the present, which is marked by a constitutive openness and as such, can never be reached. While Luhmann opposes technology and utopia as two distinct modes of dealing with the future, my analysis would rather suggest the entanglement of both.

with truly miraculous prefigurements, like decreasing process costs by 40 % and workplace costs by 30 % (cf. Muschiol 2005, 207). On the other hand, corporations which do not cater to the dynamics of present futures – explicitly slipping from easy calculations – “run the risk of losing their position to competitors on the global market place” (Messedat 2005, 15).

Strong promises for new technologies of work are certainly not new. Frederick W. Taylor assured that his method “would readily in the future double the productivity of the average man” (Taylor 1913, 142). There is an important difference though. Taylor’s future is first of all an overcoming of the past – wrong attitudes, conflicting relations, bad habits, which prevent the human machines from whirring smoothly. Ultimately, this future is grounded in a mechanistic optimum. This changes with the transformation of office work and the increasing importance of communication and creativity (Allen 1984; Reckwitz 2017; Krämer 2014, 30–58), which opens up a new potentiality of the future. Office spaces are now expected to become “generative” on their own, producing communication and creativity (Kornberger and Clegg 2004; Klauck 2002). This situation produces a certain ambivalence: in stressing the openness and unimaginable potentiality of future, it becomes more and more unforeseeable – and that means also less claimable by architecture. This directly points to the next aspect of the intersecting temporalities of architecture and organization in the process of planning.

4.2 Planning (for) the future

The particular temporality of office buildings means that they cannot be understood as purely functional for present circumstances. Architecture plans for a future present, the time of completion, and a present future, which cannot be exhausted by technical procedures. The persistence of built space confronts the organization with a need to construe a proper future.

While architects need to “fix” a future at some point, to be able to execute and complete a building, economic organizations incessantly alter their future according to given and anticipated events. This can produce a conflict between clients and architects, in which architectural work is again and again subverted. With changing market situations, changes in public discourses or impending scandals, assessments of future needs of the organization can revert drastically. However, in order to “go on”* without ending in chaos, at one point a “design freeze” is indispensable, as one architect pointed out in an interview on an office project for a large international corporation. By “freezing” the future, however, it is cut off from the horizon of possibilities and thus risks to be outdated. The number of work stations can be too low, once the building is realized.⁴ Architects and organizations react to this risk by the inclusion of a certain leeway in the project. Wolfgang D. Prix (2013, 3) proposes an “intelligent Himmelblau meter“ in this context, consisting of 1m × 1,05. The unforeseeable future of market developments and innovations is thus complemented by the generalized assumption of a moderate but continual growth.

⁴ The first non-territorial open space office in Germany is said to be born from this problem. The number of employees had outnumbered the work stations by the start of construction. The new office form allowed to accommodate more employees than desks (Staniek 2005, 59), thereby loosening the strict coupling of staff and surface.

A second way of handling the future can be seen in efforts to include openness and flexibility in office spaces. As “[a]nything which lasts into the future lasts into uncertainty” (Duffy, Cave, and Worthington 1976, 5), architects will have to *avoid* strong architectural programs. This has led to an internal temporal differentiation of the office. “Shell design is for (say) 40 years; scenery design for seven years; set design for three months” (Duffy, Cave, and Worthington 1976, 5). Although adaptability has always been of interest for office buildings (Galloway 1922, 43–44; Neufert 1936, 171), reversibility has become a ever more pressing requirement since the 1990s, due to with the demand of sustainability and flexibilization as well as the diversification of work forms. And, of course, reversibility is marked as a *sine qua non* for future success: “The adaptability is therefore for sure a fundamental constituent of the future viability of buildings”* (Voss et al. 2006, 1). The strong promises, which can be generally found in the architectural discourse, are thus confronted with the recommendation to avoid strong architectural determinations in planning.⁵ Architecture tries to handle the contingencies of the organization’s future by increasing the contingencies of built space. This implies a redistribution of the decision on and responsibility for the office design from architects to interior designers, management and finally: employees.

4.3 Performing office architecture

Office architecture promises to foster creativity, stimulate communication and, not least, increase productivity. If we look at local practices within the organization, the virtues attributed to architectural concepts appear less to be given facts guaranteed by the spatial arrangements than something which has to be actively produced in organizational practices and work activities. Microsociologists have pointed out that technology does not “work” on its own, but has to be performed (Law and Singleton 2000). This opens up the perspective on the active engagement with and transformation of office spaces, rather than assuming the instrumental effectivity of office layouts. If architecture “acts” in the organizational context it is quite often as a problem, not a solution. During my field work, a recurrent question – and likely the first one being discussed – would be *where* to carry out a specific activity. In the multi-option office the employees are responsible for finding the best spot for their work, considering potential disturbances for co-present colleagues, access to technological resources as well as aesthetically and semiotically marked territories, such as the “informal”* and “cozy”* kitchen versus the “official”* conference room. The prospect of a willful spatial creation of creativity is in itself paradoxical. Even though the social aspect of creativity can be stressed against its heroic attribution to lonely geniuses or venturous entrepreneurs (cf. Krämer 2014, 160–68; Deutschmann 2011, 95), the architectural production of creativity claims a technological grasp of something which is quintessentially valued for being non-technological. Against this background, organizational space does not only present an everyday problem for situating work practices, it is also problematized itself. In my case study the employees perceived the tension between the aspirations built into their work environment and the profane reality of their work activities. There was the shared feeling that a) work in the agency was not as creative as it should be and b) the

⁵ Paradoxically this is determining the architectural creative leeway quite a bit. For instance, the building’s depth is bound to be between 14 and 15 meters in order to provide acceptable lightening for different office concepts (cf. Staniek and Staniek 2013, 39).

creativity of the employees and their work is not sufficiently reflected in the agency's spatio-material appearance. This feeling resulted in an extensive effort to revamp the office space, initiated neither by the head of department nor the CEO, but by a group of senior and junior consultants.⁶ This transformation of the office will in all likelihood not be the last one. It can be considered to be one attempt of many to practically bring about that which has always already been promised in office discourses – and thereby keeping alive the imaginary of office architecture. Other than simply *producing* a future, office architecture thus constitutes a perpetual practical occasion and need for *performing* the future.

4.4 Staging the potentiality of labor

If I have argued that architecture's promises have to be practically performed, this includes also a scenical aspect. Architecture is not only construed as a machine to produce creativity, communication and ultimately productivity, it also *stages* the general capacity of the organization to access the potential of human activity and put it to its use.

In my ethnographical case study the CEO would regularly take potential clients for a tour through the agency, telling them: "This is where we do our PR work". He was referring to current projects based more in free association than in his detailed knowledge of the everyday activities of the department – sometimes even mentioning projects that were never realized. It was thus less the actual work that was (re-)presented here, but the capacities that can and will be activated for the benefit of the client. These capacities are, however, hardly tangible by the mere look of everyday work practices. As an intern, I was on the contrary regularly confronted with the problem of the surprising *intransparency* of the bodily practices of my colleagues, not knowing when to approach them best. The presentation of the organization's potential cannot rely on the display of work alone. This is where office architecture comes into play again. In providing an imaginary charged frame, the material work environment permits this "presentation" – this making-present of the constitutively absent – in a particularly palpable manner.

In his ethnography of creative work, Hannes Krämer points out that there is a blending of organizational "backstage" and "frontstage", understood as spaces of production and spaces of representation (Krämer 2014, 137–47). In keeping with the argument put forward here, we would have to formulate even stronger that the space of work and production has in itself become a central representational space of the organization. In times of network economics, the interpenetration of organizations increases and self-marketing becomes an ongoing necessity. This implies that organizational "impression management" (Goffman) is relocated from the official façade to the depth of the organizational space. Accordingly, staging work seems to become more and more important for the public display of a corporation's economic potency, and work has been moved from the back room of the organization to its showroom (cf. Warhurst et al. 2000; Castells 2010). For the organization, this exhibition of labor is essential, because it gives a sensory impression of the organizations own human "assets" delivering the necessary services or goods to potential clients.

What is more, office architecture is the object of newspaper articles, business magazines as well as documentary films, some of which I have mentioned above.

⁶ This case is analyzed in detail in Adler (2017).

Office architecture thus becomes relevant for a societal imaginary of labor, exceeding the professional circles immediately concerned with its construction and utilization. This public dimension of the office architecture's imaginary becomes manifest in the structure of new buildings. The monolithic block of modernism is dissolved into more or less complex layers, blurring the inside world and the outside world. Atria, passages and even parks make the office building partly accessible for the public. The Unilever headquarters for Germany, Austria and Switzerland in Hamburg is one of many examples for this. The building, designed by Behnisch Architects, splits into two volumina connected by an atrium with bridges and balconies providing shared spaces for informal meetings. The atrium is at the same time inviting the public into the building, providing a café and a small shop (Fitz 2012, 39).



[Fig. X.4. Atrium and meeting points. The Unilever Headquarters for Germany, Austria and Swiss in Hamburg by Behnisch Architekten.
Source: © Behnisch Architekten / Adam Mørk]

Interestingly such interstitial spaces echo the semi-public spaces of the arcades, galleries and department stores with their characteristic iron and glass roofing described by Benjamin. In his Exposé to the Arcades Project he remarks concerning the World Exhibitions of the 19th century, that the exposed objects gain an auratic value, which exceeds both exchange value and use value (Benjamin 2002a, 7).

Perhaps, office architecture, in its imaginary dimension, provides something similar for the realm of labor. Architectural promises, its practical problems and its work performances as well as the organizational self-marketing form a constellation in which office architecture construes a quasi inexhaustible communicative and creative potential of labor, while at the same time promising access to it. In presenting the “commodity labor power” (Marx) the “arcades” of contemporary office architecture and its amplification in journals and magazines add up to a societal understanding of the productive prospects of work organization, which is probably not only fostering the confidence in the future-ability of a specific corporation, but, beyond that, in the capitalist labor relation itself.

5 Conclusion

I have tried to show how office space is generated by and generates an anticipation of the future. It therefore cannot simply be understood in terms of its functionality or instrumentality for given social or economic structures. In the perspective proposed here, instrumentality and functionality should instead be grounded in the concrete knowledge and its practical use, which are part of the organizational procedures and dynamics themselves. Office architecture is impregnated with specific concepts and imaginaries of rationality and efficiency, creativity and productivity.

Building on recent theories about the future in economic sociology, I have tried to “materialize” the discussion by putting labor and its built environment in the center of my argument, pointing out that both are essentially constituted by relating to a future. This change of perspective allows to broaden the reflection on how future is important for the work organization. I have tried to show how the materiality of the contemporary office, in performing and staging the access to the absent potential of labor, molds the actual working practices as well as infusing it with a subjective meaning. Instead of simply assuring an objective technological progress, which either makes the office more and more rational and efficient or subjects the employees to more and more subtle and effective modes of power and control, office architecture *produces* an imaginary of an ever more successful utilization and activation of labor – an imaginary, which consolidates the societal confidence in both work organizations and the labor relation.

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