

The politics of the office: space, power, and photography

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The Politics of the Office Space, Power, and Photography

Andreia Alves de Oliveira

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Abstract

This practice-based research examines the relation between power, space, and photography, in relation to the office. It aims to investigate working conditions in service-based society, by addressing its dominant form of work: office work. Based on the hypothesis that office space has an effect on how office workers are made to work and feel, that it has not been sufficiently nor adequately addressed in documentary photography, the research proposes to employ documentary photography to investigate the relation between power and space in the office in relation both to actual offices and to their existing representations. Its questions are: how is space a means to exercise power in the office? Can this question be investigated through documentary photography? How, given the critique of documentary's (positivist) claims to truth?

The research developed the concepts of witnessing and intervention as methods for the practice, positing documentary practice as the deliberate process of recording reality from a critical point of view, with the aim of making reality visible through images understood as visual arguments, thereby aspiring to criticality. Underpinned by a Foucauldian notion of power, the research developed an empirical visual enquiry accessing nearly fifty offices located in the City and Canary Wharf, London, informed by a study of power and space within organisation theory, organisation psychology and architecture and office design.

The research produced a visual work titled *The Politics of the Office* comprising 128 photographs that give visibility to spatial power relations of hierarchy and control, physical and symbolic, and intervene in the structures of the photographic representation of the office space, through their visual strategy and their presentation as installation, thereby extending the documentary representation of the office space. The research further contributes to the theory of documentary photography by developing the concepts of witnessing and intervention. The research contributes to the understanding of spatial power relations in offices by allowing witnessing images of actual offices that are largely inaccessible to the general public.

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Bruno, for making it all possible.

In memory of Ester Alves.

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Enclosed: CD with installation plan, installation captions, and folder with 128 jpeg files, corresponding to the photographs comprising the visual work.

Author's Declaration

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This copy has been supplied for the purpose of research for private study and therefore the confidential material included in the thesis cannot be made public.

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Captions (Visuals)

From left to right and top to bottom:

Reception/ Waiting Area

- 1 Lobby, Advertising agency
- 2 Waiting area, Law firm
- 3 Entrance hall, Transportation finance bank
- 4 Waiting area, Financial services firm
- 5 Waiting area, Trading services firm
- 6 Reception, Hedge Fund
- 7 Reception, Investment banking firm
- 8 Reception, Advertising agency
- 9 Reception, Private equity
- 10 Reception, Management consulting firm
- 11 Waiting area, Private equity
- 12 Reception, Investment bank
- 13 Waiting area, law firm

Clients' Area

- 14 Clients' top floor, Law firm
- 15 Clients' top floor, Law firm
- 16 Clients area, Professional services firm
- 17 Clients' floor, Law firm
- 18 Lounge, Insurance and reinsurance firm
- 19 Clients' area, Law firm
- 20 Clients' area, Private equity firm
- 21 Clients' area, Investment bank
- 22 Clients' area, Insurance and reinsurance firm

- 23 Clients' waiting area, Asset management firm
- 24 Clients waiting area, Law firm
- 25 Clients' lounge, Law firm
- 26 Clients' area, Law firm
- 27 Clients' area, Private equity firm
- 28 Clients' area, Capital management firm
- 29 Clients' waiting area, Law firm
- 30 Clients' area. Audit, tax and advisory services firm
- 31 Partners' and clients' dining room, Law firm
- 32 Entertaining floor. Audit, tax, and advisory services firm
- 33 Entertaining floor. Audit, tax, and advisory services firm
- 34 Clients' area, Professional services firm

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- 35 Corridor, Management consulting firm
- 36 Boardroom, Insurance and reinsurance company
- 37 Boardroom. Audit, tax, and advisory services firm
- 38 Boardroom, Financial services firm
- 39 Boardroom, Law firm
- 40 Partners' meeting room, Professional services firm
- 41 Partners' meeting room, Management consulting firm
- 42 Partners' meeting room, Professional services firm
- 43 Partners' meeting room, Law firm
- 44 Meeting room, Law firm
- 45 Boardroom, reinsurance company
- 46 Meeting room, Emerging markets equity firm
- 47 Boardroom, Brand consulting firm
- 48 Meeting room, Hedge fund
- 49 Meeting room, Law firm
- 50 Meeting room, Asset management firm
- 51 Boardroom, Trading services firm
- 52 Meeting room, Law firm
- 53 Meeting room, Law firm
- 54 Telepresence conference room, Law firm
- 55 Meeting room. Audit, tax, and advisory services firm
- 56 Meeting room, Insurance company
- 57 Meeting room. Insurance market
- 58 Meeting room, Law firm

- 59 Meeting room, Professional services firm
- 60 Meeting room, Law firm
- 61 Meeting room, Financial services firm
- 62 Meeting room, Private equity firm
- 63 Meeting room, International bank
- 64 Meeting room. Audit, tax and advisory services firm
- 65 Meeting room. Maritime insurance company
- 66 Meeting room, Management consulting firm
- 67 Corridor, Law firm
- 68 Corridor, Management consulting firm

Workspaces

- 69 Partner's office, Hedge fund
- 70 Partner's office, Asset management firm
- 71 Manager's office, Executive recruitment firm
- 72 Director's office, Transportation finance bank
- 73 Director's office, IT financial services firm
- 74 Private office, Reinsurance company
- 75 Private office, Financial services firm
- 76 Private office, Private equity firm
- 77 Private office, Maritime insurance company
- 78 Trading floor, Financial services firm
- 79 Open plan, Management consulting firm
- 80 Open plan, Insurance company
- 81 Middle office, Insurance and reinsurance firm
- 82 Corridor, International bank
- 83 Open plan, Hedge fund
- 84 Open plan, Financial services firm
- 85 Trading floor, Investment bank
- 86 Trading floor, Investment bank
- 87 Hot-desking open plan. Audit, tax, and advisory services firm
- 88 Back office, Investment bank
- 89 Copy area. Audit, tax, and advisory services firm
- 90 Lookout room, Brand consulting firm
- 91 Break out area, Law firm
- 92 Break out area, Transportation finance bank
- 93 Break out area, Professional services firm
- 94 Break out area, Management consulting firm

95 Break out area. Audit, tax, and advisory services firm
96 Break out area, Law firm
97 Break out area, Asset management firm
98 Break out area, Professional services firm
99 Facilities manager's desk, Strategy consulting firm
100 Accountant's desk in shared office, Law firm
101 Back office, Advertising agency
102 Back office, Advertising agency
103 Accountant's desk, Insurance company
104 IT Department, Advertising agency
105 Mail room, Law firm
106 Copy area, Reinsurance company
107 Training room, Law firm

Amenities

108 Pantry, Law firm
109 Pantry, Law firm
110 Pantry, Law firm
111 Pantry, Executive recruitment firm
112 Canteen, Insurance and reinsurance company
113 Canteen, International bank
114 Canteen, Law firm
115 Canteen, Law firm
116 Canteen, Strategy consulting firm
117 Lower ground floor staff amenities, Law firm
118 Canteen, Law firm
119 Canteen, Law firm
120 Cafeteria, Reinsurance company
121 Cafeteria, Transportation finance bank
122 Lounge, Law firm
123 Lounge, Law firm
124 Games room, Transportation finance bank
125 Café. Audit, tax, and advisory services firm
126 Games room, Strategy consulting firm
127 Bar, Advertising agency
128 Bar, Advertising agency

Introduction

My interest in the office dates back to the MA Photographic Studies project work I developed in 2009 showing the 'cubicles' of office workers in a large open plan office, titled ironically *Open Plan*. The irony is that the photographs show the cubicles frontally and from a low vantage point, to the effect that there is no visibility of the space beyond the partition walls, rather the field of vision of the spectator is confined to the narrow space created by those walls—much like that of workers themselves. In the photographs, the profusion of objects lying on top and under the desks draws the attention of the spectator, as they act as traces of the people who literally inhabit the cubicles, providing evidence of the long hours spent at work. The cubicles belong to so-called 'bankers', working for a large international bank located in Canary Wharf, one of London's main 'financial areas'. Generally perceived as privileged workers, the bankers' actual workplaces, largely inaccessible to the public, showed working conditions that were far from privileged, and certainly at odds with the spectacular settings where financiers are generally portrayed in films and TV series (for instance, Gordon Gekko, the main character in the 1980s film *Wall Street*, and his immense, opulent 'corner office').

As part of the research for the project, I studied Lee Friedlander's 1992 series *Dreyfus*, showing people at work in the cramped offices of a brokerage firm in New York. What was happening to people in the photographs—being cornered, confined, compressed, sectioned, exposed—was a result both of the action of the camera and of space itself. If the work stations prescribed a (diminutive) space where to perform their tasks, the office workers were further squeezed by Friedlander's eccentric framing. However, the effect was not primarily to provoke pity for the workers, nor to incite reflection about working conditions in offices or, by extension, in service-based society. Instead, it was almost fun peeping at the workers caught (seemingly) unawares. Did this lack of empathy with their not so good working conditions occur because they were 'white-collar' and therefore privileged workers? Moreover, they were brokers in early 1990s New York, surely they had a lavish yuppie lifestyle? Or was the lack of reflection the result instead of how they were photographed, their faces shown as expressionless, inscrutable? One way or the other, there they were, available to the voyeurism of the spectator, entrapped within the space in/ of the image.

Research questions and aims

These questions have been at the basis of my motivation for developing this practice-based research, which aims to investigate work and working conditions in service-based society, by addressing its dominant form: office work. From my photographic practice, and also from my personal experience (I worked for two years as a lawyer in the offices of a large international law firm), I had the sense that, within the office, space itself plays a role on how people are made to work and how they are made to feel. Space in the office does something to office workers, and my aim has been to investigate this relation between space and power in the office through documentary photography, based on the hypothesis that, within this mode of photography, the question has not been sufficiently nor adequately examined. The reason for this neglect lies, on the one hand, on the fact that the majority of documentary photographic projects on the office engages in documenting office workers at the expense of space. To be sure, the prevailing approach among these projects is, as in Friedlander's series, non-humanist. 'Humanist' documentary photography developed in the first half of the twentieth century as an engaged practice, aiming to raise awareness and concern in the public towards those whom it estimated to be in need of protection, including, after the work of Lewis Hine, workers themselves. But this concern did not extend to office workers. On the contrary, it was as if the office materialised the limits of the traditional humanist documentary representation of work: how to represent workers who are not obvious victims of exploitation? Why indeed? On the other hand, the documentary photographic projects that do address the office space do not however engage sufficiently, it seemed to me, with the way that space in the office is used to act upon the people who inhabit it—workers of different types and ranks, clients, visitors, and also the general public through corporate and architectural images of it—that is, with questions of power. These questions pose themselves in two ways: in relation to the power exercised in the office by spatial means, and regarding the power mechanisms involved in the representation of this space. Existing documentary photographic projects that show the office itself, devoid of people, address power in what seem to me to be a reductive way, that equates power with the corporate institution itself, showing only the space within the office that looks 'powerful' (namely, the 'boardrooms') and which in turn is

made to look (more) powerful by a representation that seems to be largely unaware of the codes and conventions it employs, and therefore of the power mechanisms it deploys.

After the experience of developing *Open Plan*, where I was witness to working conditions that somewhat differed to the general representation of the 'banker', it seemed important to examine the questions of space and power in the office in relation to actual offices. For if the office has been widely represented in films, TV series, comic strips, pornography, its independent documentary and critical representation are nevertheless limited. Photographs of actual offices exist mainly in the form of architectural photographs and, more broadly, commercial photography commissioned by corporations or real estate developers for advertising purposes. The office has been addressed too by artists, who have engaged with various aspects, from bureaucracy and the archive (Spieker, 2008), to workplace gender issues (Burgin, 1986). What is less abundant, I argue, are representations that have as their aim to *witness* the office, in particular its space.

Witnessing has been an idea central to the documentary form since its emergence. Both in the work of nineteenth-century pioneers such as Lewis Hine in the USA or John Thomson in Britain, as well as in the photo illustrated magazines like *Picture Post* in Britain and *Life* in the USA that popularised the genre in the 1920s and 1930s, the idea of witnessing 'life' was crucial (Bate, 2009, p59). However, documentary photography has since been the subject of unrelenting critique, mainly to do with its claims to objectivity and knowledge, based on the conflation of image and reality, vision and truth. So much so that some authors go as far as to call it a 'dying practice' on the verge of disappearance (Rosler, 2004c, p212). Notwithstanding, these very authors are vocal advocates of documentary, defending the need to maintain what they see as a practice uniquely positioned to provide explanation and analysis of social issues, and to convey to the audience a sense of society in times of rampant individualism (Rosler, 2004c, pp 229 and 240).

I was interested in my research in using photography in this documentary mode, both as a tool and as the medium to investigate a subject in the world—working conditions in service-based society, through an investigation of relations of power in relation to the space of the office—and to produce images of it, thereby making it visible, in order not only to inform about it, but moreover to say

something about it, to offer a critical view. The theoretical and practical questions raised by this project reflect the very debates generated by documentary. In concrete: how to produce documentary photography work today, which concepts can sustain theoretically its practice, if any? What is the value (social, political, epistemological, aesthetic) of documentary representation? And, specifically in relation to the research subject, how has the office been represented in documentary photography and what are the effects of this representation? How can the research extend and contribute to this representation? More specifically, how can the relation between space and power be investigated through documentary photography? How can this relation be made visible through photographs?

These questions about representation imply, in turn, a set of questions about the object of representation: what is the relationship between space and power in the office? Is the office, as space, a means to exercise power? What type of objectives are pursued through it? How are they pursued? And what is 'power'? If, as Michel Foucault puts it, 'power as such does not exist' (1993, p424), in what form or forms does power exist and how can it be studied in relation to the office?

Scope of the research

The scope of the research is defined by the terms space, power, and photography, in their relation to the office. Its geographic, historical and cultural ambit is that of industrialised and service-based society, in particular Britain and the USA.

In what respects photography, the research addresses the theory and practice of realist representation, with exclusion of other visual regimes. More specifically, it covers the documentary representation of the office that addresses actual offices, and architectural photography of actual offices as a branch of commercial photography, excluding the discussion of other forms of representation of the office, fictional or non-fictional. The research is developed from a non-humanist standpoint, which means that the research does not aim to document the effects of spatial power relations on office workers. This is not to say that the research is not concerned with human beings and with what space and in particular the office space—physical or photographed—does to human beings. In this sense, it is part of the visual strategy proposed by the research to represent

space in a 'human scale' (see ahead, p176).

The research understands power as power relations, employing the concept of power in the sense proposed by Michel Foucault, as 'a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action' (Foucault, 1993, p427). Power understood in this sense is discussed in relation to space only within the office, with exclusion of other means by which power might be exercised in offices, or in the corporate sphere, or the institution of business in general. In other words, the research is concerned with *spatial* power relations, with relations of power as manifested through space in the office. In connection with this understanding of power, the research employs the expression 'politics of the office'—referencing the popular expression 'office politics'—in the sense of 'management or control of private affairs and interests, especially as regards status or position' (Oxford English Dictionary), in relation to space only and, following Foucault, from the standpoint of power relations only (see ahead, p134). It means also 'actions concerned with the acquisition or exercise of power, status, or authority' (Oxford English Dictionary), insofar as they are manifested and/ or effected through spatial means, and from the standpoint of power relations.

In what regards space, the research discusses directly the office as corporate work space, positing that, considering the history of the modern office, the corporate office is representative of offices in other types of institutional contexts (administration, education), notwithstanding necessary specificities. In what regards the notion of 'space', it understands space in its physical, geometrical sense, as the architectural interior space of the office as determined by: location within a building and size; spatial features such as doors and windows; layout, including partitions and physical boundaries; interior décor, including furniture and its materials, lighting, artwork, plants. It understands space also as social space, in the sense proposed by Henri Lefebvre, comprising 'spatial practice', 'representations of space', and 'representational spaces' (see ahead, p29). In this sense, the research investigates through photography actual offices as spatial practice, and is informed by representations of the space of the office including organisation theory, organisation psychology, and office architecture and design, aiming to create visual work as representational space. The research employs this classification of space by Lefebvre in the measure that it is useful for distinguishing between different discourses on the space of the office, but it is out

of the breadth of the research to discuss the research questions in terms of this theory as, however regrettably, thesis do have limitations to their maximum lengths.

Methodology and methods

i. Theory of photography: witnessing and intervention

There seems, in my view, to be a *lacuna* in theoretical production about documentary photography offering operative concepts upon which to base an informed practice of documentary today. As I struggled to find bibliographical references, I was struck by the extent and depth of the theoretical production about documentary *film*. Although documentary film is an established and indeed popular genre, underpinned by a solid institutional existence that documentary photography nowadays certainly lacks, it is however somewhat perplexing—or then, perhaps, it is rather revealing?—that in relation to the latter there is no equivalent for instance to Bill Nicholas many writings, namely his canonical book *Introduction to Documentary* (Nichols, 2001), or to a book like Stella Bruzzi's *New Documentary*, theorising the dramatic changes in documentary brought about by the advent of reality television and other performative modes (Bruzzi, 2006).

Theoretical writing on documentary photography has essentially focused on the critique of the problems of documentary. The main focus of contention has been documentary's assumption that the photographic image could *re-present* reality objectively and factually, and therefore that the photographer was able to witness the truth and to present it, without interpretation or bias, to the spectator (Morden, 1986, p169). The critique of this unproblematic relationship between the photographic image and perceived reality had its roots in structuralist and semiotic linguistic theory and took definitive shape in the beginning of the 1980s with the publication of *Thinking Photography* (Burgin, 1982). In this collection of essays, which incidentally is the precursor of photography theory (ibid., p1), Victor Burgin, Umberto Eco, Allan Sekula, John Tagg and Simon Watney fatally challenged the idea of documentary truth in photography, among other established concepts of photographic practice such as 'originality' and 'purely visual language'. Around the same time, the critique arose also from practitioners, with the emergence of a 'new

documentary' movement aiming to make work 'which avoids liberal sentimentalism' and 'expose social conditions and representational modes in order to propose social change' (Neumaier, 1984). It had expression, namely, in the 1984 exhibition 'The Way We Live Now: Beyond Social Documentary' curated by Abigail Solomon-Godeau at P.S. 1 in New York, showing the work of American, Canadian and British artists (including Karen Knorr and Mitra Tabrizian). Among its most active supporters were photographers and theorists based at the Visual Arts Department at the University of California at San Diego, namely Allan Sekula and Martha Rosler. Sekula's 1976 essay 'Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary' and Rosler's 1981 essay 'In, Around, and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography)' set the principles of a renewed form of documentary, rejecting both the photograph as 'evidence' characteristic of traditional documentary and the photograph as 'self expression' typical of what they termed 'art-documentary'. Embraced during the 1960s and the 1970s by the Museum of Modern Art in New York in the work of Diane Arbus, Garry Winogrand, and Lee Friedlander, art-documentary, they argued, had drained the genre of its political and social critical potential, transforming it into a practice whose aim was to transcend its reference to the world by being first and foremost an act of self-expression on the part of the artist (Sekula, 1984, p60). Sekula and Rosler defended instead a form of activist, militant documentary, aimed at exposing causes rather than consequences of social wrongs, and enabling the poor and oppressed to take action for themselves (Kester, 1987). As Diane Neumaier, a contemporary critic, put it, 'this work *always* has as its project the radicalization of the audience' (Neumaier, 1984).

However, Rosler remained pessimistic about the documentary uses of photography, writing in 2001 that 'documentary really is a dying practice' (Rosler, 2004c, p212). Due to developments in photography (namely, the onset of digital technologies, the demise of documentary institutional outlets, and the public's preference for reality tv), what she calls 'post-photographic' practice has 'abandoned any interest in indexicality and ... in the privileged viewpoint of "witness"' (Rosler, 2004c, p211). Rosler is nevertheless a vocal advocate of the need to continue to produce documentary work in the face of enduring social inequality, as the provider of serious analysis of social and political imbalances. Rosler concedes that such documentary can no longer, after the structuralist and

postmodernist critique of the photographic image, be based on the strict objectivity and 'straight information' standards proper of written journalism, but she argues that it can not be based either on what she calls 'the alibi of personalisation, sentiment, or disengagement' (Rosler, 2004c, p230). For Rosler, documentary photographers who resorted to the 'aestheticisation and universalisation favoured in the art world' or to personal account as strategies for protecting their work against accusations of exploitation and victimisation or claims to truth, provide a 'subjectivized witness', which falls short of the representational responsibility to the subject that is for Rosler an imperative of documentary photography (Rosler, 2004c, pp211 and 226).

Apart from Sekula's and Rosler's critical texts, and excluding also writing of historical nature on subjects such as the photography of the Farm Security Administration, contemporary writing on documentary photography is essentially limited to chapters in textbooks and monographs on the wider category of 'photography'. These chapters include 'Surveyors and surveyed: photography out and about' in Liz Wells's *Photography: a Critical Introduction* (2004); 'Documentary and story-telling' in David Bate's *Photography: Key Concepts* (2009); 'Photography's social function: the documentary legacy' in Hilde van Gelder and Helen Westgeest's *Photography Theory in Historical Perspective* (2011); or 'Documentary, or instants of truth' in Jae Emerling's *Photography History and Theory* (2012).

Considering this state of the art of documentary photography theory, I have draw on a variety of sources for developing a working concept of documentary upon which to base the present practice-based research. These sources include, in addition to the documentary photography theory referred to above, documentary film theory and media studies, as I describe hereafter.

I have draw on film theorist Elizabeth Cowie's conception of documentary as formulated in her *Recording Reality, Desiring the Real* (2011). In this book, Cowie defines documentary as a project that 'seeks to enable the citizen-spectator to know and experience reality through recorded images ... of reality', by 'enabl[ing] reality to "speak" at the same time as it "speaks about" reality' (2011, p1). The reality (historical, social) re-presented by documentary is therefore not only a discursive construction but also a constructing discourse. In her words, 'the documentary project constitutes reality as knowable and produces a knowledge of

reality through its construction and deployment of discourses about reality' (2011, p5). What is interesting is Cowie's insistence on the discursive nature of documentary, on how facts do not speak for themselves but rather they need always to be presented in some form in order to be articulated (2011, p26). Documentary therefore means a re-presentation that involves transformation, and this does not invalidate its claims to knowledge, on the contrary, it is an integrant part of how documentary makes those claims.

Another conceptualisation useful in Cowie's theoretical construction is the idea that, in contrast to other forms of empirical knowledge that aspire to 'objectivity', documentary engages directly in pleasure—not only the pleasure arising from the image as spectacle, but moreover that arising through the re-presentation of actuality. Cowie argues that there is an interrelationship and interdependence at the centre of the documentary project between the pleasures of spectacle and the more 'serious' aim of informing and educating, producing what Cowie designates as the paradox 'of the fascinating pleasure of recorded reality as both spectacle and knowledge' (2011, p3). This dual desire to know reality and experience pleasure was implicit, she points out, in Daguerre's invention: the daguerreotype was born out of the desire both to reproduce a realistic view of reality, and to reproduce the spectacle and sensation of views in the real world (p6). It was also contained in the definition by John Grierson, who famously named documentary film and helped established the genre, that documentary consisted in the '*creative* treatment of actuality' (Winston, 2008, p9. My emphasis). This attribute of documentary is important in the measure that it enables to distinguish documentary from forms of visual research employed by social scientists, namely sociologists, ethnographers or anthropologists. Documentary images not only provide interpretation and analysis of what they represent (and not simply 'raw data'), they also intentionally engage with aesthetics and rhetorical figures in a way that images produced by social researchers do not and, on the contrary, actively reject (Wagner, 2007). As Cowie puts it, 'the spectacle of reality involves an entertaining of the eye through form and light, and an entertaining of the mind' (2011, p13). This active engagement of documentary in pleasure and spectacle is also part of what distinguishes it from (photo)journalism, as the latter is strongly conditioned by professional ethical codes entailing a degree of 'objectivity' which is incompatible with the aims of

seducing and persuading an audience. But, on the other hand, the dimension of the pleasure of documentary to do with the access to knowledge, by showing 'something known either as familiar, or in a new or spectacular way, or something not yet known that thereby becomes the known' (2011, p13) and as such satisfying the wish to see and the wish to know, is common both to documentary and photojournalism. This acceptance of documentary's engagement in spectacle, that Cowie defines as what is viewed not for knowledge but for sensation, is enabling in that it sidesteps deadlock debates such as those concerning the 'aestheticisation' of the documentary image. Against the defenders of the anti-aesthetic position, namely Sekula and Rosler, who regard spectacle and 'retinal excitation' as opposed to a 'critical understanding of the social world' (Sekula, 1984, p57), Cowie's conceptualisation opens up documentary practice to more formal and conceptual freedom. As art historian Jae Emerling puts it, 'all photographs "transform" their subjects; they all simultaneously create documents and works of visual art' (2012, p118). In consequence, the questions to be asked from a documentary image are not if it aestheticises the subject but rather 'what is being documented here? What is being transmitted to me? What is being asked of me as a spectator?' (ibid., 2012, p113).

The specificity of the documentary image is that its discursive and aesthetic construction refers to reality and aspires to say something about contemporary and historical reality, in particular political and social issues, through images of it. Documentary presents therefore not reality, but images of it. In Cowie's words, 'recorded reality re-presented (...) because it is extracted from ongoing reality, ... thereby distorts by becoming exemplary, standing in for but also excluding—as unrecorded' (2011, p21). In order to open up recorded reality into meaningfulness, documentary selects and orders, adds captions, not to mention that it records in the terms dictated by the medium (such as two-dimensionality, perspective, or frame in lens-based media), and it is this process of (necessary) mediation that creates anxiety, as Cowie puts it, about the truth value of the image, materialised in the question 'is it real?'. As Cowie explains, the anxiety is generated by the belief that there is 'the' world, as 'obvious, as a fact, and as knowable, and thus as a reality guaranteed by the symbolic order of law, science and the discourses of sobriety' (2011, p23). This is not to open the door to epistemological relativism, but more simply to admit that recorded reality, and by extension any form of realist

representation, do not and can not grasp reality beyond those very representations and their determinations, in spite the fact that they certainly provide the illusion of the contrary, and thereby expand, as Cowie puts it, 'the fantasy ... of reality beyond oneself but graspable and available to be held in an image' (2011, p8).

This nuanced ontology of documentary proposed by Cowie provided the research with its underlying definition of documentary, in particular its understanding of the relation between representation and reality. I extended the research on documentary theory further, in order to answer the questions raised by the practice, in particular the question of which concept or concepts can sustain the practice of documentary today. In other words, I wanted to examine the questions of 'why record reality?', and 'how to record reality?'. Considering the history of the documentary genre, documentary practice has been grounded on different aims, more or less connected to each other: witnessing, information, education, knowledge, analysis, activism, social and political change. Critics have denounced tensions between these aims, pointing out the contradictions between the requirements of objectivity summoned by the aim of informing and educating, and the instrumentality and necessary partisanism of documentary put to activist and campaigning ends. This position however assumes a degree of objectivity on the part of documentary which the history of its practice does not corroborate. Such objectivity, entailing honesty, impartiality and what Martha Rosler calls a 'responsibility to society' that puts the document above namely the interests of the subjects depicted (2004c, p226), is part of the professional codes regulating the practice of photojournalism, not of documentary's practice. As Rosler puts it, the two genres may overlap but they are still distinguishable from one another (2004c, p225). Such degree of objectivity, as I have pointed out above, is also foreign to documentary's active engagement in the pleasures afforded by the visual.

In the light of the aims of the research, it seemed to me that witnessing provided an adequate concept to think and upon which to base the development of the practice. Considering the history of documentary, witnessing has been a concept central to its project. This is not however to say that witnessing accounts solely for all forms of documentary practice or, better said, practices—as by their variety we must necessarily referred to them as plural—with exclusion of other aims. But it seemed to me that the concept was more productive than others, considering its conceptualization in other realms, in particular those of trauma

studies, media studies and the legal realm, as I discuss hereafter.

The twentieth century has been called the century of witness, as the advent and expansion of electronic media have, in the words of media theorist Paul Frosh, 'substantially augmented, if not transformed, what it means to witness' (Frosh, 2009, p134). 'Media witnessing' refers to the witnessing 'performed *in, by,* and *through* the media', consisting in 'the systematic and ongoing reporting of the experiences and realities of distant others to *mass audiences*' (Frosh and Pinchevski, 2009, p1). Media technology in the form of video was successfully employed to document the discourse of the Holocaust witness (The Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, 2011), Holocaust witnessing becoming the very paradigm of witnessing in general (ibid., p3). Scholars have employed witnessing to think anew about 'abiding problems of media, communication, and culture, that were previously addressed by terms such as "representation", "mediation", "reception", "dissemination", and "effects"' (ibid., p2).

In the legal sphere, the witness is someone called upon to present a statement in the context of a conflict or dispute about something they have firsthand knowledge. The witness provides evidence, which as such however is not proof, but instead it will be subjected to the court's assessment of its evidential value in supporting the version of the facts being alleged by the party who summoned that witness. This relative value of the testimony of the witness in the judicial procedure challenges the authority ascribed generally to the witness. In *Seeing Witness. Visuality and the Ethics of Testimony* (2009), art historian Jane Blocker develops a critique of the witness, taking on this supposed 'subject position of privilege' (p20) and the power it entails. In relation to photography in particular, Blocker locates the privilege in the fact that 'the witness is conceived, like the camera, to be objective and neutral' (p23). Although Blocker's critique is referring to photojournalism, and for the most part reverberates the old-time debates about photography's truth value, her analysis goes against several of the arguments I am trying to make here in relation to documentary photographic witnessing: that photographs as representation involve always mediation and transformation, that the witness has necessarily a point of view, that the testimony of the witness is subject to discussion regarding its probatory value. Blocker seems to view 'the politics of witnessing' as a negative aspect of witnessing, that her book sets out to expose and critique. If this is a legitimate, laudable aim (we as

the witness's audience should know who is speaking and in the name of what or whom), issues of power are not however an 'anomaly' of witnessing, but very much part of it. As media theorists Tamar Ashuri and Amit Pinchevski show in relation to media witnessing, witnessing is an 'inherently political practice', a field comprised of 'various agents, interests, positions, and resources' (2009, p133), subject to 'contest and struggle' and hence 'a genuine political arena' (ibid., p135).

I have draw on these sources to develop an understanding of the concept that would allow me to use it as a method for the practice. Its advantages in relation to other concepts underpinning documentary include avoiding the pitfalls of neutrality and objectivity, due to the fact that witnessing implies having a point of view, both literally (standing here or there when watching an accident for example) and figuratively (to do with the specificities of the witness—their subjectivity—including their interests, either they are themselves conscious of it or not). Witnessing entails also mediation (the very simple fact of putting an experience into words), and therefore transformation—as in (photographic) representation. Witnessing implies self-awareness, as the witness needs to maintain or subsequently to create some degree of detachment from what they experienced in order to be able to testify. Witness can therefore be a deliberate activity and as such have a purpose, as opposed to being a situation or quality one merely inhabits due to the force of circumstances. Witnessing can also be mundane, especially after the advent of electronic media and mass reproduction. As film theorist John Ellis argues in relation to media witnessing, catastrophe and suffering in one hand, and the everyday frustrations of life in the other hand—respectively, the monstrous and the mundane—'occupy the same place, and the mundane predominates' (2009, p74). This mundane witnessing was a central idea too of earlier forms of documentary photography such as the illustrated photo magazines of the 1920s and 1930s mentioned above, showing the everyday in the form of 'photo essays' portraying common people going about their daily tasks. The aims of educating while entertaining of those early practices of documentary were linked to wider democratic purposes. As photography theorist Terry Morden puts it, 'because it dealt with that which was common to all [documentary] was seen as essentially democratic – it gave everybody the facts upon which to base their opinions' (1986, p169). My point here is that witnessing can support theoretically a practice of documentary that is concerned with the everyday (as

opposed to the extraordinary, namely in the form of atrocity and trauma), and that simultaneously is engaged with social and political issues. Such engagement then is not solely the attribute of the forms of documentary based on activism and open advocacy favoured by Rosler and Sekula, mentioned above.

This raises the question of criticality, that is, whether the practice based on witnessing can be critical or instead, as Ashuri and Pinchevski put it, the quasi religious purity invoked by the term is incompatible with critical thinking (2009, p135). I draw here for my argument on documentary photography theory, in concrete David Bate's 'The Real Aesthetic: Documentary Noise' (2010). In spite of its briefness, the article introduces useful concepts, by proposing a definition of documentary as a critical practice that seeks both to describe a social subject and to intervene in its 'normal' representations (pp.6 and 7). The notions of 'intervention' and 'normal representations' are key here. Bate does not elaborate further on their definition, rather they are, more interestingly, put into practice in the analysis of specific documentary photographic works developed in the article. Bate states for instance that the photographs by Nadav Kander showing people in China engaging in leisure time 'work against the clichéd images of Chinese as millions of uniform workers dutifully busy at work'. Or, in relation to a series by Dana Popa showing Romanians in domestic sets, Bate writes that 'a human psychological view is taken up ... [which is] more leisured than the images of misery in Romania from the past' (ibid.). This notion of intervention in 'normal representations' relates to the late 1970s and 1980s debates around the 'representation of politics' and the 'politics of representation', most famously led by the Photography Workshop project established by Jo Spence and Terry Dennett in 1974. In the introduction to the second collection of essays published by the group, the editors employ the expression 'interventionary photography' to name the practices that 'reveal and oppose' the 'dominant systems of representation in photo-practice', that 'legitimis[e] and naturalis[e] ... inequalities of race and class and sex ... in the very process of representation itself' (Holland et al., 1986, p3). The agents of such 'ideological' uses of photography are a wide range of institutions in society, 'from small private galleries and publications to huge multi-national corporations', including 'camera clubs and periodicals ... professional institutes and organisations' who define 'our sense of coherent recognisable styles in photo-practice ... of what is "appropriate" to certain types of photography as

opposed to others' by employing visual styles 'taken for granted ... concerning the selection, construction and repetition of particular motifs, camera angles, grades of paper, and so on' (ibid.). Intervention means then to 'challenge both the content and the context' of these photographic practices (ibid., p7). As the editors put it, "political" photography can and must be about the representation of "politics" (...) [but] must also embrace an awareness of the politics of representation, of the ways in which photography is involved in the construction and regulation of [meaning]' (ibid.). Intervention can be effected through practice, by 'short-circuiting and breaking down the elusive strands of ideology which move across [the] surfaces' of dominant forms of photography, by 're-work[ing] these materials, demonstrat[ing] their repetitions and their absences', by an 'heterogeneity of practices' with 'specific value and meaning' (ibid.). Returning to Bate, documentary photographs which intervene in this sense offer 'critical views' and 'generate ... implicit commentary' (2010, p7).

To conclude this methodological discussion concerning the theory of photography underpinning the practice, the research proposes the concepts of witnessing and intervention as methods for the practice, offering a theoretical discussion that aims to expand the understanding of these methods within documentary photography theory.

ii. Power and space in the office: textual analysis

My ontology of documentary photography embraces the understanding that reality can not be apprehended solely through vision. In concrete, in answer to the research question of 'what is the relation between power and space in the office?', my position is that I can not know what it is and how it is exclusively through photography. How would I select what to photograph, and how would I decide how to photograph it in order to show such relation? Therefore, in order to answer the research questions related to power and space—is power exercised through spatial means in the office? In this case, how?—a broader research is necessary to inform and support the witnessing of the office space. I turn now to describe the scope and methods of this research.

In relation to the idea of 'power', I developed a study of the writings of philosopher Michel Foucault on this theme, with focus on the article 'The Subject

and Power' (1993). The understanding of power not as a quality or attribute in itself but as power *relations* that Foucault proposes in this article has underpinned the development of the research. Foucault's thesis is that power relations must be studied in its manifestations and therefore through an empirical investigation, by establishing their main characteristics (pp429). The relation between power and space in the office thus seemed to be an adequate question to be studied through photography, given the medium's empirical proclivity and its particular suitability to spatial description, and by employing witnessing as method.

In order to assist this photographic enquiry into power relations and space in the office, it seemed to me that it was necessary to develop a study on the production, to paraphrase the philosopher Henri Lefebvre, of the office space. Lefebvre's tripartite conception of social space is useful here to understand how the office is caught up in multiple discourses and practices that address different aspects of its being as a social, rather than Cartesian, space. In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre (1991) proposes three intersecting and interconnected 'moments' of social space, that correspond, respectively, to the 'perceived-conceived-lived/described': 1) 'spatial practice' is the material expression of social relations in space (an office, for instance); 2) 'representations of space' refers to conceptualized space, 'the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers ... the dominant space in any society' (pp38-9), being mainly verbal; and 3) 'representational space', which means space 'as directly lived through its associated images and symbols' by inhabitants, users or—more important here to the research—as 'described' by artists, writers, philosophers, 'who describe and aspire to do no more than describe'. It is the space passively experienced 'which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate', overlaying physical space and 'making symbolic use of its objects', and is essentially non-verbal in nature (ibid., p39). As Lefebvre points out, the distinction between the three moments is only relatively autonomous. The separation between representations of space and representational spaces, in particular, may not even exist.

Applying this distinction to my research, the intersections and interconnections of the three types of space are multiple. The photographs, as 'representational space', aim to represent the conceptualisations of the space of the office (the 'representations of space'), in particular those aspects which are

related to power. They will do so not from the perspective of the inhabitant or user of the space (I am not doing a humanist type of documentary, nor I am giving a personal account of my own experience of the office as a former office worker myself), but from the perspective of the 'artist' as an outsider who seeks to 'describe', as Lefebvre puts it, the space of the office. Description however is a narrow word to name what the photographs aim to do. Description is an aspect of witnessing, but as I argued above, the photographs aim also to intervene and therefore they 'seek to change and appropriate' space passively experienced, to use Lefebvre's words (ibid., p39). This 'space passively experienced' which is the object of the intervention are for instance other photographic representations of the office, that is, other manifestations of the office as 'representational space'.

As I wrote above, the photographs aim to witness power relations as embedded in space, but in order to know what these are or how they manifest itself, vision is not sufficient. In order to understand and make sense of what I would witness in actual offices, I developed a study into the 'representations of space', that is, the office as conceptualised by its 'producers'. This field is vast, as patent in this account by an organisational scientist:

The 'territory' ... of [the] organisation has been – and in large measure still is - the domain of efficiency experts and architects/ designers. Starting from Taylor's original concern with economy of motion and visual check on workers, efficiency experts have planned the physical setting according, in general, to rigorously instrumental criteria, mitigated by the widespread knowledge that the work environment should also be a status marker. Architects and designers for their part have shown over recent decades a widespread tendency in the plans to “interpret” the needs of contemporary society, turning themselves into disciples of theories and ideologies which drew, sometimes in nonchalant fashion, on all kinds of human and social sciences, making themselves proponents/ interpreters of fads or supposedly universal criteria of “socially responsible” planning of work environment ('open plan', for example ...) (...) This redefinition by architects of their own professional territory has perhaps been abetted by the marginal interest shown by social scientists in the physical settings of organisations (Gagliardi, 1990, p7).

The key concepts and disciplines seem to be here: territory, organisation,

efficiency, status marker, architecture and design, social science. However, as a photographer and visual researcher, my competence to navigate the vastness of the field was limited. A thorough literature review was beyond the scope of the research, as I am not formulating a thesis, nor testing an hypothesis, in this scientific domain. Nor am I collecting 'empirical data' in order to support or contradict a thesis. Researchers in other social science fields might of course use the photographs as data, although perhaps they will be surprised to find that rather than 'raw material', the photographs are, as two sociologists put it, 'analyses in themselves like those [social scientists] produce, only visual instead of discursive' (Cohen and Tyler, 2004).

My first step was to try to understand what the office is, how and when it emerged, what functions it fulfils. Drawing on both textual and visual sources, I developed a 'short history' of the modern office, that addresses the history of the office as a space, but does not engage directly with issues of power. This study was fundamental in several ways, namely in the design of the empirical enquiry, as described in the next section below. It has also helped to inform the definition of the intervention that the practice was to achieve.

For studying specifically the questions of power and space, I draw on the disciplines of organisation theory, environmental psychology, and office design. I developed a study of the relation between power and space as addressed in these disciplines, selecting material that was relevant to the scope and the needs of the research. The starting point was the discipline of organisation theory (also called management theory). Part of the business and economics academic curricula, it is essentially an 'applied discipline' and an 'umbrella' discipline that deals with most of the aspects comprising the field (Hatch, 2013, p21). I draw on organisational management literature, including textbooks and articles published in the field's (abundant) scientific journals. In my selection, I tried to include the great variety of methods used for studying the relationship between power and space. These included, for theorists working within the symbolic approach, interpretive methods such as semiotics which were applied for instance to the analysis of office floor plans (Hofbauer, 2000), or to the analysis of spatial elements in popular films about the office, including geographical location, type of building, office layout, interior décor, and spatial features such as doors and windows (Panayotou and Kafiris, 2011). An article used a photographic reportage showing the offices of a

government ministry to study 'physical things and visible gestures' by 'enter[ing] the organisation as visitors and describing[ing] possible interpretations of artifacts'-this by using the photographs themselves as empirical data (Larsen and Schultz, 1990). Apart from this article, the majority of the literature does not include images, this in spite of their focus on the 'sensory experience' and 'aesthetic dimension' of space. This is seen as a negative lack of 'empirical cases', with authors suggesting that 'essential missing spatial detail' could be conveyed through the use of 'photos, films or documentaries' (van Marrewijk, 2006, p1562). This was significant, corroborating the research's hypothesis that the space of actual offices has not been sufficiently represented.

I also draw on empirical research developed by environmental and organisational psychology. The discipline studies the psychological and social-psychological influences of the physical environment on individuals, interpersonal relationships and organisations in terms of, respectively, satisfaction and performance, group formation, cohesion and communication, and lastly effectiveness, namely productivity (Sundstrom and Sundstrom, 1986, p3). Alternatively, from a symbolic epistemological perspective, environmental psychology studies 'how people are culturally trained to associate certain meanings with physical arrangements' (Berg and Kreiner: 59). Symbolic and postmodern researchers are in fact generally critical of the discipline, dismissing the knowledge it produces as 'laboratory experiments', unsuitable for apprehending the symbolic dimension of phenomena (Gagliardi, 1990, p7). I have draw in particular on a widely cited monograph summarising the research on the psychological and social influences of work settings in offices, in what these refer specifically to space (Sundstrom and Sundstrom, 1986). In addition, I draw on an article reviewing research specifically on the physical environment in offices (Elsbach and Pratt, 2008). This type of research empirical research provides itself data for interpretive theorists (e.g., Hatch 1990, comparing the effect on employees of open vs. private office arrangements). It is also frequently evoked to support practical approaches, namely those of architects and designers. In this sense, Sundstrom and Sundstrom recognise that their book is directed to a wide variety of disciplines, including architecture, ergonomics, facilities management, interior design, management science, office planning, organisational behaviour, and social psychology (1986, p.xi).

I draw also on an anthropological and sociological study of Wall Street investment banks employing ethnographic methods, namely interviews and participant observation (Ho, 2009). The description and analysis of the space of these corporations' offices has been influential to my research.

In what respects the 'practitioners' (as opposed to the theorists referred to above) within the 'producers' of the office space (in Lefebvre's sense), I have drawn fundamentally on the field of office interior design and, in lesser measure, office architecture. The approach to the space of the office in this field is fundamentally normative. Hofbauer (2000) and others argue that designers and architects deal with concepts derived from organisation theory in a rather intuitive fashion, and that their approach based on the functionality of buildings completely forgoes the underlying issues of power (pp172-3). The (overwhelming) literature is essentially divided into three main categories: 'glossy coffee-table books' covering 'issues of corporate image, power, and status as communicated through the visual language of design'; monographs about technical issues such as lighting and furniture layout; and finally the literature focusing 'on the individual and organisational consequences of different approaches to office space planning and design' (Becker and Steele, 1995, p.x). I draw essentially on the first and third categories to learn about office design 'concepts'. It has also served to examine architectural and interiors photography of offices, which has been instrumental to the development of the strategy for the visual work as intervention. Finally, it was useful for defining the sample of corporations to be contacted for developing the empirical enquiry, as described in the next section.

To summarize this section, I have employed textual analysis to develop a study of the office comprising its history as a space, as well as the relation between space and power as posited in the disciplines of organisation theory, organisation psychology, and office architecture and design. This study informs several aspects of the practice, namely: the design of the visual empirical enquiry, by defining its material and geographical scope; the witnessing of the relation between power and space in the office, by allowing to identify its manifestations; the development of the strategy for the visual work, by contributing to the definition of the scope of the 'intervention'.

iii. Practice

With the aim of witnessing spatial power relations in the office, I developed an empirical enquiry consisting in the examination of this space through photography in relation to offices based in London's main office areas—the City and Canary Wharf. This empirical enquiry is located within the boundaries set by: a) my knowledge of power and space in the office; b) photography; c) witnessing; and d) access to actual offices. The expression 'empirical enquiry' (and hereafter related terms such as 'sample') is not used here in the sense it has within the scientific realm. To reiterate what I have stated above, I am not engaging here with the scientific method, by which an hypothesis which has been formulated on the basis of theory is then tested through empirical enquiry. My task is that of representation, not of explanation. Photography is both the means and the goal of the research. My method is that of witnessing, which implies recording images of what I have seen from a specific, both physical and intellectual, point of view. They aspire to offer visual arguments, and thereby to generate 'implicit commentary' (Bate, 2010, p7), contributing to a discussion, rather than presenting (irrefutable) 'proofs'.

In order to develop this enquiry, I defined a 'sample' of offices with basis on the study of power and space in the office described in the section above. In particular, considering the history of the modern office, the offices of the services industries were by far the most interesting: housing hundreds and even thousands of people, the relation between productivity and space posed itself more acutely. Moreover, their imposing presence in the urban landscape, materialized in high-rise 'business districts' occupying the centre of cities around the globe, was a sign both of the size of these industries and of their symbolic power. London as one of the 'world's financial capitals' was a privileged site where to study the phenomenon of the office. The business dedicated areas of the City and Canary Wharf, home to corporations and corporations' branches of all types, sizes and in all areas of business on a global scale, offered seemingly endless square feet of office space where to pursue such inquiry.

The impossibility of developing an in-depth study of an office made clear by the limited terms under which I was able to obtain access to the offices led me, in alternative, to develop an extensive study. During a period of two years, I

contacted nearly five hundred corporations, requesting to photograph their offices and was able to obtain permission to photograph in nearly fifty offices. These covered a wide range of activities, from finance and accountancy to advertising and law. In average, I was allowed to remain in each office for about one hour, during which I was 'escorted' by someone at all time, and usually it would not be possible to return for a second visit.

Outline of chapters

The thesis is organised into four chapters, interspersed with five chapters presenting the visual work, identified as 'Visuals'. The Visuals are organised according to the (horizontal) sequence of the visual work as presented in the installation (see ahead, p186): (1) Reception and Waiting Area, (2) Clients' Area, (3) Meeting Rooms, (4) Workspaces, (5) Amenities. The written chapters, in turn, are introduced by a sequence of illustrations that refer (directly or not, as some of the photographs are not specifically mentioned in the ensuing text) to the content of the chapter, and which, by its content and syntax, are organised into a visual essay about the subject to be addressed by the chapter. To give an example, the sequence of photographs that introduce chapter four makes an argument about the effect of different visual strategies employed to represent identical spaces. The relation between the Visuals and the written chapters is one of contiguity, in the sense that they are in close and continuous contact but remain two separate entities.

The first chapter, titled 'Documentary Photography and the Office' describes and discusses existing documentary photographic works about the office. The works were selected following the geographical scope of the thesis including, in addition to Britain and the USA, (service-based) Europe and Japan. They were chosen from works published and/ or exhibited in these countries, showing actual offices based in these countries, and developed within the genre of documentary *sensu lato*—it includes Henri Cartier-Bresson's series produced for commercial aims, and Lee Friedlander's series commissioned by a corporation.

The critical analysis developed in the chapter employs visual semiotics, theory of photography and documentary film theory to discuss the visual strategies they employ and how they engage the spectator. The analysis proposes an

essential division between the works documenting office workers and those showing the office devoid of people, arguing that, while the former engage the spectator mostly in the voyeuristic pleasures of overlooking, the latter, by showing the office empty, foreground and give visibility to space. This is an important argument for the development of the research and will be expanded in chapter four. The aim of the chapter is to position the research in relation to the existing documentary representations of the office, establishing in what measure the research will extend and contribute to these representations.

Chapter two explores the history of the office as a space. It proposes a 'Short History of the Modern Office' that shows how the office emerged in the nineteenth century in virtue of the Industrial Revolution, in parallel to the emergence of photography itself, tracing then its transformations until the present day. Its aim is to introduce the key concepts associated to this space: bureaucracy, rationalisation, standardisation, organisation, productivity, arguing that the office is a defining space of industrialised and service-based society. The chapter does not discuss directly questions of power, rather it presents a textual and visual description of the office through time that informs the subsequent analysis of the relation between power, space, and photography carried out in the following two chapters and is, as mentioned above, instrumental to the design and development of the visual empirical enquiry.

Chapter three, titled 'Power and Space', starts by introducing the concept of witnessing and establishes it as the crucial method for the practice, proposing to adopt a definition of documentary photography as a form of witnessing. At first, it may be illogical to introduce the concept in a chapter titled 'Power and Space', but the reason is that witnessing as method comprises the *what* of the practice. This is not something that can be separated from the method of the practice. In the research, its main terms—power, space, photography—are always interconnected.

The discussion of the concept of witnessing draws on witnessing in the fields of trauma studies, media studies, and the legal sphere in order to theorise the practice as developed by the research as the act of deliberately recording reality in order to make it visible in a way that differs and challenges existing representations of it. The argument made is that there is also epistemological value in knowing reality through images of it (that is, through documentary photography), that knowledge of reality is not a privilege of science and other

predominantly non-visual methods and discourses of 'truth', and that documentary photography is not superior nor inferior in its claims to truth to these other methods, but rather it competes with them to present accounts of reality that are able to persuade about the adequacy to reality of the propositions it makes through visual means, including pleasure.

The chapter proceeds then to apply the concept to the study of the research's question of the relation between space and power in the office. It discusses Jacqueline Hassink's *The Table of Power 2*, a project whose stated aims are to expose corporate power by witnessing a particular area within corporate space (the boardroom), showing the limitations of this project, to do with a narrow conception of power, and a representation that does not fully engage with the complexity of power relations as embedded in the corporate (work) space, leaving however the discussion of the latter to chapter four. In contrast to Hassink's project, the chapter proposes a Foucauldian understanding of the concept of power, that entails studying power in relation to the totality of the space of the office (as opposed to the partial study of specific areas such as the boardrooms), from the point of view of power relations themselves, by establishing their main characteristics. The chapter shows how the research has carried out this study, in the one hand, by developing an understanding of the relation between power and space in the office drawing on organisation theory, organisation psychology and architecture and office design as 'representations of space' in Lefebvre's sense, based on the epistemological assumption that that relation could not be apprehended by visual means only. And, on the other hand, by studying the relation through an empirical visual enquiry carried out in nearly fifty offices located in the City and Canary Wharf, London that aimed to witness that relation through photography. These two moments of the study are largely interdependent in that the textual research permitted to make sense of what I witnessed in the offices and, further, to identify aspects in the offices that I would not have recognised had used only common sense knowledge, my personal experience, or the offices' photogenic properties to guide the choice of what to witness. And, conversely, the empirical enquiry identified aspects and raised questions that had not been brought up by the textual analysis. In particular, it shows how the office space is essentially a private space, that is difficult to access in independent terms, and that as result has remained poorly developed as

'representational space' in the sense of the space described by artists, philosophers, or indeed documentary photographers whose aim is to describe it, that is, to think and make it visible for the sake of it.

The chapter presents the conclusions from this textual and empirical enquiry into the relation between power and space in the office, positing space in the office as a means for the exercise of power in Foucault's sense, as 'a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting-subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action', a means of 'bringing power relations into being' (Foucault, 1993, p427). Following Foucault's assertion that power can not be defined in terms of *what* it is but, rather, needs to be described through its main characteristics or *how* it is, the chapter describes the *how* of spatial power relations in the office in five sections dealing each with a different aspect: symbolic spatial power relations in relation to public and private space within the office, identifying a division of space into 'reception and waiting areas', 'clients' areas', 'meeting rooms', 'workspaces', 'amenities' that will be influential to the strategy of the visual work, as shown in chapter four; spatially induced interaction through 'breakout' and other areas dedicated to 'leisure', which transform this into a part of 'work' and therefore make it compulsory; nonterritoriality through non-assigned desks and a spatial organisation akin to that of hotels; hierarchy as materialised through 'status markers', which is also important to the definition of the visual strategy and as such is discussed in chapter four. Importantly, it argues that the 'representations of space' studied for the development of the practice are an aspect of the exercise of power relations through the office, as they provide the high degree of rationalisation that allows the very sophistication and effectiveness of those power relations. The chapter argues that the aim of the spatial power relations in the office is to make human beings *subjects*, to transform workers' into *subjects to production* or *productive subjects*. This is achieved, in the offices witnessed, mainly by spatial status hierarchies and other symbolic means, rather than through visual surveillance, as in the Taylorist office. The chapter proposes that a new spatial model for the office as hotel is perhaps becoming popular among the 'producers' of the space of the office, with the effect that workers are put in the position of guests, who may have to pay in order to use the space.

Finally, chapter four, titled 'Witnessing and Intervening', discusses the *how* of the witnessing of spatial power relations in order to produce a representation

that generates intervention. This separation of the *what* and the *how* of the practice into two different chapters does not correspond to the actual process of the research, as the visual strategy was defined by experimenting through the practice and, conversely, the practice helped define what was to be witnessed. Having said this, chapter four is specifically concerned with questions of representation, of how the visual work can both describe the power relations enacted through space in the office and intervene in the power structures of photographic representation. Following the argument developed in chapter one, the discussion starts by positing productivity of photographs as a result of the emptiness of the (photographed) space. In support of this argument, it offers an analysis of Eugene Atget's photographs of Paris empty streets, Anthony Hernandez' photographs of empty makeshift shelters of the homeless in Los Angeles, and Martha Rosler's photographs of the empty Bowery, showing how these photographic works are productive in that they 'stir the viewer', to quote Walter Benjamin (2005, p226), as well as they intervene in existing representations, photographic and other, of those subjects.

The chapter returns then to Jacqueline Hassink's *The Table of Power 2* to examine its self-proclaimed 'strict, registering, architectural' visual strategy, exposing the inadequacy of this practice to create images that address the office space from the point of view of power relations, that is, that make power, understood in a Foucauldian sense as power relations, visible. It argues also that this strategy is largely positivist and it does not have the effect of intervening in the existing representations of the corporate space as powerful, rather having the contrary effect of reaffirming it, engaging the spectator in enjoying the pleasure they afford.

The chapter moves then to present the strategy devised by the research to create the visual work and discusses in what sense this makes claims to witnessing and intervening. The visual strategy includes selecting a low vantage point for placing the camera. This has the effect of, within the frame of the photograph, placing furniture and other spatial elements that materialise power relations at the eye level of the spectator-camera, thereby making these the subject of the picture. It includes also a strategy for framing this subject that avoids 'good composition', namely through asymmetric, awry compositions and the visual tension thereby created, freedom from the 'imperialism of the right angle',

eschewing, like Atget, the 'anecdotal' (for instance, the objects on workers' desks visible in my series *Open Plan* were anecdotal in that they referred to the small incidents in workers' lives) and the 'great sights and so-called landmarks' (the views from many of the offices visited were breathtaking, and many of its spaces, especially the Clients' areas located on top floors, were, by their size and décor, spectacular—as spectacular at least as many of the boardrooms photographed by Hassink). Finally, the visual strategy includes the presentation of the work as an installation titled 'The Politics of the Office', comprising 128 photographs organised in an horizontal sequence that follows the spatial organisation of the different areas within an office (in order: Reception and waiting areas, Clients' areas, Meeting rooms, Workspaces, Staff amenities), and vertical series that expand upwards and downwards from the horizontal sequence, creating hierarchical relations between identical functional spaces.

To conclude, the chapter discusses how this strategy 'intervenes'. It does this using comparison, examining the visual strategies and effects of architecture and interiors commercial photography, showing how their 'good composition' engages the spectator in enjoyment of the photographs as spectacle and moreover as fantasy, at the expense of encouraging reflection about space itself. The chapter makes the argument that the visual work intervenes in the photographic representation of the office space, which is well circulated, as defined by this type of photography. And it does this through the strategy described, that has the effect of engaging the spectator not in enjoying the spectularity of the office space, but in looking at space itself, at its division into functional areas, at the disposition of furniture in specific arrangements, at its hierarchical organisation, encouraging them to reflect on how this space organises the office worker, how it makes them *subjects*.

Reception
Waiting Area



1

Documentary Photography and the Office



1.1. August Sander, *Shorthand-Typist at a Savings Bank*. Köln, 1928



1.2. August Sander, *Banker*. Köln, ca. 1932



1.3. Henri Cartier-Bresson, from *Bankers Trust Company, New York*, 1960



1.4. Lee Friedlander, Photograph no. 93, from *MIT*, 1985-1986



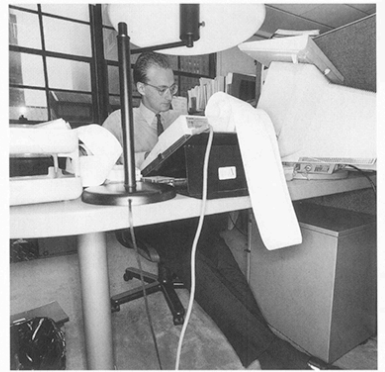
1.5. Lee Friedlander, Photographs no. 99 to 113, from *MIT*, 1985-1986



158



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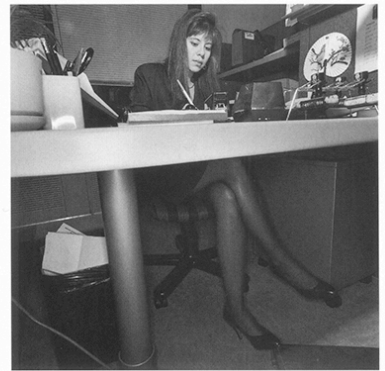
160



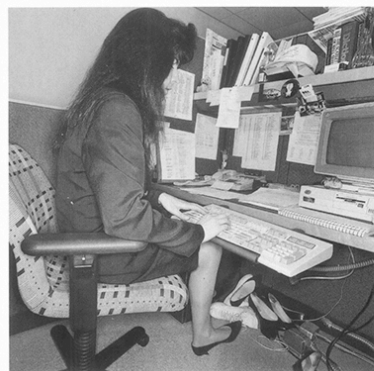
161



162



163



164

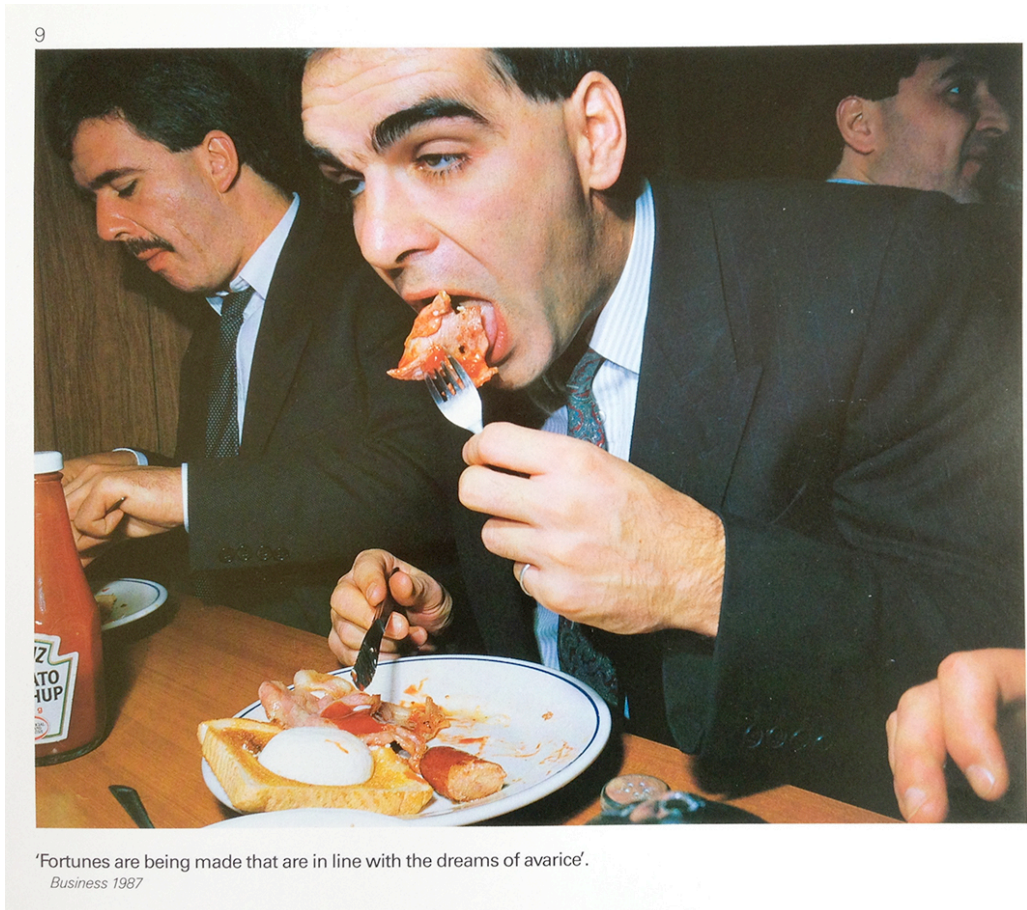


165



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1.6. Lee Friedlander, Photographs no. 158 to 166, from *Dreyfus*, 1992



1.7. Anna Fox, 'Café, the City. Salesperson', in *Work Stations*, 1988



'Right beaming you up now'.
Employment Manager

1.8. Anna Fox, 'Company dealing in office equipment, West End. Regional Manager and Commercial High Volume Sales Executive', in *Work Stations*, 1988



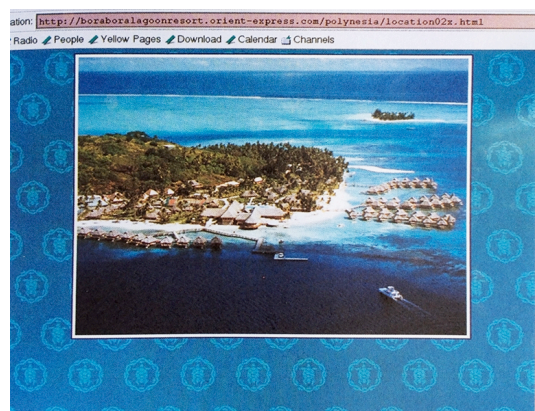
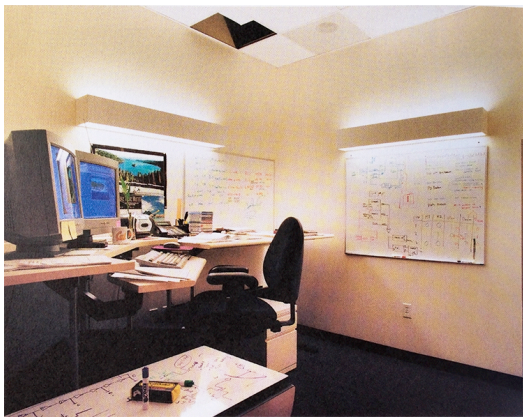
1.9. Lars Tunbjörk, 'Investment bank, New York, 1997', in *Office*, 2001



1.10. Jacqueline Hassink, 'BNP Paribas S.A., 3 rue d'Antin, Paris, France', in *The Table of Power* 2, 2011



1.11. Jacqueline Hassink, from 'Mr. James P. Kelly, Chairman & Chief Executive Officer, United Parcel Service, Atlanta, GA. October 21, 1999', in *100 CEOs – 10 Rooms, USA & Japan*, 1998 - 2001



1.12. Jacqueline Hassink, 'Ms. Mickey Ryder, MTS Design', from *Cubicles*, USA, 2000



1.13. Lynne Cohen, 'Corporate Office', 1987



1.14. Lynne Cohen, 'Employment Office for Women', 1987



1.15. Lynne Cohen, "Statue of Liberty, c. 1982/ 2008"



1.16. Lynne Cohen, Untitled, 1980s in *Camouflage*, 2005

Historically, the documentation of the office and office work has been marginal or often nonexistent in relation to the documentation of manual labour. Initially, work and workers as such were not perceived as suitable photographic subjects; rather, nineteenth century photographers were concerned with depicting the poor, hence a vast number of workers - including clerks - went largely unnoticed (Price, 2004, pp80-1). Lewis Hine's documentation of manual workers, depicting the poor in their condition as workers (Rosler, 2004c, p220) as well as, later, 'worker-photography' movements across Europe (Ribalta, 2011), contributed to the inclusion of labour and labourers in the documentary range of legitimate subjects. Office workers, considered as 'white-collar' and therefore privileged workers, were left out of what became an essentially humanist practice (Bate, 2009, p48).

The predominance of labour in the photographic documentation of work is manifest in the landmark exhibition *The Family of Man*. Curated by Edward Steichen for the New York Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in 1955, it aimed to celebrate humanity and the universality of life events from birth to death (including work) in a world devastated by the war and the prospect of further destruction represented by the nuclear threat and the belligerent climate of the Cold War. It was the most widely circulated photography exhibition ever (it toured 38 countries until 1963) and it had a great impact on photography, stimulating a global interest in the medium and establishing many of its dominant conventions and popular ideas (Bate, 2009, p151). *The Family of Man* includes a section dedicated to work which comprises sixty-four photographs; among the photographs showing people at work, forty-six photographs depict manual work, while only five are related to non-manual work. The photographs related to manual work refer in their majority to agriculture, logging, mining, and fishing, that is, to activities within the "primary sector" of the economy. Manufacturing is mainly represented by photographs of building and construction. Such representation of the world of work is fairly distant from the historical reality of the 1950s, in particular in the Western, industrialized countries from where seventy per cent of the photographs in the section originate. The USA in particular were undergoing a period of unprecedented economic prosperity and abundance based on industrialisation; *The Family of Man* presented instead, as Allan Sekula puts it, an 'earthbound workaday world' in which 'Fordist consumerism was largely invisible' (Sekula, 2001, pp167 and 173),

the same happening to the expanding numbers of clerical workers (see chapter two).

The office became the object of documentary attention mainly in the 1980s. These were the years of neoliberal politics across the Atlantic under the governments of conservative leaders Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, which not only contributed to the expansion of the service industries, but gave rise to a new middle class of professionals, coined at the time as 'yuppies' (acronym for 'young urban professionals') (McDowell, 1997). Documentary photographers reacted to these changes by turning their lenses to the new office world that was emerging and producing work that was essentially critical of the 'greed is good' ethos of the period. Subsequent documentary works have approached the office from this and other perspectives. The following sections employ visual semiotics, theory of photography and documentary film theory to develop an analysis of key works, that I argue belong in two main categories and produce different effects: documentary works showing people at work in offices, and documentary works showing the space of the office, devoid of people.

Office workers

With a few exceptions—namely, the work of August Sander and, to a certain extent, that of Henri Cartier-Bresson discussed hereafter—documentary about the office emerged in the 1980s as a reaction to its ubiquity in the industrialised world, what had become 'the central and all-consuming space of our lives, existing in paradoxical dyads: anonymous and deeply personal, corporeal and virtual (...) a second home to the average working person' (Rose and Marks, 2006). The works included here, many produced on commissions from corporations, adopt an observational strategy, looking at office workers going about their tasks in the office as if the camera were not present. The spectator, led by the photographic apparatus to identify with the point of view of the camera, is invited to watch without being seen, like a 'fly on the wall'. The photographs meet their wish to see what cannot normally be seen—in this case, actual office employees at work in actual offices—affording them the pleasure in overseeing which is at the centre of how the images in these projects work.

i. Portraits of Office Workers (1928-1935) in *People of the Twentieth Century*, by August Sander

The portraits of the German photographer August Sander are an exception to this mode of documentary. Within his projected human taxonomy of German society, Sander photographed office clerks, in particular bank employees, as well as bankers and businessmen, all at their posts in the office. In *Shorthand-Typist at a Savings Bank* (1928) (illus. 1.1) a female clerk is shown at her desk, surrounded by office equipment: a typewriter, a rubber stamp and stamp pad, a blotter, sheets of paper, a desk lamp. In *Savings Bank Cashier* (1928), a male clerk poses for the camera standing next to a cash register machine. In both portraits, the setting defines the subjects' social role. Their rather subdued postures contrast with those of the executives photographed in *Banker* (1929) (illus. 1.2) and *Engineer and Advertising Manager* (c. 1935). Seated at their desks, both men look busy and in control: the banker holds a cigar and a document from an open folder on his busy desk, the manager is posed talking on the phone and holding a fountain pen. The framing of these photographs is tighter, leaving out a larger part of the setting than in the clerks' photographs, as if the banker and the manager were less defined by their settings and more by their selves.

In contrast to the subjects' direct gaze at the camera typical of Sander's portraits, here the subjects (with the exception of the bank cashier clerk) are looking away, as if unaware of the presence of the camera. In spite of the obvious posing, the spectator is still lured by the pleasure in overlooking that the photographs afford. But the approach remains the characteristic 'objective' approach of Sander's work: the subject is photographed frontally, from a neutral camera position, that is, parallel to the picture plane; all the planes in the image are in sharp focus, due to the use both of a tripod and a small lens aperture. From a semiotic perspective, this set of technical choices privileges the 'informational' codes of the medium at the expense of its 'expressive' codes (blur, cut-off edges, human movement), typical of the reportage documentary mode (Bate, 2009, p53) which predominates in the works discussed hereafter.

ii. The Bankers Trust Company Annual Report (1960), by Henri Cartier-Bresson

Historically, commercial photography has provided an opportunity for photographers to gain access to the office—a semi-private, enclosed space, with defined rules as to whom is allowed in, and who remains on the outside. Besides the commissioning of architectural photographers to document their buildings and interiors, corporations have also hired photographers to produce images for use in their internal documents, in particular their 'annual reports'. In the 1960s, corporations were looking specifically for photographs in the style of those published in magazines such as *Life* (Galassi, 2010). One such corporation was the Bankers Trust in New York, who commissioned Henri Cartier-Bresson to produce a series for their annual report in the reportage style. Cartier-Bresson used a hand-held camera and no flash to roam through the open plan office snapping office employees on a regular working day, (seemingly) absorbed in their tasks. The spectator is given access even to private offices, where (male) executives and (female) secretaries are seen at work. The approach is 'subjective' (in opposition to Sander's 'objective' approach): office workers are shown in a range of emotions and poses, a series of fleeting moments 'captured' by the camera. Contrasting with Sander's portraits, the spectator is made to feel as if 'being there', present at the scene, watching (unnoticed) with their own eyes. The technical choices and the moments selected here connote involvement and expression of life, whereas in Sander's photographs the connotation was that of a more disengaged, distanced position. The subjective and the objective modes refer therefore to differences in the way documentary photographs look and how they signify, and not to their intrinsic conformity with reality. As Bate puts it, 'the idea that one picture *is* more objective than another only really means that one has hidden its ideology within a rhetoric of neutrality and description, while the other flaunts its codes of subjective investment' (Bate, 2009, pp53-4).

Cartier-Bresson offers a fleeting, fragmented view of the office, composed of a series of anecdotal moments which nevertheless, and however inadvertently, do address the question of (imbalanced) gender relations in the office (e.g. illus. 1.3).

iii. *MIT* (1985-6) and *Dreyfus* (1992), by Lee Friedlander

Lee Friedlander also employed an observational and subjective approach in his two series addressing office work, later published in the monograph *At Work: MIT and Dreyfus*.

MIT was shot between 1985 and 1986 in the environs of Boston, on a commission from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) challenging photographers to picture the impact of the radical technological transformations taking place in the area known as 'Route 128'. A high-tech centre similar to Silicon Valley, the industries based in this area were responsible for a period of economic boom in the 1980s known as the 'Massachusetts Miracle'. From the three photographers invited, only Friedlander addressed the office, the other two focusing on scientific laboratories instead (Cumming et al., 1998). Friedlander states in the introduction to the series: 'I chose to photograph people working at computers as these ubiquitous machines seemed to be the vehicle for that [technological] change', having had access to the offices of industries and services in 'banking, insurance, medicine, emergency services, and communications' (Friedlander, 2002, no page number). No information is provided as to how he obtained access to these offices, but it is legitimate to presume that this was facilitated by the institutional commissioner, the MIT.

The photographs show office workers at their desks, staring blankly at computer screens which in turn are left out of the frame (illus. 1.5). The focus is on the workers, whose heads and torsos occupy the centre of the frame, their surroundings barely visible in the background (illus. 1.4). The composition is repeated in the fifty-one photographs published in *At Work*, only the camera angle varying between a slightly lateral and, less frequently, frontal view, and the camera height shifting between head-on shots and shots from a slightly higher position, looking downwards at the workers. This serial approach, displayed in the pages of *At Work* in a grid arrangement, connotes repetition and sameness, reinforced by the lack of individual captions identifying the workers or their workplace.

The spectator is given the opportunity to look at the workers, caught seemingly unaware of the presence of the camera, and to scrutinize their appearance and facial expression (or, better said, the lack of it). Both Cowie and

Bate point out that the desire to see is not only related to curiosity and the wish to know, but also with a 'less noble' aspect of looking, associated with pleasure, and therefore with the dimension of spectacle intrinsic to the documentary genre, what is usually termed voyeurism (Bate, 2009, p62). The desire is not that of overturning the physical barriers to sight that prevent knowledge (as in curiosity, central to science), but to see what is hidden. As Cowie (2011) puts it, 'what may be desired in this coming to know of the hidden is the already known, as in the repeated viewing of the now-familiar but still forbidden body of the woman-mother in voyeurism. Alternatively, there is the pleasure and wish to see or be shown the unfamiliar' (p14). Documentary and in particular the 'fly on the wall' mode affords this pleasure, by allowing the spectator to overlook the hidden, and investing them with mastery over what is being shown, by transforming it into something knowledgeable, that is, the object of the spectator's knowledge.

The photographs in *MIT* make explicit use of this pleasure in overlooking the (apparently) unguarded workers, this is how they *work*. At the same time, the photographs aim to say something about reality. In this sense, Friedlander's response to the commission by the MIT and the question of the representation of social changes resulting from technical innovation, was to offer a bleak picture of the world of work emerging from these transformations, defined by individualism (as no workers are shown interacting) and alienation.

The other series, titled *Dreyfus*, was commissioned by a brokerage and financial services firm. In the introduction, Friedlander states: 'I made these pictures on the trading floor and in the offices of the Dreyfus Corporation in New York City. The commission was the idea of the CEO ['chief executive officer', the highest ranked worker in the corporate hierarchy]... and the prints were exhibited at the company's corporate headquarters' (Friedlander, 2002, no page number).

As in *MIT*, Friedlander roamed through the office with a hand held camera equipped with flash, 'catching' Dreyfus' workers seated at their desks staring at computer screens, and also reading, writing, typing, talking on the phone, seating, standing (illus. 1.6). Workers' facial expressions are more varied than in *MIT* but never close to effusiveness: they look concentrated, pensive, distressed, confused. Wider lenses than those used in *MIT* allow for their immediate surroundings to be in the frame. Workers' desks and what is on top and under

them are now in focus and they constitute the subject of the picture as much as the workers themselves. The approach is less formally contrived. The camera moves freely along different positions and heights to look at the workers and the space they occupy frontally, sideways, from the back, downwards and upwards. Workstations look cramped, workers seem to barely fit between partition walls placed too close to each other, their legs compressed under the weight of overloaded desks. The square format picture gives the impression of further squeezing people within their cubicles, of incarcerating them behind their desks. As in *MIT*, the people photographed never look back at the camera. As Cowie puts it, 'the spectator-camera intrudes or roams with impunity (depending on how one evaluates this) through the scene' (2011, p14).

In this series, Friedlander portrays the office as a confined, claustrophobic space, inhabited by human beings whose bodies have to skilfully fit into the narrow spaces left free by furniture, machines and piles of paper. Stockbrokers and financiers are shown occupying such offices, an image that unsettles their more widely circulated representation as 'masters of the universe', seated comfortably in corner offices, popularized in the 1980s by Hollywood films, in particular *Wall Street* and its main character, Gordon Gekko (McDowell, 1997, p3).

However, Friedlander's critique of the office world put forward both in *Dreyfus* and in *MIT* is far from a serious engagement with social issues, namely that of working conditions in the office, or a sustained analysis of that very office world. Friedlander's work operates essentially, in the words of Martha Rosler (2004a), within formalist modernism, where the meaning of the photograph is subordinated to 'playfulness and the making of pseudo-propositions as [its] strategy while identifying some set of formal manoeuvres as the essential meaning of [his] work' (p117). This 'dry humour' as Rosler calls it—if not overt mockery—and attention to form are present in *MIT* (for instance, the woman in photograph number 93, wearing a blouse with a pattern that mirrors the shapes of the lamps in the ceiling – illus. 1.4), as well as in *Dreyfus* (the infantile peeping at women's legs from under the desks, the odd camera angles – illus. 1.6). Neither project fits exactly into the objective nor the subjective documentary approaches. Friedlander work instead challenges this distinction, as it both makes use of the codes of the subjective mode (hand held camera, 'tilted' camera positions, 'capture' of moments – what Bate terms 'shutter photography'), and at the same time maintains a

distance and a lack of involvement in what it photographs, signalled precisely by those very formal decisions and dry humour, that shatters the connotations of spontaneity and the expressiveness typical of the subjective mode. As Rosler (2004a) puts it, Friedlander's work is 'exhaustive yet cool, the effect markedly distanced (...). Distancing is everywhere evident ... in the juxtapositions and the carefully composed spatial compressions ... Art making here entails a removal from temporal events, even though the act of recording requires a physical presence' (p118). Friedlander's documentary verges on art, and therefore should be more properly termed 'art documentary'. His photographs are not primarily about something occurring in the outside world, but mainly about what is happening in his mind and in the camera, and therefore, as Rosler (2004a) puts it, they are 'not consciously invested with social meaning', rather their import is 'open to question and can be read anywhere from photo funnies to metaphysical dismay' (p130).

iv. *Work Stations* (1987-1988), by Anna Fox

At about the same time as Friedlander's commission by the MIT, Anna Fox was commissioned to photograph 'office life' in London by the Camerawork Gallery and the Museum of London. The two institutions were interested in the subject 'partly because it had never been done, possibly because of its mundaneness' and chose Fox, a recent graduate, as they wanted to 'look at it from a woman's point of view' (Gupta, 1998, p.xv). Fox stated that she had also a personal interest in the subject, as the office had become very present in her family's life, whose members were all working or had worked in offices, including Fox herself (Chandler, 2007, p20). The commission resulted in an exhibition and a book published by Camerawork in 1988 titled *Work Stations. Office Life in London*.

The book comprises 35 photographs, each with a caption indicating the location and the job title of the office workers photographed. Most of the photographs have been juxtaposed to quotes originating from a wide variety of business publications, ranging from newspapers and business magazines such as, respectively, *Financial Times* and *Management Today*, to management books with titles like *How to Win the Business Battle* and conversations with workers themselves. Fox photographed in the offices of varied, if not random, types of

industries: insurance (7 photographs), office equipment (4), paper merchants (3), banking (2), video production (2), real estate (1), advertising (1), fashion (1), design (1); from these, only the insurers and the bank were based in the City, London's main business district. No details about the process for obtaining access to these offices, nor indeed the rationale behind their selection, are provided; it is only stated in the introduction to the book that access 'became possible because this was an official commission' (Gupta, 1998, p.xxi).

The photographs, taken with a portable medium format Plaubel Makina (and flash), are made in the 'fly on the wall' mode. The spectator is given access to the hidden world of the office, and shown what is not normally seen in public: office workers are 'caught' by the camera not only working at their desks (illus. 1.8), as in Friedlander's series, but also in meetings, as well as at lunch (illus. 1.7), in the pub, in office parties - a succession of moments arranged in a (loose) narrative sequence that covers a normal working day, from 8am to 5:30pm. Fox's approach is in effect quite distinct from Friedlander's: the photographs are colour and very saturated, many show office workers from close up, the strong flash freezing facial expressions and movements at awkward, excessive poses. In result, there is no 'cool distance', the camera and therefore the spectator are too close, too involved in the scene. To use Bate's (2009) expression, the approach is 'hot' instead of 'cold' (p53). Fox's series is not a modernist piece of witty visual jokes, rather the photographs aim to say something about the actual world. Through them, Fox offers a critical view of 'office life' in a particular context, that of London in the mid and late 1980s and the 'greed is good', to quote Gordon Gekko, ethos of the time, where the office is the centre of ruthless competition and individualism. In photograph number 15 for instance, a portrait of Margaret Thatcher is seen hanging in the office of an 'independent video production company' based in the 'Docklands Enterprise Zone' (now, the business district of Canary Wharf), the quote Fox juxtaposed to the photograph reading: 'Strength, stamina and precision had kept him at the top' (Fox, 1998, no page number).

The tone of *Work Stations* is that of satire, signified by the saturated colours and direct flash. Such satire is typical of the new colour documentary photography emerging in the UK in the 1980s with the work of, among others, photographers and Fox tutors Martin Parr and Paul Graham. The 'new colourists', as Val Williams (2007) refers to the group, were breaking away from traditional reportage and

documentary by opting for colour instead of black-and-white, and using it in a critical and satirical fashion (p11). They were moved by the wish to question the premises of objectivity and Humanism on which such documentary practices relied, striving to produce works that were able to voice personal and political views, often critical. As David Mellor (cited in Chandler, 2007) puts it, the new colour documentary marked a fracture in the reigning 'sentimental Left Humanism', producing photographs that confronted the viewer with its 'hot, estranging glare' and were distant and unsympathetic to their subjects; colour, he writes, 'took on a violence and insolence never seen before in British photography' (p19).

Through this radical use of colour and employing the visual conventions proper of the subjective mode ('shutter photography'), *Work Stations* voices Fox's views on the phenomenon of the office emerging in the 1980s, an assumed anti-humanist critique, where workers are no longer portrayed as victims. The office workers portrayed here—receptionists, secretaries, typists, sales executives, various types of managers ('hire manager', 'personnel manager', 'account manager', 'marketing manager', 'district manager', 'regional manager', 'director office manager', 'assistant office manager'), managing directors, including also a 'behavioural scientist', and a 'chairman's butler'—are not given names, rather they are anonymously depicted, as representatives of the office worker 'class' and their particular job position. The spectator is not asked to empathise with them, rather the spectator is invited to condemn office life as excessive, competitive, and aspirational as they watch office workers voyeuristically, through the point of view of the camera.

The critique and satire are further expanded by the image-text juxtapositions. The quotes occupy the place normally assigned to captions (the captions having been listed in a single page after the photographs at the end of the book), subverting the expectations of the spectator of finding information on what they are seeing. The effect is studiedly comical; the intention is to expose and ridicule the mentality that governs life in the office, as in photograph number 26 (also in the cover of the book) (illus. 1.8), where a shot of a 'regional manager and commercial high volume sales executive' in a 'company dealing in office equipment' (a factual information provided by the caption) talking on the phone and looking upwards taken from a low camera position is paired with a quote reading 'Right beaming you up now' (Fox, 1998, no page number).

It may be questioned if the office universe that Fox presents is representative of 'office life' in 1980s London. Taking into consideration that financial activities and related services such as legal, accounting and consulting services were at the centre of the new economy responsible for the expansion of the office world (see chapter two), then *Work Stations* is rather about the world of small offices and 'middle management', depicting a reality closer to that 'mock documented' by the TV series *The Office* a decade later, than the one fictionalized in *Wall Street*, released the same year as *Work Stations*, that is, the world and mentality of David Brent rather than that of Gordon Gekko.

v. *Office* (2001), by Lars Tunbjörk

More than a decade after the production of *Work Stations*, a similar approach to the office was undertaken by photographer and member of Agence VU (a documentary and photojournalism photo agency) Lars Tunbjörk, offering equally a critical view of the office environment. *Office*, a popular book among the photobook community, comprises seventy-nine photographs taken between 1994 and 1999 in offices located in the USA, Japan and Sweden. The inspiration for the series came from Tunbjörk's visits to offices while on assignment for editorial work; moreover, he used the access obtained in this way to photograph for the series (Kors, 2004). The offices photographed cover a wide range of industries and activities: stockbrokers (15 photographers), banks (12), investment banks (4), lawyers (7), accountants (2), insurance (1), advertising (3), web consultant (1), customer care centre (1), tax authority (2), civic administration (2), postal giro service (2), social insurance (1), software and computer (5), car manufacturer (6), food industry (3), construction company (2), electronics (2), telecoms (1), retail trade company (2), export centre (1), car sales (1), conference centre (1) and museum (2). Twenty-eight of these offices are located in Tokyo, twenty-six in the USA (mainly in New York) and twenty-five in Sweden (most of them in Stockholm). This factual information is provided by the captions, printed on the back cover of the book. Tunbjörk does not offer a textual statement contextualizing the work.

Like Fox, Tunbjörk employed the 'fly on the wall' approach, together with the saturated colours and direct, all-revealing flash aesthetic. The effect is also that of excess, the photographs creating a parody out of cluttered open plan offices and

Japanese office workers sleeping at their desks. The spectator, once again, is invited to watch office workers 'caught' in the oddest situations, from working under the desk, to running and exercising inside the office. The points of view and angles of shooting are numerous and in some cases extreme, including the 'worm's eye view', as in photograph number 2 showing the point where the beige carpeted floor meets the grey wall, or photograph number 66 framing the wheels of an office chair and the shoe soles of the person sitting on it from close up. Bizarre or displaced objects are also frequent: a pair of men's shoes lying on top of a desk, a Christmas garland hanging from the ceiling on an otherwise empty office, a computer hanging from a tree, a (stuffed?) moose, a birthday cake, a golf hole signalled by a flag. Wires are pervasive and constitute the main subject of various photographs. Differently from Fox's, Tunbjörk series includes photographs showing aspects of the offices' interiors, such as furniture and furnishings, as well as partial views of empty offices and meeting rooms. The focus here is on the space solely, with Tunbjörk using the harsh flashlight reflected on the metallic surfaces to create a strange, eerie atmosphere (e.g. illus. 1.9).

Like *Work Stations*, *Office* aims to make a comment on the office world, of which it offers a fleeting, fragmented picture, as though seen from an undercover position (many of the photographs seem indeed to have been shot from the hip, a technique used by street photographers to photograph without drawing the subjects attention). In this sense, the sequence of the photographs in the book does not follow a narrative structure like Fox's, rather the photographs seemed to be arranged according to their formal qualities.

Office space

In contrast to the projects focusing on office workers analysed above, the projects discussed in this section address the phenomenon of the office by looking at its space, devoid of people. They operate within the objective mode, but adopt different approaches: Jacqueline Hassink's can be termed quasi-anthropological, while Lynne Cohen relies on a non-serial 'tableau', nearly-staged approach. Similarly to the photographs depicting workers, their photographs of actual empty offices afford the spectator the pleasure of the hidden revealed. However, they demand from the spectator a different response. The absence of people engages

the spectator not only in observing the photographed space, but also in interpreting: what the space is used for, who inhabits it, why it has its particular configuration.

i. *The Table of Power* (1993-1995) and *The Table of Power 2* (2009-2011); *100 CEOs – 10 Rooms, USA & Japan* (1998 – 2002); and *Cubicles, USA* (2001), by Jacqueline Hassink

Photographer and artist Jacqueline Hassink has addressed several aspects of the office space in her work, as part of a sustained enquiry into questions of power, privacy and public visibility. Her methodical, comprehensive approach, together with the design of the empirical enquiry in terms akin to those employed in social science (Wagner, 2007, p29), and use of the objective conventions of the documentary mode, constitute her practice as a mode of empirical enquiry close to visual anthropology. The effect is to offer restrained, clinical images, that look indeed like they are part of the 'discourses of sobriety' (Cowie, 2011, p2) rather than documentary, and leave the spectator rather cold. To be sure, her work circulates in (art) photography contexts.

The Table of Power shows the boardrooms—the room in the office where the 'board' of a corporation, constituted by the top executives with the power to decide on the most important corporate matters, holds its meetings—of the largest European corporations, as listed in the American business magazine Fortune's 'Global 500' ranking. The project comprises two parts, the first made between 1993 and 1995, and the second between 2009 and 2011. I will discuss these projects in detail ahead in chapters three and four, while here I present a short introduction to both.

For the first project, Hassink contacted the forty largest European industrial corporations, from which twenty-one agreed to provide her with access. The project was published as a book in 1996, in a small, notebook type format measuring 5-1/8 x 3-3/4 inches (12,2 x 9 cm). It was released in a limited edition of 1000, followed in 2000 by a second printing edition of 1,500. All the books are numbered and a few from the first edition were made available in a wooden box; the first edition is hand signed by Hassink. The book has since acquired something like the status of a collector item, being difficult to find, including in

specialized art libraries.

In 2009, the financial crisis prompted Hassink to revisit the subject. Fortune's ranking had changed and only a few corporations from the first project were still listed. Again, Hassink contacted the top forty corporations, from which twenty-nine acceded to the request. The project was published in 2012 with the title *The Table of Power 2*. It was released in a commercial edition, plus three limited editions of 120 copies each priced at almost three times the value of the commercial edition, bound in either walnut, cherry or red gum wood hardcovers - a reference to the materials used in many of the boardroom tables.

Hassink sees the boardroom table as a symbol of economic power, and a secluded one, removed from the public eye, since the boardrooms are semi-private or indeed, given that only few people within corporations are allowed to use it, close to private spaces. She has asked corporations to answer a questionnaire about them and, in both projects, the 'Facts about the table' are included on a single page placed after the photograph of the corresponding boardroom. Additional information inserted in these text-only pages includes the corporation's location, revenue, name of the members of the board, and rank in Fortune's list, as well as a 'Special comments' section with Hassink's personal observations. Small sketches by Hassink are also reproduced. In addition, *The Table of Power 2* includes facsimiles of the pages of *The Table of Power* for the corporations where Hassink had already photographed during the first project. *The Table of Power 2* includes also a chapter titled 'Laboratory', where the two projects are compared through several charts and graphics that relate it to economic and other data referring to the companies involved.

The photographs show the boardrooms devoid of people, with the tables at the centre and the chairs neatly arranged around them (illus. 1.10). They were taken from the vantage point of a person standing in the room, from a frontal or slightly lateral perspective. Hassink used a tripod and for the second project she replaced the 35mm camera used in the first project with a medium format camera. In the second project, the vertical lines in the photographs are all parallel to the frame of the picture, which did not occur in the first project. Wide angle lenses allowed her to frame not only the tables but also the architectural space of the room—floor, walls, windows, ceiling. Only available light was used. Through this neutral approach—what Hassink (2011) calls a 'strict, registering, architectural

eye' (p4)—privileging the informational codes of the medium (depth-of-field, sharpness, perspective correction – either through the use of shift lenses, or through the correction of the perspective in post-production), Hassink offers a description of the boardrooms, which it presents as objective: here are the boardrooms of the most powerful European corporations, the photographs are saying, this is how they look. But the way they look in the photographs—neat, serious, powerful—is the result of the visual codes used to construct the picture, that is, as arguments of the picture. The neutral tone of the photographs in *The Table of Power*, together with the detailed textual information it provides, are close to a sociological or anthropological visual enquiry, where the images work in a relation of transparency to what they purport to show in the actual world, that is, in a sort of naïve realism. The spectator is invited to see, through the pictures, the hidden space of the boardrooms, and to enjoy the spectacle of the hidden revealed, heightened by the fact that the photographs make the boardrooms look powerful, therefore confirming the expectations of the spectator towards what such spaces should look like, that is, towards reality not only as what they believe exists, but also as what they *wish* to exist (Bate, 2009).

The series *100 CEOs – 10 Rooms, USA & Japan* and *Cubicles, USA* are part of *Mindscapes*, a project made between 1998 and 2002 that comprises four other series: *Personal Coffee Cups, USA* (2000), *Training Center for Salarymen, Japan* (2000), *The Shoe Project, USA* (1999 - 2000), and *VIP Fitting Rooms, USA & Japan* (2001 - 2003). The aim of the project is to examine and compare contemporary notions of private and public in the workplace, both in the USA and Japan (the two being, at the time, the world's leading economies). In the introduction to *Mindscapes*, Hassink states that she wanted 'to explore how the information society has influenced the values of private and public life in the minds of CEOs, executives and employees of Fortune's Global 500 corporations'. The term 'mindscapes', she adds, is imported from anthropological theory and refers to the mental landscape of individuals. The project was exhibited and published as a catalogue in 2003 (Hassink, 2003).

In *100 CEOs – 10 Rooms, USA & Japan*, Hassink focuses on the figure of the CEO. Relying once again on business publications' rankings to select her sample, Hassink contacted 100 CEOs (75 in the USA and 25 in Japan) of industrial companies, requesting to photograph three to five spaces from a list of

ten: the CEO's home office, their corporate office, company limo, library/ archives, living room/ private meeting room, business jet, lobby, garden, boardroom, and the corporate dining room. A total of sixteen CEOs (eleven in the USA and five in Japan) allowed her to photograph all or some of the spaces in the list.

The published project comprises fifty-three photographs plus several charts and graphics that map thoroughly the contacts and the requests made, and the results obtained. The photographs show the spaces that Hassink was allowed to photograph in the sixteen corporations she visited: CEOs' offices (11) (illus. 1.11), their private meeting rooms (5), lobbies (10), gardens (3), dining rooms (5), and boardrooms (8); as Hassink (2003) explains, '[c]ompany limos, business jets, and home offices (...) were generally out of bounds. Surprisingly in Japan it was impossible to photograph the corporate gardens and it was quite difficult to photograph the CEO's office' (p10). Blocks of colour stand for the areas which Hassink was not allowed to photograph. The colours follow a chromatic scale, varying from red for the most private spaces (the CEO's home office) to navy for the most public (the corporate dining room). An introduction with an extensive description is provided, accompanied by a portrait of Hassink standing in front of a wall size diagram of the project.

The visual strategy is formally similar to that in *The Table of Power*: the photographs were taken with a medium size camera, from a high vantage point, using wide angle lenses and available light only. They show wide views of the spaces photographed, taken from a frontal position (which replicates the orthogonality of the office spaces) or slightly lateral, especially in narrow spaces; the vertical lines in the spaces are also parallel to the frame of the picture. Again, the rhetoric of neutrality is used to convey information about space, the images functioning in a seemingly uncomplicated relationship with the referent, as illustrations of Hassink's quasi sociological and anthropological visual enquiry.

Cubicles, USA (2001), also part of *Mindscapes*, concentrates on the work spaces of high rank engineers working at computer software corporations in Silicon Valley, listed in Fortune's ranking of 'the 100 best companies to work for'. To Hassink (2003), the cubicle – a concept of office furniture that emerged in the 1960s, consisting of a desk fitted with partition walls separating it from identical desks, usually placed in an open plan office – 'symbolize[s] the ultimate place in which private and public are no longer separated' (p116), as workers tend to

'personalise' their standard, bare work places. She approached six companies and requested to photograph the cubicles of their top five engineers. The published project includes photographs taken in three corporations: Sun Microsystems, Silicon Graphics and Intel.

As in previous projects, and using the same visual strategy, Hassink approached the subject systematically: she took two photographs per engineer, one of their cubicle and the other of their favourite computer screen image; in the book, the two images are paired in a double page spread (illus. 1.12). The photographs show the cubicles – the majority of which are in fact desks placed in private offices – from a distance that allows Hassink to frame also the space surrounding it, including office items, as well as furnishings and personal objects. Many images, often family portraits and pictures of landscapes and animals, can be seen decorating the offices. Adding to these, the image on the computer screen is widespread, as everyone has one. Their subjects are varied: a reproduction of Van Gogh's painting *The Bedroom*; computer generated images showing forests, a jellyfish, a city street; landscape photographs (namely, an aerial view of an island in Polynesia - illus. 1.12), 3D models of computer parts and images of computer chips. Hassink (2003) is interested in these screen images as they are, she claims, the most private. In her words, 'the cubicle is a private space within a public space and the photograph of the computer screen reflects a private space within a private space' (p 116). By giving the spectator access to this private sphere, Hassink's diptychs afford them a voyeuristic pleasure, simultaneously engaging them in establishing relationships between individuals and their surroundings, and in reflecting on how workers negotiate the bareness and anonymity of the office space. This standardised space is in contrast with the richly decorated, almost domestic space occupied by those at the top of the corporate hierarchy, as shown in *100 CEOs – 10 Rooms*. Corporate hierarchy also had bearing on corporation's decisions to grant Hassink permission or not to photograph: Intel for instance allowed Hassink to photograph the cubicles of its top engineers', but refused to grant access when she approached the corporation to participate in *100 CEOs – 10 Rooms*. As Hassink's projects show, the question of public visibility of the corporate space is therefore not so much related to the public or private nature of each of the areas of the office (in which case Hassink would have obtained a higher number of negative answers to her request to photograph

the cubicles), but with notions of hierarchy and power, that determine which individuals within the corporation are entitled to exercise control over their surroundings (in this case, the CEOs but not the top engineers), and/ or which areas corporations are more likely to want to keep away from the public eye (namely, CEOs' facilities and boardrooms).

ii. *Occupied Territory* (1987), by Lynne Cohen

The late photo artist Lynne Cohen has investigated the domestic and institutional interior space, photographing relentlessly since the 1970s living rooms, men's clubs, public halls, lobbies, showrooms, classrooms, laboratories, spas, military facilities, shooting ranges, to name the ones most often revisited in her work. The office has been addressed in a few images published initially in the book *Occupied Territory* (1987). Some of them were reprinted in later publications such as *No Man's Land* (2001) and *Nothing is Hidden* (2012), a retrospective of Cohen's work published on the occasion of the awarding of the 2011 Scotiabank Photography Award. *Camouflage* (2005), containing photographs taken between 1971 and 2004 previously unpublished or never exhibited, includes two different photographs of offices that have not been reproduced in subsequent publications. After approximately 2002, the captions of Cohen's photographs include only the date of their making, deliberately inducing ambiguity as to where they were taken. In what follows, I will discuss four of her photographs showing offices, preceded by an introduction to some aspects of her working process.

Like Hassink, Cohen (2001) does not present herself or her work as documentary; on the contrary, she has stated that she is not a documentary photographer as she does not set herself the task of recording or capturing the 'essence of a place' (p 25). Instead, Cohen (2001) talks about the existence of a 'documentary aspect', fundamental to her work, consisting in the fact that she photographs actual spaces. As she puts it, 'the force of the work would be diluted if it weren't mostly true' (p 27). This narrow conception of documentary embraced by Cohen does not impede, I argue, the inclusion of her work in my analysis of documentary photography about the office. Cohen seems to imply that what defines documentary is its faithfulness to the reality recorded, a positivist conception that neglects that documentary *is* transformation, not only due to the

fact that all photography involves mediation, but also because direct access to the real through images of it is but a fantasy. As Cowie puts it, 'the documentary project constitutes reality as knowable and produces a knowledge of reality through its construction and deployment of discourses about reality' (2011, p5). 'The world shown ... is presented as knowable, and the terms of its knowability are organised by the [documentary], not by reality' (ibid., p13). Cohen's work is not only about photography and pictorial and formal aspects, it is also about the actual world, as it aims to say something about it through images of it. In this sense, she rejected what she termed as her 'dangerously aesthetic' work of the early 1970s and had since avoided 'falling into the trap of making "beautiful pictures"' (Cohen, 2012, p149). 'What the picture is about', she writes, 'comes from the choice of subject matter and how it is turned into a photographic object' (Cohen, 2001, p30). In her words, her 'work has always been about psychological, sociological, intellectual and politic artifice ... deception, claustrophobia, manipulation and control' (Cohen, 2001, p30). She is adamant that she does 'not produce work that is overtly political or social' (Cohen, 2012, p150)—in spite the fact that in 2001 she wrote exactly the opposite: 'I take my work to be social and political' (Cohen, 2001, p30)—but she concedes that there are 'messages to be found' in the photographs, and that these 'are ones for the viewer to figure out' (Cohen, 2012, p150). As she puts it, she 'want[s] the audience to do some of the work', preferring not to tell people how to read her pictures (Cohen, 2001, p25).

This neutrality is constructed through Cohen's visual approach, identical throughout her work, by employing the conventions of the objective mode. As Cohen puts it, she has tried to 'heighten the illusion of neutrality by flat lighting, symmetry and deep focus ... [which] gives the pictures a cool, dispassionate edge. It makes them seem immaculately conceived while camouflaging the all-but-incomprehensible stories they seem to convey' (Cohen 2001, p28). Made with an 8 x 10" view camera, the photographs convey extraordinary pictorial detail, and are frequently printed in large sizes. Their sharpness is a feast for the eyes, a spectacle that affords pleasure in itself. However, and contrary to Hassink's claims of a 'strict, registering, architectural' framing, Cohen's framing is carefully orchestrated to produce a certain effect, that Cohen (2001) defines as a dissolution of the 'barrier between the space depicted and the room in which the viewer is standing', in a way that what is shown 'creeps up on the viewer' (pp30

and 28). Cohen (2001) conceives of her framing as 'seamless', nondisruptive of the space in the actual world, so that the spectator 'feel[s] the edges of the picture could be here or there or somewhere else' (p30). For Cohen, the framing is not exclusively responsible for the way spaces look in her photographs—humorous, absurd, threatening—as these are qualities of the spaces themselves or, better said, of how Cohen sees these spaces. This includes their constructed appearance, as Cohen (2012) finds it 'enough to record the unexpected, to present locations that could pass, with at most slight assistance, as “found installations”' (p150). 'Assistance' means here for instance 'remov[ing] objects that are distracting or clumsy' (Cohen, 2001, p27). Cohen photographs the spaces empty, devoid of human presence, as well as of any immediate traces of that presence. In contrast to Hassink's pictures of cubicles or CEOs' offices, where personal and everyday objects are the subject of the picture as much as the space itself, in Cohen's photographs spaces are uncommonly empty, in such way that what is left for the spectator to see and interpret is the architectural space, its fixtures and furnishings.

Occupied Territory, Cohen's first monograph, was published in 1987 and republished (in an expanded and revised edition) in 2012. It includes eight photographs showing office interiors, taken between 1971 and 1987 (the exact dates are not disclosed). The classification into five themes or chapters used in first edition ('Facsimiles', 'Conglomerates', 'Preoccupations', 'Sanctuaries', 'Dislocations', and 'Controls') has been abandoned in the second edition, and captions were inserted under the photographs, in red (in the previous edition they were at the back). In addition, one of the photographs of an office included in the first edition has been left out in the second, and a new photograph of an office has been included.

'Corporate Office' (reproduced in both editions of *Occupied Territory*, and also in *No Man's Land* and *Nothing is Hidden*) (illus. 1.13) shows a frontal, elevated view of an office furniture arrangement consisting of a heavy wood desk, an upholstered chair with high back, and wood drawer cabinets with a table lamp on top. The floor is carpeted and the wall behind the desk, parallel to the frame, is (clumsily) papered with a sky and clouds motif wallpaper. The space is otherwise empty, offering the spectator no further clues regarding the identity of its occupier. On the contrary, it raises doubts about its existence aside from being a display in

an office furniture showroom. The chair is at the centre of the composition, facing the camera frontally, in an uncanny position, as if looking back at the camera. The large, heavy panelled desk and the padded, velvety chair convey privilege and power, an effect enhanced by the soft light of the table lamp that contrasts with the typical fluorescent, harsh lighting of open plan offices. The sky in the background alludes to top floors in high-rise office buildings. This is the office of a powerful person, someone in the top ranks of the corporate hierarchy—or the furniture designed to furnish the office of such person. The spectator is placed by the photograph on the other side of table, in the position of the interlocutor, possibly an hierarchical subordinate. As Cohen (2001) puts it, '[t]he positioning of the furniture makes it crystal clear who is in charge. It draws a line between them and us' (p26). Besides materialising hierarchical relationships, furniture acts as a surrogate for people in Cohen's pictures. In her words, 'couches and chairs look like people' (p26).

In 'Employment Office' (captioned in the second edition of *Occupied Territory* as 'Employment Office for Women') (illus. 1.14), the camera is placed further away from the desk that occupies the centre of the composition, and the architectural space of the room is included in the frame. The photograph shows in detail the room's different surfaces: the tiled ceiling and tiled flooring, the mirror and other reflective panelling covering the walls, the metallic surface of the desk and cabinet file, the curtain with a wavy pattern that looks eccentric in this otherwise orderly, indistinct space. Cohen (2011) has paid close attention to materials since the beginning of her career, especially to manufactured surface coverings such as plywood, polyethylene or linoleum, and synthetic materials imitating marble and leather like Formica or Naugahyde, that were becoming pervasive and had also been appropriated by Minimalist artists (p 29). The photograph, included in the section 'Conglomerates', offers a humorous if not critical observation about the Administration's mentality by focusing on the way it conceives its office space. As in 'Corporate Office', this space is eerily empty, with no traces of human presence. Again, the spectator is put in the place of the person facing the employment officer's desk, that is, the employment seeker. It is from this position that they are invited to look around, as if they were there. As Cohen (2001) states, her aim is to 'mak[e] the viewer feel more a part of the space of the picture', using devices 'to implicate the viewer physically and psychologically'

(p29).

'Office' (reproduced in both editions of *Occupied Territory* and in *Nothing is Hidden*, where it is captioned as 'Statue of Liberty, c. 1982/ 2008') (illus. 1.15), shows a wall with a stencilled image of the Statue of Liberty next to an open door leading to the space behind, hidden by the wall. The frontal framing emphasizes the irony Cohen saw in the juxtaposition of the very symbol of liberty next to the entrance to the enclosed, seemingly windowless, workspace. It creates the deadpan humour of the image, at the same time that it places the spectator in front of the wall, making them wonder what might lie behind it. Cohen (2012) insists that the irony exists in the actual world, or at least in the way that she sees the world. As she puts it, she 'photographs irony' but she is not an 'ironist' (p151). Unlike Friedlander, Cohen is vocal that her photographs are about things in the world, and that her visual strategy is the form that enables to translate their appearance and meaning. This realist position is quite different from Hassink's, as Cohen acknowledges the inevitable mediation performed by the image and deliberately makes use of the rhetoric of objectivity for conveying her ideas, while Hassink seems to believe that this rhetoric is rather the guarantor of the objectivity of things in the world, of an objective access to them through images.

Encouraged by Cohen's wish that the spectator participates in the making of the meaning of her images, I venture to suggest that 'Office' may be further interpreted as a critical comment both on the appropriation by corporations of collective images and symbols for their own purposes, and on the enclosed nature and deliberate public invisibility of the corporate space.

In the book *Camouflage*, the photograph reproduced in page 127 (illus. 1.16) shows what seems to be a reception area in an office, or perhaps the desk of the secretary to the executive seating in the private office to where an open door appears to give access. Although the caption does not identify the location of the photograph, the layout and furnishings of the space are unequivocally those of an office: the high, tiled ceiling fitted with tile lighting, the carpeted floor, the metallic desk where a telephone lies, the absence of decoration apart from two plants in pots. Everything is placed at right angles: the square desk, the panelled walls, the entrance to the corridor and the private office, the tiles in the ceiling, the frame of the picture. This is the perfect orderly, functional, productive office space envisaged by Modernist architects after Taylorist 'scientific' management theories,

parodied by the filmmaker Jacques Tati in his 1960s film *Playtime* (see chapter two ahead). Cohen is able, through her framing and visual strategy, to present an image of this space that is both concrete (this is an actual office in the world) and abstract (this is how these offices are designed to look like), singular (this is how this particular office looks) and universal (any office looks like this). We are far from Tunbjörk's moody flashed metallic surfaces and close ups of beige carpeted floors. The dullness of the office space is presented here from a distance, dispassionately, encouraging a more critical engagement by the spectator, who has to interpret what the meaning or meanings of the picture might be since the picture is basically laconic. Cohen's images are also more deliberately about space itself. It is this quality of Cohen's work—the ability to address space critically and to create meaningful images of space—that sets it apart from the other works discussed here.

Cohen careful framing selects for the attention of the spectator only the meaningful elements that give space its qualities. At the same time, it places the spectator-camera in a relationship with the space depicted, either seating at corporate desks as the interlocutor of chairs that stand metaphorically for powerful people, or as the bystander in front of open doors and corridors that lead to enclosed, hidden spaces. In this way, the photographs incite the curiosity of the spectator, their wish to know: who is the person on the other side of the table, where do the doors lead to, and, eventually, why does space look the way it does, why does it have a particular configuration? The photographs rely less than those in the previous projects on the pleasure of the hidden revealed to engage the spectator, not only because the exact location is not disclosed (contrasting with Hassink's *The Table of Power* for instance, where the spectator knows that what they are seeing are the boardrooms of particular corporations), but also due to the fact that the images make the spaces look constructed and therefore unreal. To a certain extent, it does not matter where the space is, nor if it exists in the actual world or not at all. What the photograph is mainly about is space itself: why the space in the photograph looks the way it does, why it has a particular configuration and produces a particular feeling or affect. From this starting point the spectator can move on, hopefully, to think about space in the actual world – such is the aim of the documentary project.

Conclusions

The existing documentary representation of the office can be summarised as either focusing on office workers, or focusing on the space of the office, devoid of people. Within the first approach, what is represented are the office workers—what they are doing, how they look like, what they might be thinking or feeling—while within the second, the subject of the images is the space of the office itself. In general, the first approach employs the conventions of the subjective mode (tilted camera positions, direct flash, 'capture' of instants) to signify involvement and overt opinion, in particular critique and parody. The second approach relies on the conventions of the objective mode (camera position neutral to the plane of the scene, deep focus, ambient light) to signify instead distance and neutrality.

Each of the approaches produces different arguments about reality, and engages the spectator differently. The projects showing office workers, where these are usually depicted as if unaware of the presence of the camera, engage in looking at the workers, affording the spectator a voyeuristic pleasure. This documentary approach entails various issues, namely the question of performance, of how the people who are being photographed negotiate the presence of the camera: in what measure are people 'being themselves' and to what extent are they performing to the camera? How can we know? In contrast, when the space of the office is the focus, the photographs engage not only the desiring spectator but the knowing spectator too, and in greater measure, as they incite them to engage more actively with what is on show, that is, not only to look on but to reflect, to make sense.

It is different to see a desk in an office as shown in Friedlander's 'Photograph no. 93' (illus. 1.4), in Hassink's 'Ms. Mickey Ryder, MTS Design' (illus. 1.12) or in Cohen's 'Corporate Office' (illus. 1.13). How? Friedlander's photograph holds me whenever I look at it, I get caught up trying to figure out the woman's facial and body expression. Is she looking absent-minded and strained because the office makes her feel like that, or because she is being photographed? Also, I cannot stop my eyes moving from the squares in her blouse to those in the ceiling, and through the boxy desks behind, in a circular movement suggested by her necklace. And does she look like some sort of saint, the white light beaming behind her head like a halo, reinforced by her perfectly central position at the

centre of the frame, with the converging lines in the ceiling seeming to beam her up from behind? This surely is a great photograph, showing the artistry of the photographer, one would conclude.

Looking at Hassink's 'Ms. Mickey Ryder, MTS Design', the disclosure of the name of the office worker prompts me to analyse space as a reflection of the person itself: a private office means a higher rank in the hierarchy, but not too high as the furniture is pretty standard and the office does not have a window for instance; the brightness, lack of decoration and general emptiness of the space denote austerity and rationality, reinforced by the equations on the board. However, this ascetism is somewhat contradicted by the choice of picture for the screen saver, of a sunny resort on a remote Pacific Island. The reference to the open, paradise like space of the island within the confined, dull space of the office, juxtapose work and its contrary, leisure, revealing an apparent tension between the obligations derived from work and the wish to escape from it, or at least, to be reminded of this possibility of escape.

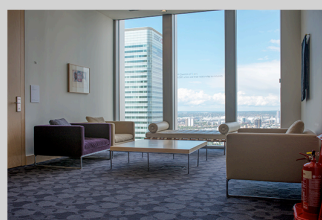
In Cohen's image, its frontality confronts me, making me feel uneasy. It seems as if I am being looked at from behind a desk that looks like a fortress, which puts me in a position of inferiority, creating a relationship where I seem to be the weaker part. However, the photograph shows only furniture, there is no human presence, and this prompts me to look at furniture itself and its arrangement, and to what these are doing and how they are doing it.

The aims of the research are closer to the second approach, centred on space, and in particular with Cohen's approach, who manages to stage through her images something of the power relations at work in the space that she photographed. The research's visual strategy is also closer to the conventions of the objective mode, as described ahead in chapter four. However, differently from Cohen's 'tableau', fragmentary approach, the aim of the research is to develop a sustained enquiry into this space. And, differently to Hassink's 'piece-meal' approach of the office (the boardroom/ the CEO areas/ the cubicle), the aim is to study the office in its totality, as a space comprised of different areas with different functions, in order to examine how power is exercised, also, in and through the interconnection of these areas. More importantly, the research aims to foreground and give visibility to the space of the office in a way that these projects, I contend, do not. If, as the research posits, power in the office is exercised through spatial

means, the witnessing of this aspect is, the research argues, important.

But what do we mean by 'office'? What is an office? Neither these questions, nor the research questions which imply them, can be answered solely through a photographic empirical enquiry. The office as a space has a history and it is to that history that I turn in the following chapter.

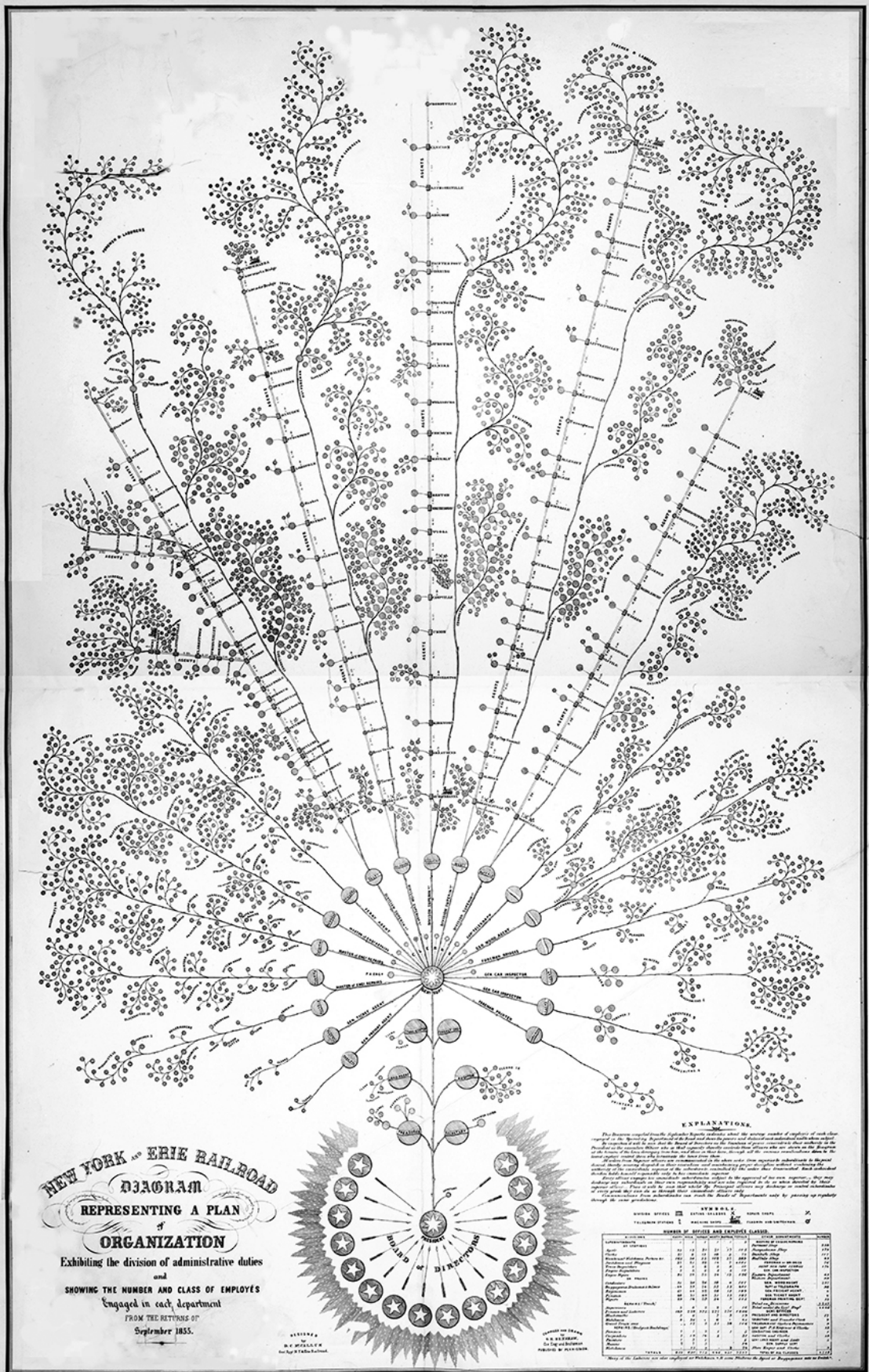
Clients Area





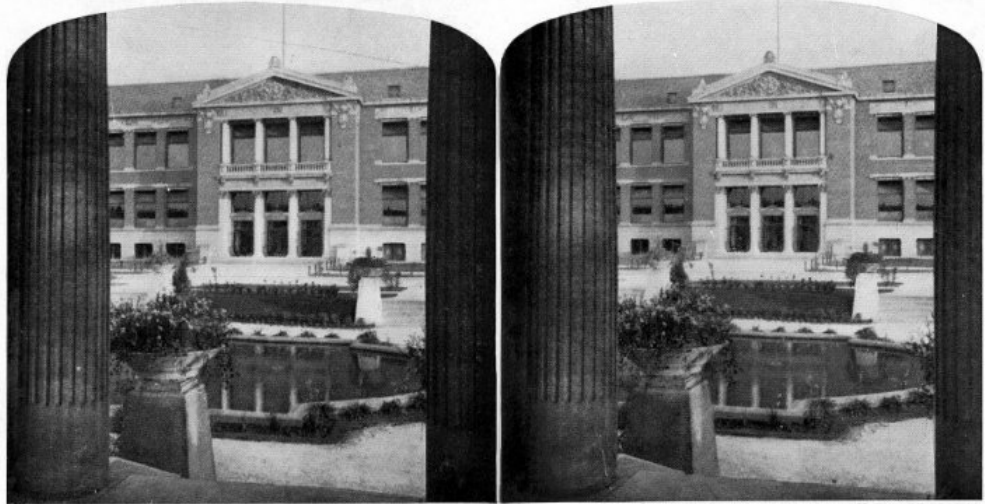
2

Short History of the Modern Office



1855.
 Deposited in Clerk's Office N.Y. Dist. Ct. May 31. 1856.

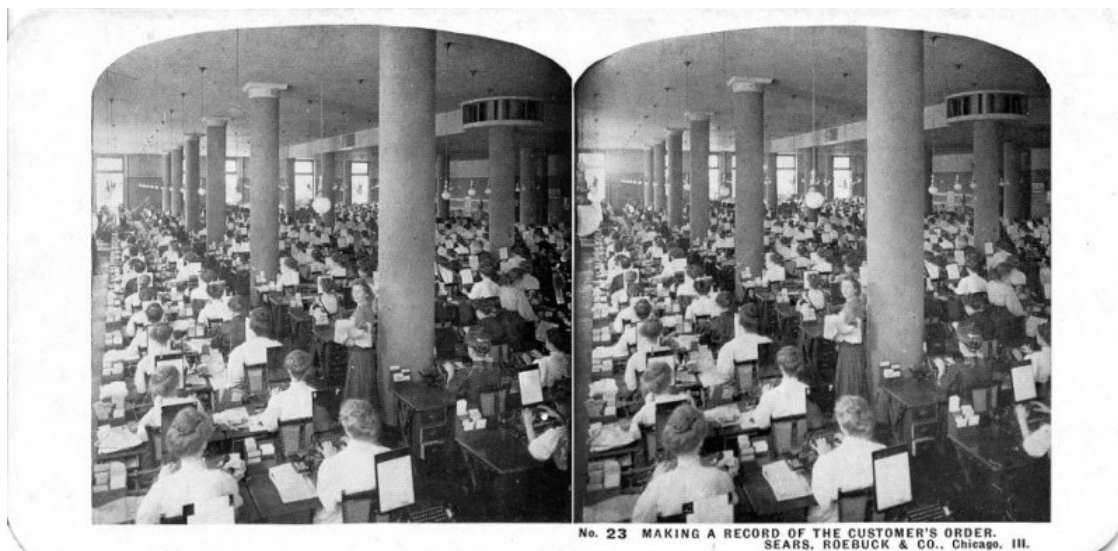
2.1. Organisational diagram, New York and Eerie Railroad, 1855



No. 20 THE ADMINISTRATION BUILDING FROM THE PERGOLA.
SEARS, ROEBUCK & CO., Chicago, Ill.

No. 20. THE ADMINISTRATION BUILDING FROM THE PERGOLA.
Sears, Roebuck & Co., Chicago, Ill.

The illustration herewith gives you a view of the magnificent entrance to the Administration Building, the home of the executive officers of Sears, Roebuck & Co. This entrance is one of the most beautiful architectural triumphs and has been illustrated and described in the greatest architectural journals in the country. This picture was taken from the Pergola just back of the Sunken Garden, a popular retreat for our employes, and one of the most unique and decorative structures in Chicago. The quiet scene spread before you here is in striking contrast to the scenes of activity within the Administration Building. To the right of the entrance and on the second floor is the great Mail Opening and Mail Auditing Departments where our customers' orders are read and the cash received credited. To the left is the Correspondence Division which handles more than 7,000 letters to our customers every working day; while on the first floor are the Auditing and the Banking Departments. This view, and others in this series, must convey to you some idea of the splendid working conditions which prevail in and about this great mercantile house. Indeed our plant is located in an ideal spot where the air is pure, and there is plenty of sunshine; and since we have beautified our grounds as shown in this illustration and others in this series of views, the surroundings of those who work for us are unusually attractive. We believe these surroundings inspire our workers to better things and make for contentment and happiness.



No. 23 MAKING A RECORD OF THE CUSTOMER'S ORDER.
SEARS, ROEBUCK & CO., Chicago, Ill.

No. 23. MAKING A RECORD OF THE CUSTOMER'S ORDER.
Sears, Roebuck & Co., Chicago, Ill.

This department is one of the most interesting as well as one of the largest departments, in point of number of employes, in this institution. During the busy season of the year, six hundred young women are employed in this room, the picture showing only a portion of this great office. The average number of young women in this department the year around is approximately five hundred. It is here that every order for merchandise is entered in our records, and the mere statement that from five to six hundred people are constantly employed in entering orders received from our customers will give you an idea of the great volume of business transacted by us. These young women are far above the average in intelligence, the very nature of their work requiring that they should be well educated, that the orders from our customers may be intelligently handled. Upon the accuracy of this department the merchandise managers must depend in filling orders.

The work of this great department is divided into eight divisions, to conform to the system designed to facilitate the handling of customers' orders. The Entry Division writes all the orders for the merchandise departments. These order tickets average in excess of sixty thousand daily. In the busy season of the year one hundred and five thousand tickets a day are handled in this room. The work of transcribing customers' orders to merchandise order tickets is performed on special typewriters; four hundred of these typewriters being in use at the present time. This gives the order fillers in the Merchandise Building typewritten instructions, thus minimizing the possibility of error and facilitating the filling of orders.

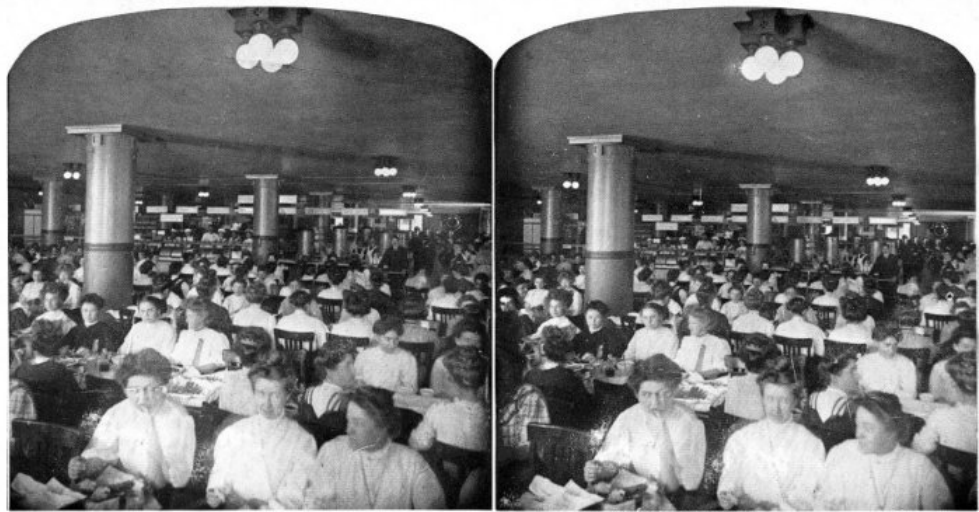
It would be almost impossible to imagine a busier place than this department. Every young woman is intent upon the work in hand. The roar of four hundred typewriters, hurrying messengers delivering new orders and collecting finished orders, the intense application of every employe in this department conveys to our visitors a most adequate idea of the immense volume of business transacted in this great merchandising institution every twenty-four hours, and while the number of people engaged exclusively in the writing of customers' orders is enormous, the activities of all employes in this department are directed along systematic lines, so that the work moves with precision and wonderful rapidity. Of the thousands and thousands of orders which come to this department every day, every one is copied and delivered to a merchandise department the same day it is received by us.



No. 27 THE CARD INDEX DEPARTMENT.
SEARS, ROEBUCK & CO., Chicago, Ill.

No. 27. THE CARD INDEX DEPARTMENT.
Sears, Roebuck & Co., Chicago, Ill.

This large room, filled with filing cabinets, is our Index Department, where we keep a record of all our transactions with our customers. One hundred and fifty-three employees are required to keep these records and this room contains the names of more than six million customers and a full and complete record of every transaction with each of them. When an order is received from a customer, an index card is prepared from that order in the department where all orders are entered, and this index card comes to this Index Department, where it is sorted in the sorting division according to state and town, then passed to young women in charge of the index cabinets devoted to that particular state or part of a state and filed alphabetically according to state and town. This elaborate method of keeping our records, while seemingly complex, is indeed very simple and enables us to immediately obtain the full record with reference to any single transaction with any customer anywhere in the United States. If a customer sends us a letter with reference to a shipment we can immediately refer to the record, providing he gives us the postoffice that the goods were ordered from or the shipping point to which the goods were shipped, should it be different from his postoffice, and we quickly ascertain the exact amount of cash received by us and the merchandise ordered by him, so that the correspondent may obtain all the records in the transaction and handle the matter to the satisfaction of our customer. From these index cards we also obtain the names of those to whom we wish to send special advertising matter. To keep this index up to date, a division is devoted to correcting the cards of our customers who notify us of any change in their postoffice addresses. Our records include all postoffices, all shipping points, R. F. D. numbers, sub-stations, summer postoffices and discontinued postoffices, and we dare say that the government itself has no more complete record of all these matters than exists in this Index Department. The character of our business is such that we are dependent upon system in handling it, and in this department centers the complex systematizing necessary to the preservation of our valuable and indispensable records.



No. 42 THE GIRLS' CAFETERIA.
SEARS, ROEBUCK & CO., Chicago, Ill.

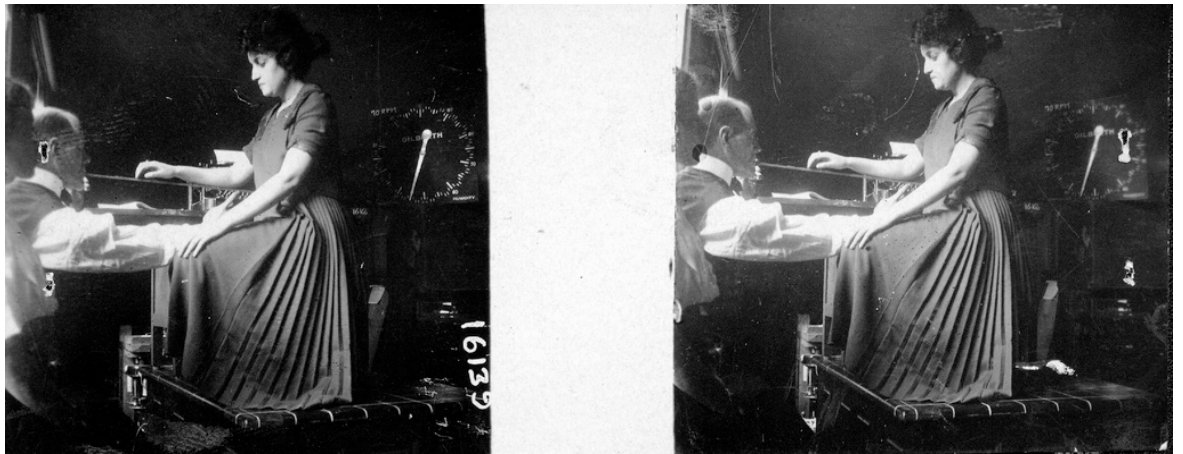
No. 42. THE GIRLS' CAFETERIA.

Sears, Roebuck & Co., Chicago, Ill.

We have, in addition to the main dining room, a lunch counter, where a quick light lunch may be secured in a very few minutes. Adjoining the lunch counter is the men's cafeteria. The service here is on the "help yourself" plan. The women's cafeteria, shown on the other side of this card, adjoins the men's on the north, and the service is distinctly the same as that in the men's cafeteria. In the Merchandise Building a big section of the basement is given over to a cafeteria provided for the accommodation of the employees in that building. The service in this cafeteria is identical with that in the two previously described, both as to bills of fare and prices. The foods are carefully selected and well prepared, notwithstanding the fact that the prices are so extremely moderate. It is possible to secure a meal for 9 cents in either of the three cafeterias, this meal comprising two sandwiches, a cup of coffee or a glass of milk, a piece of pie, some cheese and fruit. It is possible for an employe to live at our restaurants, and live comfortably, though of course on plain food, for 35 cents per day.

We have another cafeteria where those who carry their own lunches may eat them at the noon hour. The use of silver and napkins in this cafeteria is free.

It is not the purpose of the management to operate the restaurants at a profit, but rather to afford the employes of the house opportunity to secure wholesome and well cooked food at cost and to serve the meals in comfortable quarters. We endeavor to give every consideration to comfort, prompt service and economy, and as time goes on and conditions improve, we hope to be able to give our employes still better service than that now furnished them.



2.6. 'Investigating motions of least waste on typist', Stereoscopic, ca. 1915, Frank B. Gilbreth Motion Study Photographs Collection (1913-1917)



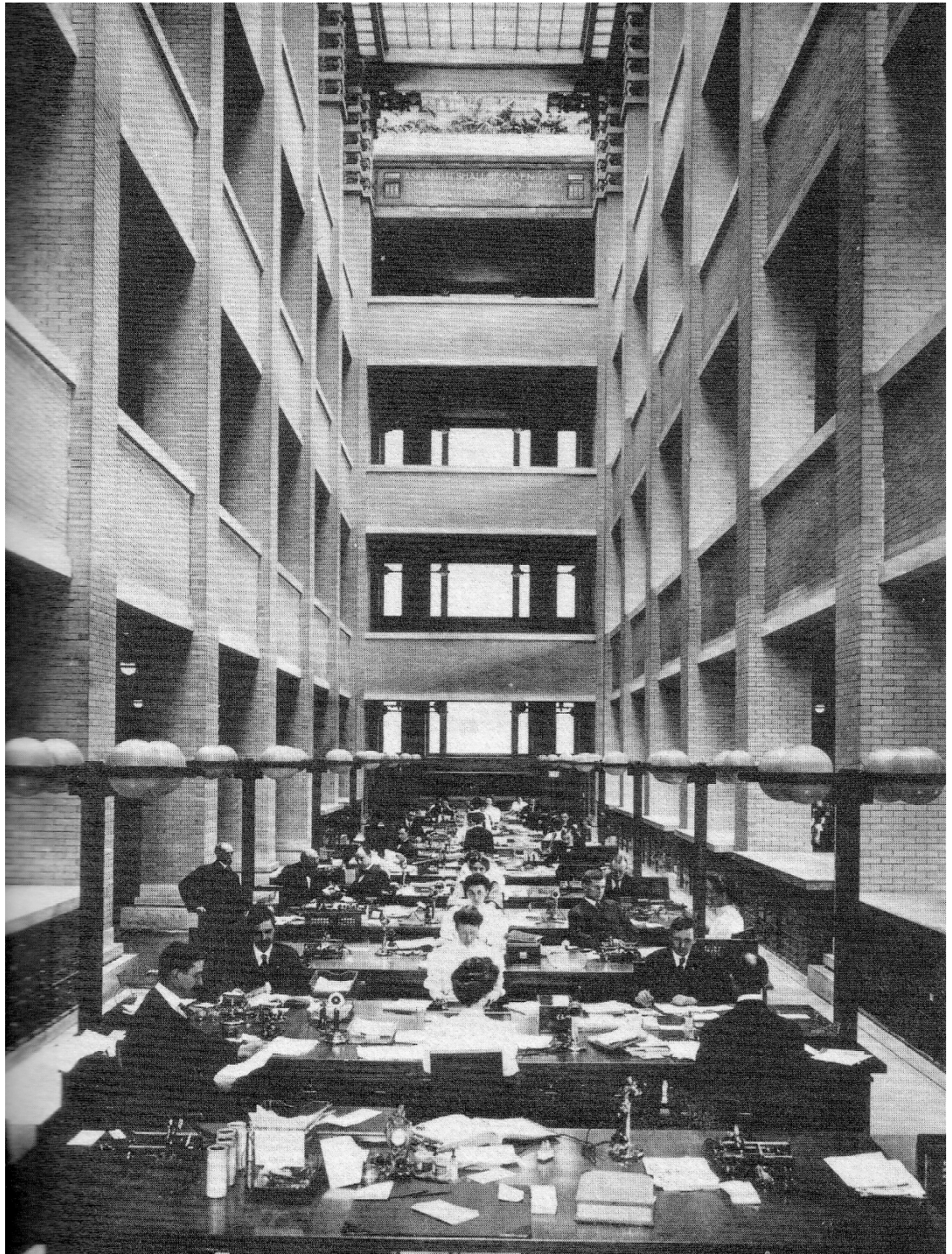
2.7. 'Champion Anna Gold moving carriage', Stereoscopic, ca. 1915, Frank B. Gilbreth Motion Study Photographs Collection (1913-1917)

i.



iii.

* 2.8. Larkin Administration Building, In-Mail Department, third floor



2.9. Larkin Administration Building, light court



2.10. Ezra Stoller, Seagram Building, New York, 1958



2.11. Ezra Stoller, Seagram Building, New York, 1958



2.12. Billy Wilder, *The Apartment*, 1960, screen shot



2.13. Exhibition display, Museum of London Docklands, 2013, author's photograph



2.15. TWBA\Chiat\Day Office, Los Angeles, California, 1998

The origins of the modern office date back to the Industrial Revolution. Dramatic industrial growth led to an unprecedented need for communications, record keeping and administration. The office as a building type emerged in the 1830s and 1840s in the City of London, side by side with the offices of merchants, banks, and the government set in domestic and institutional buildings (Cruickshank, 1983). In contrast to these, the office building was a financial venture with lucrative aim. Speculative office buildings and the increasing number of clerical workers required radical architectural innovations and efficient spatial organisation in order to ensure the profitability of businesses, including real estate ownership.

The origins of photography date from the same historical period. In 1839, Daguerre made public his invention of a process to fix camera images on a silver-plated sheet of copper, the daguerreotype, whose rights were bought by the French government and made publicly available, free of charge, in that same year. In 1841, Talbot patented in England the calotype, a process of fixing latent images on paper, producing a negative image from which multiple positive prints could then be made.

Products of the mid-nineteenth century and the Industrial Revolution, the modern office and photography both emerged and expanded as widespread technologies for the production and reproduction of records, contributing to what James Beniger terms the reestablishment of 'control'.

Bureaucracy and the 'crisis of control'

In his study of the origins of the 'Information Society', communications and sociology theorist James Beniger (1986) places the modern office at the centre of the 'Control Revolution'. Beniger defines 'control' broadly, as the purposive influence on behaviour, however slight, toward a predetermined goal of the controlling agent (pp7-8). According to him, the Industrial Revolution generated an unprecedented 'crisis of control':

Never before had the processing of material flows threatened to exceed, in both volume and speed, the capacity of technology to contain them. For centuries most goods had moved with the speed of draft animals down roadway and canal,

weather permitting. This infrastructure, controlled by small organizations of only a few hierarchical levels, supported even national economies. Suddenly – owing to the harnessing of steam power – goods could be moved at the full speed of industrial production, night and day and under virtually any conditions, not only from town to town but across entire continents and around the world. To do this, however, required an increasingly complex system of manufacturers and distributors, central and branch offices, transportation lines and terminals, containers and cars, that grew increasingly staggering in its complexity (Beniger, 1986, p279).

As the crisis unfolded, a series of technological innovations in the collection, storing, processing and communication of information, and on the way decisions can effect societal control, steadily developed until eventually, by the turn of the century, the control crisis had been largely contained throughout the US, England, France and Germany. The single overarching and most important control technology was, following Beniger, the development of formal bureaucracy, understood in its Weberian sense, as the rationalization of collective activities. Within an organization, bureaucratization occurs by the establishment of a system of impersonal rules defining functions and responsibilities, and ordering careers (Crozier, 2010, p3). In Max Weber's description of bureaucracy's 'ideal type', this form of control involves job specialization (jobs consist in simple, routine and well-defined tasks); hierarchical authority, whereby all positions are situated within a clear chain of command; employees' selection and promotion based on their technical qualifications and offer of a full-time career; record keeping, all administrative acts and decisions being recorded in writing; rules and procedures to which all employees are subjected, therefore guaranteeing reliable and predictable behaviour; and impersonality of the said rules and procedures, applying equally to managerial and non-managerial staff (Buchanan and Huczynski, 2004, p505).

Bureaucratic control was the solution to the majority of the problems in control. The transportation sector in the USA was pioneer. In the 1840s, the alarming number of accidents and casualties in the railroads was resolved through the institution of centralized new headquarters, linked to regional offices by strict chains of command, each of them overseeing a specific set of issues. This

organizational structure was based in regular and careful data collection, the formalization of information processing and decision rules, and the standardization of communication with feedback. Workers, including train conductors, received detailed and explicit rules on how to perform each of their tasks; directors constantly studied and reprogrammed the system. The institution of this bureaucratic model created division, specialization and deskilling of labour at such levels that for the first time in history it was possible to use workers as programmable, employing people 'not for their strength or ability, nor for their knowledge or intelligence, but for the more objective capacity of their brains to store and process information' (Beniger, 1986, p225). However, the end of safety problems in the railroads gave way to a crisis in efficiency: as the risks of collision lowered, traffic augmented exponentially and the systems of control were again overburdened. The Erie Railroad, America's first great trunk line connecting East and West from 1851, reacted by devising a system that centralized control in the company's superintendent office, through a new hierarchical system of information gathering, processing, and communication. Erie's general superintendent, Daniel McCallum, designed an organizational chart (generally credited as the first such chart ever created) detailing with precision the lines of authority and especially communication between Erie's various offices and employees (illus. 2.1). Hourly, daily and monthly reports were to be sent via telegraph to McCallum's office by all train conductors, stations agents and heads of service departments, which required a spectacular amount of data processing. This information served not only to know the precise location of a train at any time, it made equally possible to compile statistical data crucial to inform the business operational decisions. The information collected also permitted also to control employees, by comparing the data each of them sent from their respective side of the supervisor/ subordinate relationship, and to rank employees according to their relative efficiency within their position.

Identical solutions based on bureaucratic organization, through precise division of labour and heavy information gathering and processing, were adopted across the industrial sector. In distribution, wholesalers not coping with the sheer scale of the movement of thousands of products from hundreds of manufacturers and purchasing offices, to thousands of retailers and costumers, adopted a progressive subdivision of the business into operating units, supervised by a

hierarchy of salaried managers. Each of the new departments constituted an almost independent unit within the company (each had its own administrative office), filling particular information-processing, communication and control functions within the areas of purchasing, general sales, advertising, orders, traffic and shipping, credit and collections, and accounting (Beninger, 1986, p256). To effect control over the different units, a hierarchy of managers was devised. Each department was headed by a general manager that would decide on all matters regarding their respective department, and would then report to the firm's top managers. This hierarchy of salaried managers was a complete innovation, breaking away with what had been the traditional form of management until the 1840s: merchants directing the business themselves, most usually with the help of a family member and a few clerks.

By the mid-1920s, the majority of large manufacturers had adopted a multidivisional decentralized bureaucratic structure and bureaucracy in its modern form was largely defined. The office was the centre of gravity of the Control Revolution. As chaos was controlled mainly through technologies that expanded dramatically its role in the economy, the office became, as Beniger (1986) puts it, the 'generalized information processor' (p280), a formal bureaucracy created to manage businesses through the creation, storage, programming, processing, and communication of information. A stream of technological innovations continually expanded these functions, as new inventions created still more paper. To give a few examples, the mechanical data-processing equipment that entered the office since the end of the 1880s included: the modern QWERTY keyboard typewriter (released in 1873 by Remington), the portable (1892) and the electric (1935) typewriter; for printing, the octuple rotary power presses printing 96,000 eight-page copies per hour (1893); for copying, several experiments with photographic copying led to the Photostat in 1910, the first photographic copying machine that made copies through a photographic camera exposing sensitized photographic paper which was developed producing a negative print, that was on its turn 'photostatted' in order to produce any number of copies as required; xerography – or photography with no cameras and no chemicals, using static electricity - was only invented in the mid-1940s, and it only became commercially available in 1959, with the release of the Xerox 9-14 copier. For gathering information, the stock-ticker (invented in 1867, it transmitted current stock market prices over

telegraph lines); for recording and storing information, the systematization of shorthand (1848), the systematization of office record-keeping (early 1870s), the dictating machine (1885); for communicating information, the telegraph (widespread after 1844), the telephone (widespread by the 1880s) including long-distance lines (1890); for processing numerical data, the keyboard calculator (1887), adding-subtracting machines with printer (1892), mass-produced four function calculators (1894), electric printing calculators (1924), multiple-register accumulating calculators (1928), linked accumulating calculators for producing data tables (1930), electronic calculator (1939). For large scale data-processing, a spate of inventions led eventually to the modern computer, starting with the Hollerith electric punch-card tabulator (1889).

The mechanical equipment was crucial for corporations like Sears, Roebuck & Co, a mail order catalogue business formed in 1893 in Chicago. Soon, it had grown out of proportion: it employed thousands of people, its catalogue was known as the 'consumers' bible' and the corporation was the first in the retail sector to be listed in the New York Stock Exchange. It was usual at the time for large corporations such as Sears to commission commercial photography studios to photograph their massive offices. In 1906 Sears produced a set of 50 stereoscopic views to be sold to the public titled 'A Trip Through Sears, Roebuck & CO.' showing the interiors of all the departments in the office, where hundreds of clerical staff are seen at work (Sears, 1906) (illus. 2.2 – 2.5).

The 'One Best Way To Do Work': the Taylorist office

The increasing number of clerical workers and the costly mechanic equipment led to the rationalisation of the office in terms similar to that of factories. Rationalisation, Beniger (1986) explains, appeared as a complement to bureaucratisation, and consisted in 'preprocessing', that is, in destructing or ignoring information in order to facilitate its processing (pp15-6). A manifestation of rationalisation was standardised paper forms, which appeared at this time. Through boxes to check and blanks to fill, forms allow collecting only a limited range of formal, objective and impersonal information, therefore 'rationalising' information collection by ignoring nuances and particularities. The 'time studies' method devised by Frederick Winslow Taylor, the founder of so-called 'scientific'

management in the late 1890s, was also a manifestation of rationalisation. It consisted in time-measuring factory workers' movements and breaking down tasks to simple, standardised gestures in order to find the 'one best way' to perform work. As Beniger (1986) puts it, 'scientific management sought to preprocess out of industrial operations the personal idiosyncrasies that distinguished workers as individuals' (p294).

Scientific management was equally applied to clerical work. Eager to reduce costs and increase productivity, businesses started to hire management consultants, who would study their administrative processes and devise improvements for increasing its efficiency, employing observation, many times through photography, as their methods. This was the case of Frank and Lillian Gilbreth, who used film and photography to study workers' movements as a way of finding the 'One Best Way To Do Work' (Lindstrom, 2000, p729) (illus. 2.6). They devised techniques such as the 'micromotion study', which consisted in filming a worker performing a task against a cross-sectioned background and a special clock to record time. The exam of the individual frames permitted to measure the speed of motions to the hundredth of a second. The technique was applied for instance to the dating of requisitions, allowing a 21% output improvement by replacing the original one-handed pattern with a two-handed motion pattern, and a 61% output improvement by replacing the original pattern with a two hands and one foot pattern (Gilbreth). The Gilbreths employed still photography on a number of techniques, attaching small light bulbs to workers' fingers, wrists or elbows and taking long-exposures of the workers while performing a task. The resulting image, a 'cyclegraph', showed the light line created by the workers' movements: a line abundant in twists and turns meant that the performance could be improved until the thinnest, softest line was achieved (illus. 2.7). Another technique, the 'chronocyclegraph', also allowed motions' times to be measured. By using regular intermittent electric current in the light bulbs, the relative position in the photograph of the dots created by the light would indicate a slow pace if the dots were close together, or a fast pace if they were rather disperse. They invented also 'stereochronocyclegraphs', three dimensional images produced by two offset cameras to be viewed with the stereoscope, which they used to improve the finger motion of typists, claiming to have helped many into winning the 'champion typist' title. As sociologist Margery Davies shows, competitiveness was a tactic favoured

by office managers, who would use it to pressure employees to meet the standard; other strategies involved rewarding clerical workers monetarily if they attained the standard, and docking them monetarily if they did not (Davies, 1982, p115).

The rationalisation of work required the rationalisation of space. In *Scientific Office Management* (1917), William H. Leffingwell, the precursor of the application of Taylorism to the office, writes: 'first in importance ... is the division and layout of the office work' and an office 'laid out so that the work will not travel back and forth over the same path' (p7). In this 'report', as the subtitle reads, 'on the results of applications of the Taylor System of Scientific Management to offices', Leffingwell gives advice on how to solve specific problems such as 'lost motion', using case studies as well as photography to illustrate his arguments. This is particularly the case in relation to the disposition of space, where in order to show for instance how a typist department should be arranged, he juxtaposes two photographs of offices, the caption of the first image reading 'an overcrowded office', that of the second reading 'plenty of room' (Leffingwell, 1917, p135).

Leffingwell's manual is a great source to understand what the 'scientific' management of the office consisted in. Leffingwell provides detailed descriptions that testify to how this 'method' organised space and, through it, people, in order to increase their productivity. For instance, to increase the flows of work, 'the aisles should be straight, running through from one end of the office to the other. Desks should be placed in pairs, with an aisles on each side of the pair, so that a clerk can leave his [sic] desk without disturbing anyone' (p8). In some offices it might be advisable to introduce 'an endless conveyor belt running at a very low speed pass[ing] alongside of each clerk [so that] little time is lost in passing the work from one operator to the next' (p67). Drinking water fountains should be widely available so that workers drink 'at least five or six times a day' (p11) without walking unnecessary distances, which amounts to 'waste motion'. Other examples of 'waste motion' and thereby wasted time included: distraction, mainly caused by 'loud talk' and 'visitors arriving within plain sight and hearing', which 'not only causes a delay during the actual length of time of the interruption, but considerable time is necessary to get back into the swing of the work'; insufficient supplies (rulers, pens, scratch pads), which make clerks 'waste from five to ten minutes a day – not that it took as long as that to do the actual borrowing, but because it furnished conversational opportunities'; lack of a desk system, which the

supervisor can check by 'suddenly ask[ing the clerk] for an eraser or a ruler or some other item that is not in constant use and see how long it takes to locate it' (Leffingwell, 1917, pp203-208). Noise, Leffingwell writes, 'is expensive' as it 'causes fatigue, which ... results in a form of poison. (...) Every effort should be made to reduce [talking] by urging clerks to speak in subdued tones if it is necessary to speak at all', a request that should be made so that it is 'understood by all that the reason ... is to reduce the amount of fatigue and not merely a whim of the proprietor' (p11-2). Floyd W. Parsons, a consultant contemporary to Leffingwell, advised that 'if possible, desks should be placed so that the workers will be back to back. Cliques destroy team-work and waste time gossiping'. In another office, desks were arranged facing one way, with the supervisor in the rear, so that 'effective supervision and ... close attention to work [were] easier', flat-top desks being preferred to roll top ones since in the former 'the worker is at all times visible to his superior' (Parsons, 1923, p. 394, cited in Davies, 1982, p123).

Large businesses introduced facilities such as canteens, with the aim both of improving working conditions and increasing productivity, as is shown by an office manager's evaluation of the canteen his company had introduced six years before: 'we have easily halved the noon absence of our organisation ... Better yet, the women instead of going out and drinking a little tea, are sent back to work with something substantial in their stomachs. The men, instead of going to a free-lunch counter, and coming back with the smell of beer on them, have clear heads and we think we can do very nearly as good in the afternoon as in the morning' (Davies, 1982, p124). Paternalistic forms of control of workers were adopted by business owners like Henry Ford, the inventor of the Model T and founder of the Ford Motor Company. Ford famously offered a salary of \$5 a day to those working on its moving assembly line (introduced in 1913, it was the first ever), on the condition that they observed the company's codes of behaviour, including outside work hours. Ford's 'Sociological Department' made unannounced visits to the workers' homes to check their cleanliness, checked with schools to verify whether their children were attending classes, monitored bank accounts to confirm that workers made regular deposits. It provided an English school for non-speakers and classes to the wives of the workers (all male) on hygiene, as well as financial and legal advice (Benson Ford Research Centre, no date).

The Larkin Administration Building, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright and built in Buffalo, New York in 1904, is generally considered as the epitome of 'enlightened Taylorism' (Duffy, 1997, p21) and the model open plan office (van Meel, 2000, p27). It was commissioned by the Larkin Soap Manufacturing Company to house its headquarters and the new expanding, lucrative mail order business, which employed 1,800 clerks (Quinan, 1987, p72). Wright created a six-and-a-half story light-courted structure for the main work which included on the top floor dining facilities with kitchen and bakery, as well as a conservatory, plus a smaller annex with support facilities for the workers, following Larkin's executives views that benefits like educational incentives, profit-sharing schemes and activities such as noon-hour concerts and lectures, annual picnics and workers' clubs, together with a clean, safe, and attractive office environment increased productivity (Quinan, 1987, pp44 and 100). The various tasks comprised in the mail handling activity were distributed within the main building with high precision, observing the flow of work (illus. 2.8). Clerks sorting mail and filing orders, and typewriter operators (mostly female), sat in ordered lines placed in large open plan spaces, well-illuminated by natural light and provided with a sophisticated heating and ventilation system, including air-conditioning (the first ever devised). Leffingwell uses a photograph of the Larkin's typist department to illustrate how this space should be laid out in order to 'increase production from typists' (Leffingwell, 1917, p135).

The furniture, designed by Wright, was in metal, and included three standard types of rectangular desks and four types of chairs, as well as built-in filing cabinets (which had been custom designed for the card ledger system pioneered by the company). The metal chairs, in particular those cantilevered from most metal desks (for making cleaning easier) and permitting only a limited arc of movement, drew complaints from the workers, who asked for more comfortable wooden chairs (Quinan, 1987, p62). Larkin's executives sat at desks in parallel rows among other clerks on the open floor beneath the skylight, visible from the upper floors' balconies (illus. 2.9). The owner and his sons had semi-private offices, located under the balcony and fitted with partially glazed walls. The annexe building was accessible from the main building through an area where typists sat, which discouraged overuse of the facilities. Its size indicated that only a fraction of the workers were to use it at the same time (Quinan, 1987, p84). It

included lockers and washing rooms, a library, a classroom for English grammar and writing teaching, a YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association) room, and a lounge equipped with wood and leather chairs and sofas, drapes, a fireplace and a piano (Quinan, 1987, pp72-84).

The building was decorated with sculptures and other fixtures designed by Wright. Motivational inscriptions exalting the virtues of work were carved onto the piers rising from the main floor to the skylight that surrounded the light court, producing a transcendental, quasi-religious atmosphere: 'Thought Feeling Action', 'Cooperation Economy Industry', or 'Intelligence Enthusiasm Control' (Quinan, 1987, p102). Tours of the Larkin Building were organised for visitors, with lunch at the top floor dining room included; postcards showing the Larkin Complex (including twelve factories and seven other buildings) were available at the lobby entrance. Workers seemed to be satisfied too; to a former secretary, the Larkin Company was 'a class place to work in Buffalo ... They took *care* of you', while others described the interior as 'beautiful ... beautiful', creating an 'almost magical aura of calmness and order' (Quinan, 1987, pp44 and 110).

However, the major tendency in office architecture was the high-rise building, as it maximised the use and profitability of space, and functioned as advertising and a symbol of power for corporations. Taylorist North America led the office skyscraper spree with the construction of the first skyscraper in Chicago in 1884 to house an insurance company. Soon high-rise office buildings were dominating the urban landscape. In 1916, a 'zoning law' in New York limited the height and required setbacks for new buildings in order to preserve sunlight and an open atmosphere in their surroundings (Klein, 1982, p18). As with the first speculative offices built in London a century before, the need to maximise profits dictated that space had to be exploited to its maximum capacity. Office towers like the Chrysler Building (1928-1930) and the Empire State Building (1930-31) offered standardised, uninterrupted office space, an 'empty shell' that was easy divisible and which tenants (and their interior designers) could then adapt to the needs of their businesses.

Around that time, European modernism entered the USA, following the arrival of exiled Bauhaus European architects such as Mies van der Rohe and Walter Gropius, and its promotion by the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1932, through a major exhibition of Modern Architecture showing what the curators

termed the new 'International Style' that included works by Mies, Gropius and Le Corbusier among others, and toured the US for three years. As sociologist Mauro Guillén shows, when it emerged between 1890 and 1930, European modernist architecture had embraced enthusiastically Taylorist scientific management, not only because cost and efficiency were socially and politically important, but also because it had found an aesthetic message in the efficiency of the machine. As Guillén puts it,

If scientific management argued that organisations and people in organisations worked, or were supposed to work, like machines ... European modernism insisted on the aesthetic potential of efficiency, precision, simplicity, regularity, and functionality; on producing useful and beautiful objects; on designing buildings and artifacts that would look like machines and be used like machines; on infusing design and social life with order (Guillén, 2006, p14).

Standardisation was seen as a virtue, both democratic and beautiful. Drawing on his readings of Taylor and Ford, Le Corbusier developed the concept of the 'machine for living', writing that 'a house is a machine for living in... an armchair is a machine for sitting in, and so on', proposing that 'in order to BUILD: STANDARDISE to be able to INDUSTRIALIZE AND TAYLORIZE' (Guillén, 2006, pp31-2). In Germany, Gropius and his collaborators at the Bauhaus introduced time-motion studies in the affordable housing projects built in response to the postwar housing shortage, using photo cameras and stopwatches. They subscribed also to the separation of task conception from task execution, and adopted hierarchy and unity of command, as well as standardisation and division of labour, as ways to improve the speed and efficiency of the execution of the tight budget government building programmes (Guillén, 1997, p692).

According to Guillén (1997), modernism did not develop in the USA until 1930 as American architects failed to appreciate the aesthetic potential of scientific management and 'clung [instead] to the old-fashioned taste for superfluous ornamentation', with the result that 'skyscrapers continued to be designed according to pre-modernist tastes, forms and motifs until well into the 1930s' (pp684 and 706). Modernism diffused there after WWII, especially during the economic boom from 1945 to 1965. As Guillén puts it,

Its impact transcended the organisation of the building activity itself. The scientific management content underlying modernist architecture has exerted a widespread, profound, and lasting effect on the people living, studying, or working in the myriad of Taylorized, machine-looking buildings erected [then] ... and that still dominate the configuration of the modern city, the industrial complex, and the university campus (2006, p142).

Offices in particular received the attention of modernist architects, who conceived them as 'machines for working in'. Le Corbusier for instance wrote enthusiastically about 'admirable office furniture' as one of the most significant new objects of modern life. The height of modernist, functionalist workspace came to be the Seagram building in New York, designed by Mies van der Rohe (with interiors by Philip Johnson) and completed in 1958, to serve as the headquarters for the Seagram company, the world's largest distiller of alcoholic beverages at the time (illus. 2.10 and 2.11). As architecture critic Franz Schulze puts it, the Seagram is 'the *sine qua non* of late-modern skyscrapers ... defined "modern classicism" ... and became the ultimate in commercial prestige architecture' (Stoller and Schulze, 1999, p10). Subsequently, glass box skyscrapers in the 'International Style' became the dominant type of office architecture worldwide, spread by architectural firms such as Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM), formed in 1936 and responsible for numerous so-called iconic buildings, from the Lever House in New York in 1952 and the Sears Tower in Chicago in 1973, to Canary Wharf in London in the late 1980s, the Burj Khalifa in Dubai in 2004 and the new One World Trade Centre in New York.

But if many loved them, the rationalist glass boxes were also derided. In the film *PlayTime* (1967), Jacques Tati's comic and witty satire of modern life, the office is portrayed as a perfectly geometrical environment set within glass walls, with grey, functional interiors, where office workers move at straight angles to the layout and typists sit perfectly straight. In this environment, Monsieur Hulot, who is on his way to a meeting, gets lost in the maze of identical rooms and eventually stumbles into a trade exhibition of (lookalike) office furniture and design. In his 1981 book *From Bauhaus to Our House*, the writer Tom Wolfe mocked, as designer theorist Jeremy Myerson puts it,

the historical irony by which cheap geometric worker housing designed for the crisis-torn Weimar Republic by morally-driven Bauhaus academics became the unchallenged architectural blueprint for “the very Babylon of capitalism”—America in the 1950s and 1960s (Myerson et al., 2010, p34).

Office industries, or the 'Unseen Hand'

In his influential 1950s study of the emergent American middle classes, the sociologist C. Wright Mills draws attention to the pervasiveness of the office in society:

The office is the Unseen Hand become visible as a row of clerks and a set of IBM equipment, a pool of dictaphone transcribers, and sixty receptionists confronting the elevators, one above the other, on each floor. (...) In the morning irregular rows of people enter the skyscraper monument to the office culture. During the day they do their little part of the business system, the government system, the war-system, the money-system, co-ordinating the machinery, commanding each other, persuading the people of other worlds, recording the activities that make up the nation's day of work. (...) And at night, after the people leave the skyscrapers, the streets are empty and inert, and the hand is unseen again (Mills, 2002, p189).

The decades after World War II represent the boom years of the service industries and the transition to the so-called 'Information Society' in industrialised societies. For Beniger, the Information Society is the culmination of the Control Revolution, the 20th century equivalent of the Industrial Revolution, whereby not only control over production, distribution, transportation, consumption and communications was regained, but also centralised economic and political control, which had been lost before the Industrial Revolution as government and markets depended on personal relationships and face-to-face interactions, was restored (Beniger 1986, p433).

In the Information Society, 'the bulk of the labour force engages in informational activities and the wealth thus generated comes increasingly from informational goods and services' (Beniger: 426). The concept originated in the 1950s, when the economist Fritz Machlup measured the sector of the economy

involved in the 'production and distribution of knowledge', grouping it into five major categories: 'education, research and development, communications media, information machines (like computers), and information services (finance, insurance, real estate)' (Beniger, 1986, p22).

The changes involved in this transition altered profoundly the composition of the working population, as well as the configuration of work. The emergence of the modern office in the mid-nineteenth century had led to the emergence of a new middle class, that of the 'white-collar workers' (as opposed to 'blue-collar' workers). Acknowledging the difficulties in defining this heterogeneous group, sociologist Michel Crozier proposed a distinction that contrasted nonmanual activities with manual activities and agricultural activities, distinguishing under nonmanual activities between professional, technical, and related occupations (doctors, engineers, teachers, technicians and the like), managerial and related occupations (managers, officials, and proprietors), office jobs (clerks), and sales workers (Crozier, 1971, p8). The number of white-collar workers in industrialised countries rose steadily throughout the 20th century, outnumbering manual workers for the first time in 1957 in the USA (Crozier, 1971, p1), while in the UK this happened in 1981 (Abercrombie et al., 1994, p175). Until the 1940s, clerical workers, comprising stenographers, typists, secretaries, bookkeepers, cashiers, office machine operators, were the group that expanded the most (Mills, 202, pp63-5). In London, the banks and offices of the City employed a constantly expanding 'army of clerical workers', who lived in increasingly distant suburbs and used the train or the Metropolitan Railway (the world's first underground railway, open in 1893) and the City and South London Railway (the first electric underground railway, open in 1890) to commute daily to and from work. By the mid-1930s, the weekday working population of the City was around half a million (Kenyon: 19). Women were admitted to the office in great numbers, mainly to operate the mechanical equipment and perform routine office work. In the USA, in 1891 twenty per cent of all clerical workers were women typists. By 1920 more than ninety per cent of the stenographers and typists were women. And by 1950, secretaries, stenographers and typists made up the largest group of working women (Berebitsky, 2012, p9).

After World War II, employment in the service sector rose steadily. In parallel to clerical work, professional and technical white-collar occupations grew as corporations in banking, insurance, accountancy, advertising and legal services

expanded. However, the introduction of computerisation led to continuous deskilling and decreasing job control and autonomy, especially of clerical workers (McColloch, 1983, p175). Distinctions were introduced between highly skilled, semi-managerial operations and routine processing of data into a form in which it could be used by a computer, as this could be operated by anyone. Data processing clerks and keypunch operators (mostly female) began to be hired for those jobs alone. Their chances of rising to higher job positions were virtually non-existent. Computerisation generated a factory-like atmosphere in large offices such as those of banks, where 'check processing centres' had hundreds of workers organised in an assembly line-like flow of work and working night shifts. Work was extremely monotonous and interaction with other workers was discouraged (McColloch, 1983, pp117-8). The film *The Apartment* (1960) parodies the inhuman scale of the services office: the main character, C. C. 'Bud' Baxter is a clerk who seats at 'desk number 861' in the 'ordinary policy department', in the 'section W' of the 'premium accounts division' of an insurance corporation that employs 'thirty thousand plus' workers (illus. 2.12). A number among many, the only way he finds to gain the attention and the favours of his hierarchical superiors is by lending them his apartment for their extramarital affairs. In return, he gets a promotion and moves out of the open plan to a private office with a view over the city.

The situation of near full employment lived during these decades obliged growing corporations to compete with factories for attracting workers. Factories offered better salaries to workers aware of the drudgery of data processing jobs in offices. In response, corporate employers relied on the perceived image of respectability and middle-class status of office work, and improved the physical environment of offices, making it more pleasant. As architecture historian Adrian Forty (1986) shows, offices were fitted with 'attractive entrances, carpeted floors, tasteful colour, finely designed equipment ... soft lighting ... varied finishes and designs that suggested fun rather than brutal industrial efficiency' and made them resemble 'the contemporarily-furnished homes of the wealthy' (pp140 and 154).

Eventually, improvements in computerisation led to the elimination of a wide range of data processing posts and to regular layoffs. In the USA, more than 100,000 white collar workers a year were losing their jobs due to automation. In one bank for example the number of bookkeepers was reduced from six hundred

to one hundred and fifty in eighteen months (McColloch, 1983, p115). Initially, it had been profitable for banks to buy a computer only if they could eliminate at least one hundred and twenty job posts; in a few years, this number decreased to slightly more than half of that (McColloch, 1983, p115).

A new stage in the development of the Information Society commenced in the 1970s, characterised by the progressive interconnection and convergence of information processing and communications technologies through digitalisation (Beniger, 1986, p25). The turning point was the introduction of the personal computer in the 1980s. It not only contributed further to the elimination of clerical tasks, it also created a 'deterritorialised space of flows' in which money, advice and even people could be moved around the world at high speeds (McDowell, 1997, p1). New technologies enabling the almost instantaneous transfer of vast sums of money and allowing electronically-based trading, as well as the development of new financial instruments, and the deregulation of money markets, led in the 1980s to a boom in the financial services sector. The globalisation of capital entailed the globalisation of services to finance, commerce and industry. A new category of professionals expanded: international lawyers, corporate tax accountants, financial advisers, management consultants. Among this new service middle-class, it was the financiers and bankers who were characterised as 'the personification of the era: the apotheosis of individualistic, profit-oriented "yuppies"' (McDowell, 1997, p22). In the words of McDowell (1997), the 'sexy/greedy' years of City expansion 'exercised a remarkable hold on the popular imagination, and the exchanges and dealing rooms of New York and London became the locus of a series of books, films and plays' (p8). One such popular fiction, the film *Wall Street* (1987). The 'greed is good' motto of its protagonist, the Wall Street boss Gordon Gekko, provided the 'motto of the decade' (McDowell, 1997, p160).

The cities where financial markets were based became 'global cities', with London, New York and Tokyo at the apex of the new globalised economic space. Each of these cities has what economic sociologist Sharon Zukin (1992) terms a 'landscape of power': 'at least one densely built, centrally located, high-rise district that drives both property values for the metropolitan region as a whole and office employment in financial and other business services' (pp197-8). The 'International Style' gave architectural expression to these 'landscapes of power'. In London, SOM designed the master plan for Canary Wharf (including several of its buildings

and squares), whose construction started in the late 1980s and concluded in the mid-1990s (more buildings having been subsequently added) (illus. 2.13). The development introduced for the first time in London the pure form of the North American office building, with a central core and uninterrupted empty floors, making it attractive to large American corporations. In the City, office buildings were built and rebuilt to adapt Victorian classical façades representing the power of old merchant banking and its wealthy individual owners to the changes brought about by technology and the new glass and steel façade of corporate and financial power.

In the subsequent period, white-collar work was once again redefined. Political economist Robert Reich (1992) divides it into three main categories: 'routine production services', corresponding to repetitive tasks and supervision (almost residual in the Information Society); 'in-person services', consisting in 'simple and repetitive tasks' which must be provided with a 'pleasant demeanour' (including among others waiters/resses, flight attendants, taxi drivers and, in the office, secretaries and security guards—'among the fastest-growing of all'); and 'symbolic-analytic services', comprising 'problem-solving, problem-identifying, and strategic-brokering' activities, including among others research scientists, university professors, writers and editors, journalists, musicians, photographers, and the majority of office workers: lawyers, investment bankers, consultants in numerous areas, advertising executives (pp205-208).

The 21st century office

The 21st Century Office (Myerson and Ross, 2003) is the title of one of the many books on office design. Their titles seldom fail to include the word 'new': *New Office Design* (Riewoldt and Hudson, 1994), *The New Office* (Duffy, 1997), *New Workplaces for New Workstyles* (Zelinsky, 1998), *New Demographics New Workspace* (Myerson et. al., 2010), to give but a few examples. In them, office designers criticise the Taylorist 'dominant office culture of the twentieth century' and the values it imposed on the office space: 'order, hierarchy, supervision, depersonalisation' (Duffy, 1997, p16). This space, materialised in the orthogonal arrangement of cubicles within the open floors of the speculative 'glass box' is, they argue, ill suited for the 'growing importance of knowledge rather than data'

and new 'ways of working (...) [that are] mobile, peripatetic, even nomadic', in a 'world of work that is now totally dependent upon information technology' (Duffy, 1997: 46 and 50-1). Against 'conventional' offices, they offer new spatial models, which aim to give shape to the 'office of the future' (Riewoldt and Hudson, 1994, p8). All usually invoke a common reference for the inspiration of their proposals: that of 'office landscape' (from *Bürolandschaft*), a type of office layout conceived in Germany in the 1960s. This consisted in arranging workers within the open plan according to 'an optimal relationship to one another', regardless of position and hierarchical rank (van Meel, 2000). All workers without exception had a desk in the open plan, as no private offices, nor other enclosed space, was available. In contrast to the regular rows typical of the American open plan, in the office landscape desks, furniture and equipment were disposed without following a pattern, according to lines of communication between different groups. Large plants and acoustic screens were used to provide privacy. The impression on site was that of a random arrangement. With this layout, the designers wanted to create a work environment that fostered both formal and informal communication and association between workers, as well as a pleasant environment providing comfort (given the simple but good quality furniture and carpeted floors) and privacy (afforded by foliage and also by furniture disposed in a way to avoid both visual confrontation and the overlooking of another's work) (Duffy, 1992). The 'primary aim' was to 'make the office work as efficiently as possible', with basis on the idea that 'staff must be made to feel at ease; if they do not, productivity will suffer' (Duffy, 1992, p12).

After enjoying a period of popularity in Continental Europe (the car manufacturer Volvo in Sweden for instance chose an office landscape arrangement for the new headquarters they built in 1967), office landscape was abandoned due to its poor reception among workers themselves. They complained about 'unpleasant temperature variations, draughts, low humidity, unacceptable noise levels, poor natural lighting, lack of visual contact with the outside' (van Meel, 2000, 37). Van Meel (2000) points also to the possibility that the closeness and tight contact that the space promoted were too foreign a concept for North Europeans to adapt to (p37). Sundstrom and Sundstrom (1986) in turn point out that in the USA, where some experiments with office landscape took place, the main complaint came from managers, who had been stripped of

their private offices, the very symbol of their status within the office (p38). The elimination of hierarchical relationships had been precisely one of the arguments underpinning office landscape. The designers, as van Meel (2000) puts it, wanted that the 'exchange of information no longer had to take place in a vertical direction, downward from boss to worker, but along functional lines, ignoring departmental or hierarchical barriers' (p33).

Despite its short life, office landscape inspired other design innovations, namely the concept of 'systems furniture' that became widespread. This consists in flexible combinations of desks and dividing panels (the so-called 'cubicle') onto which shelves and cabinets can be mounted in order to customise it, and are easily dismantled and reconfigured. Lightweight, interchangeable furniture became increasingly preferred to (heavy) metal and mahogany desks. It was also cheaper and occupied much less space (Abercrombie, 2000, p90). Several designs of systems furniture succeeded, but the prevalent arrangement became the grid layout, known popularly as 'sea of cubicles' or 'cubicle farm'.

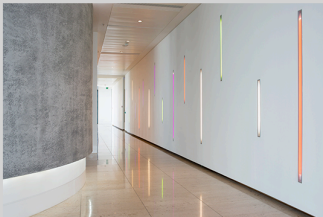
More recently, the notions of interaction and the 'flattening' of hierarchical relations through spatial means proposed by the office landscape designers in the 1960s have been retaken. I discuss these concepts ahead in chapter three, in relation to the offices that I have visited. Here I indicate two spatial metaphors derived from those concepts that designers have used for conceiving the 'offices of the future': that of the club, and that of the loft. The idea of the office as club appeared in the 1990s to describe a space modelled on that of a club where an 'élite group of ... ambitious, successful, intellectual people with many common interests ... share ... a rich and diverse environment that provides a level of comfort and service that each member could not afford separately' (Duffy, 1997, p18). Similarly, workers go to the club office in order to 'meet, exchange ideas, and share resources', with no fixed timetable. The work they perform is 'highly autonomous and highly interactive', of the problem-solving type (Duffy, 1997, p65). Space is occupied on an 'as-needed' basis, combined with 'tele-working, home-working, and working at client and other locations' (ibid.). Corporations adopting this office concept aim to 'promote interaction among their staff, to give them access to richer resources, to accommodate more types of activity, and to save money at the same time' (Duffy, 1997, p18).

The metaphor of the loft, also from the same time, associates the space of

the office with the 1980s cheap work live studios located in disused warehouses and workshops that artists in New York started to inhabit (Riewoldt and Hudson, 1994, p108). In the 1990s, companies in the so-called 'creative industries' (advertising, film production, graphic design, architecture) started to occupy old, purpose-built architecture like factories, and transformed them into 'open and as spectacular as possible' offices (illus. 2.15). 'Bubbles', sculptural spatial forms devised by the architect Frank Gehry in collaboration with the advertising chief Jay Chiat, were employed to structure open floors and create enclosed areas (Riewoldt and Hudson, 1994, p109). This 'fantasy office', with a 'backcloth interior which oscillates between show and understatement', enabled 'the kind of high-fashion, Zeitgeist design that is usually the province of boutiques and bars, to enter the world of the office ... in the form of a whole environment which provides an architectural corporate identity for trend-conscious clients' (Riewoldt and Hudson, 1994, p109).

The history of the modern office just presented has tried to show how the office emerged in the nineteenth century to become a central space of contemporary industrialised and service-based society, materialising central concepts like bureaucracy, rationalisation, standardisation, organisation, hierarchical relations, productivity, flexibility. This textual and visual description of the office through time is instrumental to the analysis of the relation between power, space, and photography carried out in the following two chapters and was key to the design and development of the visual empirical enquiry.

Meeting rooms





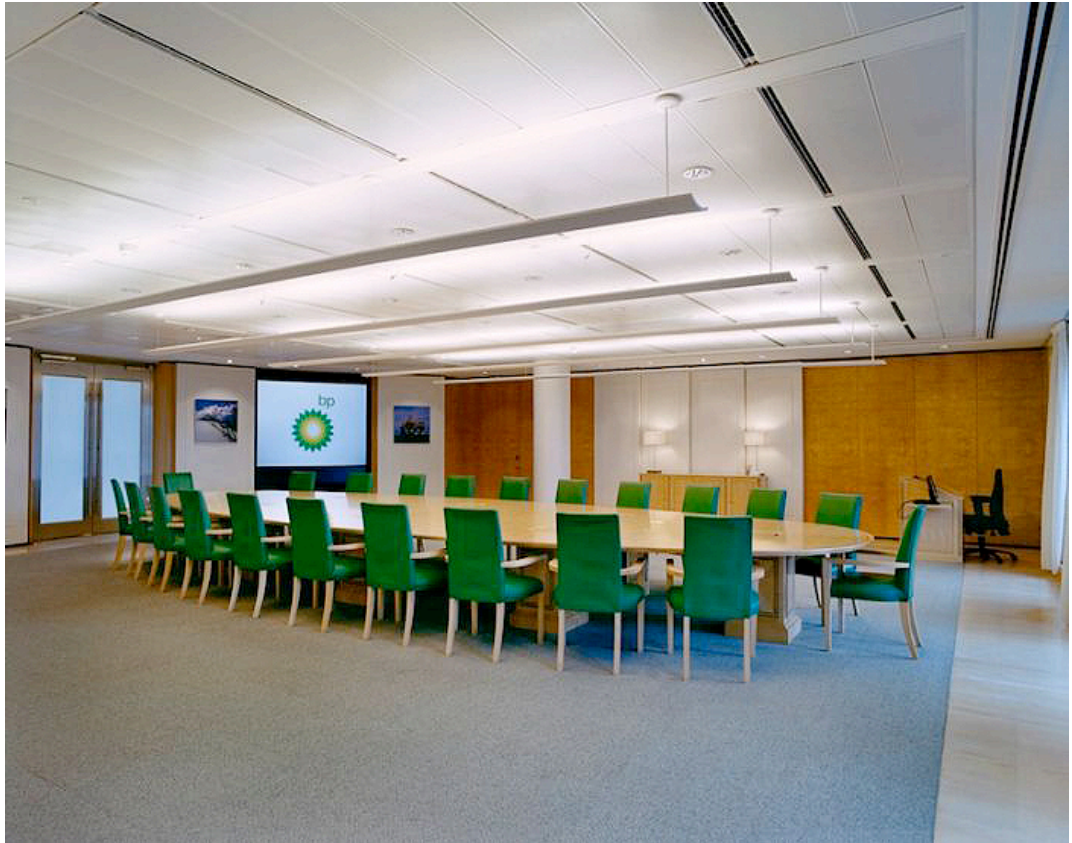


3

Power and Space



3.1. Jacqueline Hassink, 'Banco Santander S. A., Ave. de Cantabria 1, Boadilla del Monte, Madrid, Spain', in *The Table of Power 2*, 2011



3.4. Jacqueline Hassink, 'BP p.l.c., 1 St. James's Square, London, Britain', in *The Table of Power* 2, 2011

For *The Table of Power 2*, Jacqueline Hassink visited and photographed, as described in chapter one, the boardrooms of Europe's largest corporations, which she defines as being the locus of economic power. In her words, she was:

searching for a table that symbolized modern society's most important value: economic power ... multinational corporations are the most powerful commercial institutions of our time... by photographing the most important corporate tables in Europe, the meeting places of companies' board of directors, I began mapping the centres of economic power. It was the first time in the history of Europe that these centres of power had been photographed and made public (Hassink, 2011a, p4).

Hassink claims that her photographs were the first to show these boardrooms to the general public. She describes the difficult and time-consuming process for obtaining access to this otherwise secluded, mostly private space that the project required. During the span of two years, from forty corporations contacted, twenty-nine agreed to provide her with such access. As an outsider to the corporations, Hassink was a privileged observer, someone who saw what others could not see. Her photographs bear witness to a hitherto closed and unseen space, giving the spectator the opportunity, in turn, to witness the photographed boardrooms.

Documentary as witnessing

Witnessing and bearing witness have been one of the functions performed traditionally by documentary photography. As David Bate puts it, 'the idea of witnessing 'life' ... is ... crucial to the documentary form' (2009, p59). The practice of witnessing is of course a wider and ancient cultural form, typical within the legal and the religious spheres, but also in science, where experiments and results depend on scientific testimony (Leach, 2009, p181). Since the Second World War, witnessing has been indissociable from atrocity and the figure of the survivor of traumatic experiences, the discourse of the Holocaust witness becoming the paradigm for witnessing in general (Frosh and Pinchevski, 2009, p3). Audiovisual media—photography, cinema, television, and video—have however inaugurated a new kind of witnessing, 'one that is radically inclusive since it equally registers the

principal subject and the extraneous detail in the scene before the camera' (Frosh and Pinchevski, 2009, p9). It is this 'referential excess', this 'sudden ability to witness the incidentals of life just as they were', John Ellis (2000) argues, that produced the effect of witness (p19-20). With the advent of mass reproduction and distribution, audiovisual media have assumed a witnessing role, 'putting society permanently on view to itself' and this 'for its own sake'—a move away from the instrumentality of other forms of witnessing (in the realm of the legal/ judicial, for instance, the witness enables a judgement) (Frosh and Pinchevski, 2009, 11).

Documentary photography led this 'mundane witnessing' impulse, with the emergence of popular illustrated photo magazines such as *Life* and *Picture Post* in the 1930s that featured 'photo essays' showing the everyday life not of 'celebrities' but of common people, portrayed while going about their daily tasks. For instance, in the photo essay titled 'The private life of Gwyned Filling', the reader is invited to follow Filling, 'a career girl in New York', through her day – at home as she wakes up, taking the bus, in the office, with friends, on dates, at home in the evening, and so on (Loengard). The aim was 'not only to record and document, but also to enlighten and creatively “educate”', on the basis of the idea of 'information as a creative education about actuality, life itself' (Bate, 2009, p46). Prior to this mundane and entertaining (if not voyeuristic) witnessing, nineteenth century photographers such as Lewis Hine were working in a documentary mode, their photographs bearing witness to social inequities like child labour, and used as a tool for social campaigning and reform. As Bate shows, these and other forms of documentary practice, arising then or later in time (like the 'New Objectivity' in 1920s Germany, Walker Evans' art 'documentary style', Henri Cartier-Bresson's 'decisive moment', or reportage), they all have at their heart the idea of witnessing life, that is, events [as well as processes and states, to use Peter Wollen's tripartite semiotic classification of photographs (Wollen, 1984)] in the actual world.

The naivety of the documentary project was eventually denounced, most famously in the 1970s, by Martha Rosler, Allan Sekula and the 'new documentary' movement (Kester, 1987). Similarly to scientific witnessing, but differently for instance from witnessing in the judiciary realm, documentary claimed that witnessing through photography provided not only evidence, but an irrefutable proof. The underlying assumption was that truth could be known through observation, that is, visually. Documentary photographers' mission, crystallized in

Lewis Hine's famous dictum that 'while photographs may not lie, liars may photograph' (Hine, 1980, p111), was to convey such truth. Much like a scientist reporting on the results of an experiment, the documentary photographer had a professional and ethical responsibility to tell the truth. Their photographs were an objective testimony and as such a credible, authoritative source.

In the judicial realm, witnessing functions differently. The typical situation would be that of a witness summoned within the context of a trial in a criminal procedure to give evidence on a subject about which s/he has, or claims to have, first-hand knowledge (hearsay usually is not allowed as evidence). The witness will be asked to take an oath (which means calling upon God to, in turn, witness that what they will say is true or binding) or make an affirmation (in case they have no religious beliefs) that their evidence is true. The witness will then be questioned, in turns, both by the prosecution and the defence, what is called 'direct examination' and 'cross-examination' (according, respectively, to the side asking the questions being the one who called the witness or not). This examination—the witness's testimony—will then be evaluated by the judge or jury, together with the other forms of evidence presented by the parties before the court, in order to decide whether the facts are proved, not proved, disproved or presumed to be proved. So, testimony in the judicial realm, including eye-witness, is not only a type of evidence among others, but is also subjected to an evaluation, rather than being synonymous with 'truth'. The witness can, in effect, provide a false testimony (configuring the offence of perjury, punished by law), a possibility implicit in the obligation to take an oath or make an affirmation before the testimony is provided. Evidence in the judicial context is 'the information or material which the [parties] will place before the court in order to persuade the court that their version of the facts which are in issue is the correct version' (Sharpley, 2013, p330). The verb *to persuade* is the key here: an evidence is not a proof, but an argument. The witness and their testimony provide an argument, that will contribute to the arguing of a position, but which can be refuted by a better argument (namely, that the evidence does not prove the fact).

Documentary as witnessing should be thought of in the same way. As Max Kozloff puts it, 'in documentary work the photograph is a witness, but one with all the possible misunderstandings, partial information, or false testament that a "witness" provides' (Emerling, 2012, p83). Documentary as witnessing (either we

consider the photographer or the photograph to be the witness, or both) does not only need to be evaluated in relation to what it claims to prove, it also has to be understood not as being objective but as having a point of view, both literally and figuratively—the point of view of the witness. As Bate writes,

being a witness always implies a definite point of view, standing here or there, which makes a difference. Documentary photography is no different (...) When you or I witness an event, our stories may be quite different; because of where people stand it can seem different, even though it was the same event (...) documentary photography always has an opinion ... [it] always has a point of view (Bate, 2009, pp59-60).

The question of the 'point of view of the witness' and its unfaithfulness to fact (excluding the intentional, deliberate lie) is the question of the representation's mediation. Every act of witnessing involves mediation of some kind, most simply the act of putting an experience into words in order to transmit it to others. At the same time, photography *is* mediation: a series of decisions regarding camera, lenses, film, exposure, framing, composition, presentation, which all organise what is in front of the camera lenses (the referent) into a series of photographic codes, giving the photograph the look it has and creating its meaning, its particular rhetoric. Both involve therefore transformation. It can be said equally of photography that 'every act of witnessing is tied to a "*transformation*" that can be expected or even "triggered". In the act of witnessing, something is added to the witnessed "event" (be it either "inside" or "outside" the witness), thereby changing the event itself' (Thomas, 2009, p96).

In relation to photography, this notion of transformation is crucial to the understanding of what a photograph is. As an image, the photograph—including the documentary photograph—is not a simple representation of a pre-existing given. Art historian Jae Emerling shows how both the theorist Jacques Rancière and the art historian Georges Didi-Huberman offer a more complex idea of an image, in response precisely to the questions posed by photographic witnessing, in particular the witnessing of suffering and atrocity (Emerling, 2012, pp107-113). Writing, respectively, about Alfredo Jaar's *The Eyes of Gutete Emerita* (1996), a work about the Rwandan genocide, and four images taken by a prisoner and

crematoria worker at Auschwitz, Rancière and Didi-Huberman both refuse to accept the indexicality of the photograph as transparent, 'as a mere means to an end' (Emerling, 2012, p112). Differently, Rancière writes, a photograph as representation is but an equivalent:

Representation is not the act of producing a visible form, but the act of offering an equivalent – something that speech does just as much as photography. The image is not the duplicate of a thing. It is a complex set of relations between the visible and the invisible, the visible and speech, the said and the unsaid. It is not a mere reproduction of what is out there in front of the photographer ... It is always an alteration that occurs in a chain of images which alter it in return. (Rancière, 2009, p93)

The images of the camps 'snatched from the hell of Auschwitz', Didi-Huberman writes, do not tell the full story, nor serve as historical definitive proof; but their technical deficiencies (blur, overexposure, lack of orthogonality), instead of rendering them unusable, make them all the more compelling as 'it offers the equivalent of the way a witness might speak: the pauses, the silences, and the heaviness of the tone' (Emerling, 2012, p112). They demand from the spectator that they imagine for themselves, not only in order to understand but, here, as an ethical obligation.

When confronted with a documentary image, the question then should not be 'what is this a photograph of?' but, as Emerling puts it, 'what is being documented here? What is being transmitted to me? What is being asked of me as a spectator?' (2012, p113). Instead of dismissing documentary images as naïve or positivist, we should ask instead 'what images are, what they do and the effects they generate' (Rancière, 2009, p95).

If the documentary photograph, as an image, is not a copy but an equivalent, evidence whose evidentiary value needs to be assessed, the photographer is not an objective, disinterested observer either. To say that the photographer-witness has a point of view means that the position from where they witness events is not a matter of accident but of deliberate choice. And in order to choose a position in space from where to witness an event, an intellectual position about the event and/ or its representation is required. In Bate's words,

'documentary photography always has an opinion ... [it] always has a point of view' (2009, p60)—a conflation between vision and thought, between sensory and intellectual data, which is present in the idiom 'point of view': the point from which one sees something, both literally and figuratively.

The documentary photographer-witness is then not a witness by accident, but an intentional witness, a witness by design. In the most basic terms of witnessing, the witness has to be able to remember in order to speak. Similarly, in order to tell their story, the survivor needs to 'reestablish an inner witness and build a discourse with an interlocutor' (Frosh and Pinchevski, 2009, p3), that is to say, the witness needs to maintain or subsequently to create some degree of detachment from what they experience in order to be able to testify, which may not happen because the events were too traumatic. Differently, the documentary photographer is a self-aware witness, someone who stands outside the event they are witnessing by decision and who strikes, or aims to strike, a balance between being removed but not removed altogether (otherwise they would not be able to testify about it), between distance and proximity. Film documentarian Ross McElwee expresses with clarity this split in relation to the making of his autobiographical documentary *Time Indefinite*: 'It was becoming more and more difficult for me to film my own life and live my own life at the same time' (Blocker, 2009, p42).

That is the self-assigned role and the goal of the photographer-witness. It is precisely in this active, interested witnessing that the critical potential of documentary resides. Witnessing, I argue, should be included as a legitimate task performed by documentary, again, today. The 'trial-like atmosphere', as Rancière puts it (2009, p95), in which documentary is so often received (and as a result dismissed) should be saved for the moment of engagement with the documentary photograph when, as in a judicial procedure, its evidentiary status will need to be evaluated as an image (and not received as proof). This will require the spectator not simply to decide if the photograph proves a fact or not but, further, to respond to the more complex demand with which it addresses them: that of trying to understand, to paraphrase Rancière, what the image is, what it does and the effects it generates.

Perhaps it would be useful here to look at 'media witnessing' and how it has been conceptualized in media studies. Paul Frosh and Amit Pinchevski, in the

introduction to the volume they edit titled *Media Witnessing: Testimony in the Age of Mass Communication* (2009), acknowledge the 'rise of media witnessing as [being] a topic of increasing attention in the humanities and social sciences' and its emergence 'as a "problematic" for thinking anew about the aesthetics, ethics, and politics of representation', which 'offers new ways of thinking through some abiding problems of media, communication, and culture that were previously addressed by terms such as "representation", "mediation", "reception", "dissemination", and "effects"' (pp12 and 1). To these, we could add 'to document'.

'Media witnessing', they explain, is 'the witnessing performed *in, by, and through* the media (...) [for instance] a television news report may depict witnesses to an event, bear witness to that event, and turn viewers into witnesses *all at the same time*' (p1). Its specificity in relation to other forms of witnessing consists in that 'contemporary media witnessing serves as its own justification, putting society permanently on view to itself for its own sake, as the audience perpetually witnesses its own shared world because *this is what mass media do*' (p11). This has been, as discussed above, the project of mass media since its inception. I argue that documentary witnessing should reconnect with this original project. Documentary witnessing can borrow further from media witnessing its conception as a field 'subject to contest and struggle, and hence as a genuine political arena' (Ashuri and Pinchevski, 2009, p135). Contrary to the common belief that witnessing is a situation one simply inhabits, media scholars argue that 'being a witness is subject to struggle, not privilege; it is something to be accomplished, not simply given'. Further, against the 'purity and wholesomeness' commonly associated with the term 'witnessing' and its apparently incompatibility both with critical thinking and with issues of power, politics, struggle and domination, they posit that witnessing 'is a field in which various forces, resources, and agents compete (...) the game being played ... [consisting in] a game of trust in which agents compete to gain the trust of their designated audiences' (Ashuri and Pinchevski, 2009, pp136-7).

These parallels with media witnessing are useful, I contend, for theorizing the new documentary witnessing, but the two remain different, and not only due to the professional ethical codes governing media witnessing. Media and documentary witnessing differ in the type of 'events' they aim to witness. Recalling Wollen's (1984) distinction between three different semiotic temporalities of

photographs—photographs perceived as signifying events (news photographs), processes (some documentary photographs) and states (art photographs and most documentary photographs) (pp109-110)—it can be said that photojournalism works within a narrower conception of the 'event', which means to be there, present at the event in space and time, while documentary would encompass also other types of relation to the event, in particular to be present in space but removed in time, and to be absent in both time and space but still have access to a event through its traces (Peters, 2009, p38). Witnessing in photojournalism would then be about changing, dynamic situations as they unfold, while in documentary, witnessing would further include dynamic situations seen from outside as conceptually complete as well as stable, unchanging situations (Wollen, 1984, p109).

To conclude this discussion, witnessing is, the research argues, an useful concept to think the documentary practice, one that can structure the relation between reality, photographer, image and spectator without the pitfall of claims to objective knowledge and proof of truth, while at the same time restoring documentary's fundamental role in representation.

Going back to *The Table of Power* and trying to think it through the concept of witnessing, what is the object of Hassink's witnessing, what do her photographs bear witness to? Her claim is that, in her own words:

by photographing the most important corporate tables in Europe, the meeting places of companies' board of directors, I began mapping the centres of economic power. It was the first time in the history of Europe that these centres of power had been photographed and made public (Hassink, 2011a, p4).

So Hassink's photographs do not bear witness to the event by which power is enacted—the meetings of the companies' boards—but rather to the *space* where this event occurs. Hassink is not present in time, but she is present in space—one of the forms by which witnessing, as we have seen, may take place. The 'mapping' metaphor is employed to describe her strategy consisting of both seeing for herself and photographing the *space* of power. The photographed boardrooms stand metonymically for economic power (the photographs are actually of the rooms and not, or not only, of the tables—as Hassink puts it, she

frames the 'characteristic elements in the room, together with the view'). The space of the boardroom (itself a small part of the office) stands for the corporation as a whole and for the power corporations hold.

But what is the relationship between corporate space and power? Hassink alludes both to a functional relation (the boardroom as the space for high-level corporate decision-making) and to a symbolic relation (whereby space, including architecture, furniture, furnishings, décor, signifies power). Hassink's enquiry is limited to the boardroom which is, as I will show, only a small part of the office. What happens if we extend this enquiry to other areas of the office? What can be said about power from studying the space of the office, including all its areas?

Power and space

'Power as such does not exist', states Foucault in 'The Subject and Power' (1993), adding that 'something called Power, with or without a capital letter, which is assumed to exist universally in a concentrated or diffused form, does not exist' (pp424 and 426). What is then power for Foucault?

In the essay 'The Subject and Power', written in 1982, Foucault asks and answers two fundamental questions to the understanding and the study of power and, for that matter, of Foucault's own work. First, in answer to the epistemological question ('Why study power?'), Foucault argues that at the centre of the study of power is the subject, that is, the need to understand how human beings are made subjects. Power, he argues, is one of the objectifying relations which operate this transformation, and an especially relevant one given that it has not received adequate theoretical analysis. In Foucault's words: 'economic history and theory provided a good instrument for [studying] relations of production and ... linguistics and semiotics offered instruments for studying relations of signification; but for power relations we had no tools of study.' (p418). The usual legal conceptualisation of power (addressing the question of legitimacy and of the state, within the ambit of political theory) did not offer the means to study the objectivising of the subject that occurs in result of power relations.

How to study these then? This is the second question that Foucault's essay tries to answer, by proposing that power should be studied in relation to its manifestations, that is, to the means by which it is exercised, rather than by

studying its origin and its nature. This is the originality of Foucault's approach to the study of power: to look at the 'how' of power, instead of focusing on its 'what' and 'why'. Such study demands an empirical investigation, rather than an ontological or metaphysical theorisation. As such, it constitutes potentially an adequate question to be explored through photography that suits the medium's empirical proclivity.

A preliminary distinction to be made refers to the fact that the power under scrutiny is not that exercised over things (this would be a question of 'capacity' or 'productive capacities'), but to that exercised by certain individuals over others, that is, the power that 'brings into play relations between individuals' and, therefore, that 'designates relationships between partners' (ibid., pp424-5). Power relations need also to be distinguished from relationships of communication. Although these produce power relations, they are not reducible to the latter. The distinction between the three types however – power relations, relationships of communication and objective capacities, is neither total nor easy as they 'always overlap one another, support one another reciprocally, and use each other mutually as means to an end' (ibid., p425).

Particular combinations of these relationships arise and maintain more or less stable forms throughout time – these are what Foucault calls 'institutions' or, in the broad sense, 'disciplines'. Foucault gives the example of the educational institution:

The disposal of its space, the meticulous regulations which govern its internal life, the different activities which are organized there, the diverse persons who live there or meet one another, each with his [sic] own function, his well-defined character – all these things constitute a block of capacity-communication-power. The activity which ensures apprenticeship and the acquisition of aptitudes or types of behaviour is developed there by means of a whole ensemble of regulated communications (lessons, questions and answers, orders, exhortations, coded signs of obedience, differentiation marks of the “value” of each person and of the levels of knowledge) and by the means of a whole series of power processes (enclosure, surveillance, reward and punishment, the pyramidal hierarchy) (Foucault, 1993, p426).

Other disciplines imply other combinations of these relationships: in the monastic and the penitential for instance, power relations are predominant; in those of workshops and hospitals, it is the finalization of the technical activity that takes precedence. In all of them nevertheless, the three types of relationships are interrelated—in workshops for instance, the productive activity implies both relations of communication (acquired information, shared work), and power relations (obligatory tasks, gestures imposed by tradition or apprenticeship, obligatory distribution of labour). Disciplining consists, Foucault argues, not in making individuals more obedient, but rather in the more rational and efficient adjustment of these three types of relationships. Considering these relationships, what is the specificity of power relations? Foucault maintains that:

what defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead, it acts upon their actions (...) It is a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action. A set of actions upon their actions (ibid., p427).

Essentially, power is not about coercion (although it may involve violence), nor about confrontation or struggle, nor even about legal constraint, but rather about influencing the actions of free individuals or groups, with the aim of obtaining a determined result. In Foucault's words, the exercise of power 'consists in guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome. Basically power is (...) a question of government'. To govern, Foucault explains, 'is to structure the possible field of action of others'; it is a "singular mode of action, neither war-like nor juridical" (ibid., pp427-8).

Foucault suggests that power relations are to be studied in relation to defined institutions, an approach that defines his own work: the study of the asylum, the clinic, the prison. The factory or, for that matter, the office, have not been addressed directly by Foucault, but the theme of work is very present in the essay, as well as in his oeuvre (Jackson and Carter, 1998, p53). In the first part of the essay ('Why Study Power?'), Foucault mentions specifically the power of

employers, along with those of the family, medicine, psychiatry, education, as deriving from the dominant form of power that spread in the eighteenth century - the new 'pastoral power', which governs by individualising, that is, by imposing determined forms of subjectivity (1993, pp422-3). And in the second part of the essay, Foucault mentions expressly the division of labour and the hierarchy of tasks as relations of power called upon finalized activities in order to develop their potential (ibid., p425).

How to study then power in relation to the office? Foucault suggests that institutions must be studied from the standpoint of power relations themselves, by establishing their main characteristics (ibid., pp429-30): 1) the 'system of differentiations' permitting individuals or groups to act upon the actions of others; 2) the types of objectives pursued by the first; 3) the means by which they exercise power; 4) the 'forms of institutionalisation' within which these power relations occur, including legal structures, customs (such as in the institution of the family), closed apparatus (such as the army and the monastery), and combinations of these; and 5) the 'degrees of rationalisation', referring to the level of sophistication and effectiveness of those power relations. How can these be studied through photography? What are the conditions and the limits to such empirical enquiry?

The strategy of Hassink, as we have seen, was to focus on space. In her photographs, the boardroom stands metonymically for power, on the basis of a relation between power and space that is first and foremost functional, but it is also symbolic—the boardrooms *looked* powerful. When the boardrooms, by their decoration, size or other material elements, did not signify power (as that of BASF, the largest chemical company in the world, which 'felt like a minimalistic Japanese zazen room with hardly any decoration, just dark brown chairs, a table, and wooden walls', or BP's 'expensive version of IKEA' that 'felt very low key for the fourth-largest company in the world' – illus. 3.4), Hassink was disappointed, not to say distrustful. Were corporations hiding the real boardrooms from her, because they would be too ostentatious to be publicly seen, especially at a time of severe financial crisis? In any case, the fact is that boardrooms are not conceived to be seen by the public, nor by the clients of the corporation, nor even in most cases by its owners (especially if these belong to a large number of shareholders). On the contrary, the people that have access to the boardrooms and are entitled to use it are the members of the 'board' only. So the power effects are designed to be

perceived internally, by those at the top of the hierarchy, those *in power*. How do these power effects work?

A selection of photographs from *The Table of Power 2*, with text and captions by Hassink (2011b), has been published in the weekend supplement of the business newspaper *Financial Times*. In connection with the photographs (which were the cover theme, under the title 'Boardroom Secrets'), the supplement included a commentary on the photographs by a member of the boardroom of a corporation which is useful here. In her article, she makes the following observation:

I am trying to imagine myself as a non-executive director on a big swivel chair at one of these shining walnut ellipses with matching halogen lights over my head, or at a table made of steel with champagne frosting. I'm not entirely sure about this, but I fancy the décor would be having a subtly restraining effect on me. The uniformity and sheer power of it, not to mention the fact it almost certainly commissioned by the CEO himself, would not serve as an invitation to tell the man that I don't think he's up to much (Kellaway, 2011).

So the power exercised by the boardroom seems to be first and foremost that which acts upon the individuals who use it, that is, in Foucault's words, 'acting upon an acting subject by virtue of their acting or being capable of action'. But does this configure a power relation, in the sense discussed above? Space here certainly can be said to influence the conduct of those subjected to it (this subjection being materially operated by the fact that, as the writer explains, the use of the boardroom for the board meetings is not optional, and that the architecture and design are imposed, either by the CEO - 'chief executive office', the employee at the highest level of the corporate hierarchy, or by the corporation itself, rather than decided by the members of the board, with basis on their functional needs as its users). Inside this space, they are *guided* to think and act with 'restraint' and respect for 'uniformity' and 'power', and therefore 'invited' not to disagree with those exercising power. So the room produces an intended *discipline* and *self-control*. The means are essentially symbolic (the 'big swivel chair', the 'table made of steel with champagne frosting') but, as Foucault argues, relationships of communication also produce effects on the realm of power which

are not reducible to the former (1993, p425).

Hassink's interest in spatial corporate power however is limited to the boardrooms. Based on the Foucauldian notion of power described above, the research aims instead to approach the office in its totality, in order to study power from the standpoint of power relations and answer, following Foucault's proposition, the questions: is the office, as a space, a means to exercise power? In this case, how? What are the spatial means by which power is exercised in the office? What types of objectives are pursued through them? Are they specific to the office? And how do they objectify those subjected to them, what form of subjectivity do they promote?

I propose to carry out this study, in the one hand, by developing an understanding of the relation between power and space in the office drawing on organisation theory, organisation psychology and architecture and office design as 'representations of space' in Lefebvre's sense, based on the epistemological assumption that that relation can not be apprehended by visual means only. And, on the other hand, by studying the relation through an empirical visual enquiry carried out in relation to actual offices, aiming to witness that relation through photography. I turn now to the first of the methods, presenting the conclusions of the textual study into power and space, and in the next section, titled 'Witnessing the politics of the office', I present and discuss the empirical enquiry and what I have witnessed through it. These two moments are however interdependent: the textual research permitted to make sense of what I witnessed in the offices and, further, to identify aspects in the offices that I would not have recognised had used only common sense knowledge, my personal experience, or the offices' photogenic properties to guide the choice of what to witness. And, conversely, the empirical enquiry identified aspects and raised questions that had not been brought up by the textual analysis, which I discuss in the next section. The interdependence between *what* I witnessed in the offices that I visited, and *why* I witnessed it (and, as I show in chapter four, *how* I witnessed it) was complete.

Organisation theory's object of study gravitates around the concepts of 'organisation' and 'organising'. It is essentially a 'theory of, and mostly for, management; it has much less to say of and for those who are managed' (Marsden and Townley, 1996, p660). The corporation is one of such forms of 'organisation', implying a relationship between manager(s) and managed,

theorised here from the position and at the service of the former. The origins of the discipline are in the Industrial Revolution and the need that emerged then for knowledge both on how best to organise in order to achieve efficiency and productivity, and on the economic and social effects of the industrial age. These are, respectively, the normative and the academic interests from which the tension between practice and theory at the heart of the field derives (Hatch, 2013, pp20-1). As an example of the normative branch, F. W. Taylor, referred to in the previous chapter, developed the technique of 'scientific management', a set of principles and standards to improve efficiency and increase workers' productivity on the basis of rationalisation, and worked as a consultant to corporations applying his method.

Other theoretical approaches, based on different ontological and epistemological assumptions, have developed since: a modern perspective, for which organisations are 'systems of decisions and action driven by norms of rationality, efficiency and effectiveness directed towards stated objectives'; a symbolic perspective defining organisations as 'socially constructed realities where webs of meaning create bonds of emotion and symbolic connection between members'; and the postmodern perspective, that defines organisations as 'sites for enacting power relations, giving rise to oppression, irrationality, and falsehoods but also humour and playful irony' (Hatch, 2013, p15). Nevertheless, the 'normative urge is interwoven with the three perspectives since its demands to relate theory and practice never go away', as the ultimate aim is to produce knowledge concerning 'how to achieve success through organisation and organising' (Hatch, 2013, p8).

The literature in the field is unanimous that space was until recently a neglected subject (Clegg and Kornberger, 2006; Gagliardi, 1990; Chanlat: 2006), in spite of the fact that 'management and organisation are fundamentally spatial activities' and that 'boundedness is central to the notion of an organisation' (Panayotou and Kafiris, 2011, p266). Another author remarks that 'organisation also means organising people in space' (Hofbauer, 2000, p168). If space has been taken for granted, that does not mean it has not been an important or even fundamental element in the application of management theories. In this sense, Taylor's scientific management for instance consisted essentially in a reorganisation of the spatial arrangement of the entire organisation, by physically

dividing space into individual cells where each worker was to perform their task in isolation. In turn, this had also a symbolic effect whereby the aligned rows of individual desks arranged at right angles had a classroom appearance that signified order.

Different currents of management thought have produced their own type of space (Chanlat, 2006, pp21-8). Scientific management (Taylorism, Fordism) created a productive, controlled, divided, hierarchised space. Bureaucracy produced, as we have seen in chapter two, the space of the office proper, the *bureau* and its container, the office building—a services-productive space, separating the private sphere from the public, divided, controlled and hierarchised. The 'Human Relations' movement in the 1930s promoted a social and negotiating space, based on the idea that the social climate results from a negotiated order that becomes crucial for the success and performance of the organisation. With origins in the former, interactionism defined the social system as a set of interactions, activities and sentiments that were conditioned by spatial settings, conceiving space as a social interaction system. Arising in the late 1970s, critical management thinking was unanimous, in spite of its diversity as a movement, in the critique of the functionalist, utilitarian and instrumental approaches of the previous movements, conceiving organisational space as a 'terrain structured by the power of the actors in it, in relationships in which what is at stake is socially legitimate dominance' (ibid., p31). Different currents within this critical movement addressed and denounced different sources of dominance within the organisational space: for the Marxian current, this was basically a space of domination, exploitation, and alienation. The feminist current sexualised an hitherto asexulised space dominated by male management thinking, positing it as the locus of power relationships between the sexes. And the postmodern current deconstructed the modern conception of organisation, understanding organisation as a textual space instead, subject to diverse interpretations and therefore uncontrollable by one meaning only, promoting flexible specialisation, networks, post-Taylorism and post-bureaucratic order (ibid., pp30-2). Also focusing on the question of power, political organisation theory defined the organisation as a space of power relationships in which 'controlling materials, people, money, and techniques becomes an imperative', pursued through various means: 'social and interpersonal relationships, language and symbols, rules and structures' (ibid.,

p34). In the 1980s, cultural and symbolic management thinking posited the organisation space as aesthetic, participating in the creation of the symbolic universe of the organisation, both inside the organisation and to the world outside, functioning as emblem and icon. More recently, factors like globalisation, developments in communications and information technology and the weight of the financial markets, led to organisational forms based on flexibility, fragmentation of work, de-localisation of production, and intensive use of information technology, changes that have originated fragmented organisational spaces.

Symbolic and postmodern organisational theorists focusing specifically on the relationship between space and power, posit this relation as implicit or inevitable:

The articulation of space always embeds relationships of power, insofar as it governs interactions between the users of a building, prescribes certain routines for them, and allows them to be subjected to particular forms of surveillance and control (Panayiotou and Kafiris, 2011, p268).

This relationship is physical and determined by architecture:

Power through buildings is exercised through the way people are defined as different kinds of members and strangers; in the way that they meet; through the control of the interface between inhabitants and visitors; through the location of persons and things; and through control of their paths of movement and visual, acoustic, and communicative paths (Kornberger and Clegg, 2006, p1104).

And is also symbolic, as 'power encoded in built corporate space marks the everyday lives of individuals and shapes relationships in the world of work' (Panayotou and Kafiris, 2011, p276) and 'spatial organisation, in whatever shape, represents and symbolizes social structures and relations of power' (Hofbauer, 2000, p174).

This research into the 'representations of space' has informed, as stated above, the empirical photographic enquiry, and it is to this that I now turn.

Witnessing the politics of the office

i. Getting access, or, first lesson in office politics

The imposing presence of the offices of the services industries in the City and Canary Wharf stands in contrast to their accessibility. Access to these offices is governed by rules determining who is entitled to enter its space. The establishing of boundaries that define who is *in* in opposition to those who are outside of it is, as Panayiotou and Kafiris (2011) put it, a central concept of the notion of organisation and the most basic way of organising (p266). An independent photographer is someone functionally and physically placed on the outside. In order to be allowed to cross the boundary between outside and inside, the photographer has to be authorized to do so by someone inside. It is only when this bureaucratic, formal access has been conferred that the material access may take place. An order from higher up is communicated down to the reception, the vertical relation being both literal (in offices occupying more than one floor, receptions are located at entrance level) and symbolic (the order comes from someone in a higher rank, who has the power to override the prohibition of access that the reception is there to enforce).

But not everyone inside had the competence to decide on a request coming from the outside asking to photograph that very inside, as I was able to conclude from very early. I had started by contacting the corporations whose buildings clearly displayed their logos. These were mainly the offices of banks occupying entire buildings. I wrote letters addressed to the attention of their “Public Relations Department”, having sourced the address through their websites. After weeks of waiting, I received only one reply, by email, declining the request and wishing me luck with the project. The politeness could not hide the inherent contradiction, in fact it only heightened it: how could I be lucky if the project was dependent on the “collaboration” they had just denied? Despite nonsensical, this politeness would be a constant: from the nearly fifty negative answers I received, almost none failed to invoke luck. Luck was indeed, I was made to think, what I would need in order to succeed.

After the banks' silence, I changed my strategy. I extended the request to other services industries based in those same office areas, and started contacting

accountancy, consulting, insurance, and legal institutions. This time the contact was made differently: I learnt quickly that requests sent to 'general' or 'info' email addresses had fewer chances to be answered, and that these increased slightly when people were addressed directly, possibly due to the proverbial corporate politeness I had already witnessed. So I explored corporations' websites, trying to identify a suitable addressee. This required a careful investigation and evaluation of the corporate hierarchy: the 'public relations' or 'external communications' departments seemed, at first, to be the functionally competent departments to deal with my request, and indeed some of the positive answers I received came from them. But, most of the times, their reply felt like a hastily dispatched 'no'. Perhaps someone in other department would respond differently? Who would that be? In legal corporations my task was made easy by the fact that the lawyers' names and contacts were available online. This allowed me to contact directly the 'partner' who was the 'head' of the corporation's office in London (almost all were international firms, with offices in many capitals of the world), and most of the times I would get a reply, if not a 'yes' (legal corporations were in fact those that responded more favourably to the request, possibly because of this strategy). Usually the answer came from either the partner's personal secretary, or the facilities manager, and I would then discuss with them the terms of the photo shoot and the suitable date. Although the facilities manager would be the person deciding on the areas that I would be able to photograph and, many times, whether I could photograph at all (the 'partner' would ask him/her to consider my request and decide), the first contact had always to be made with someone higher up in the corporate hierarchy. I started to look for the 'heads' in other corporations but each industry had their own hierarchical structure. In financial and insurance corporations for instance, I started to address directly the COO ('chief operating officer'), and in a few cases I also tried the CEO (above the COO in the hierarchy). I spent days sourcing these contacts, many times searching for profiles in business social networks, or guessing the address from the composition of other emails in the corporation (usually [first name]dot[last name]@[corporation's typical extension] would work). This time-consuming and tedious process (a clerical task, of sorts) was useful however in that it introduced me to the workings of the corporate hierarchy. After a while, it became clear that the success of the request was dependent, among other things, on reaching the right person in the right place

in the hierarchy.

When I exhausted my knowledge of corporate brands, I employed other sources to identify new suitable offices and their corporations: case studies in the office design and architecture literature; corporation's stock prices listings and corporate advertising in the specialized business press; the websites of the high-rise buildings, where their real estate corporate owners display the names of the current buildings' tenants as a way to advertise available office space to prospective ones. And, *in loco*, checking the panels with tenants' names displayed in the buildings entrance halls and lobbies (fast enough not to attract the attention of security guards distrustful of outsiders). It was ironic that the office buildings were so present and imposing while their occupants were largely anonymous and, for outsiders, difficult to identify. Another manifestation of this paradox between visibility and invisibility was the omnipresence of glass—its symbolic connotations of transparency, openness and lack of boundaries undermined by its actual opacity or reflectivity when seen from the outside (Vidler, 1992).

In a period spanning almost two years, I contacted nearly five hundred financial, corporate and legal institutions based chiefly in the City and Canary Wharf (including also a small number located in Mayfair, Victoria, and on the south bank near Tower Bridge), and was able to obtain access to the offices of approximately fifty of them (please see Annexe A for detailed information on the contacts made. Please be aware that the information provided there is strictly confidential). The reason for selecting this large sample had to do with the process for obtaining access and the conditions under which this was granted. To the difficulty in receiving any replies at all to my request, it added that the first few corporations that allowed me to visit were only willing to do so for a short period of time (usually, one hour) and very rarely would accept that I return after the first visit. After a few positive answers it became clear that I would not be able to develop an in depth study, by immersing myself in one of the offices for a long period of time. My alternative strategy was to contact and visit as many offices as possible, across the widest range of industries within the services, so that the sample would be as representative as possible. Hence the extensive rather than intensive empirical enquiry.

The condition regarding the time frame had been imposed by the first corporation accepting the request and it proved prescient. It was a large global

corporation, providing 'professional services' to businesses, including audit, consulting, finance and tax advisory (I refer to this and similar corporations hereafter as 'consulting' corporations), with offices occupying full high-rise buildings in distinct parts of the city. I was allowed to photograph one of them (brand new, the size of four football pitches, housing more than six thousand employees, I read in the abundant information available online), on the condition that a) no people were photographed; b) the company would not be identified and therefore no logos or other corporative identity signs were photographed; c) I would be 'escorted' by someone during the full length of the photo shoot, and therefore could not be left alone to work by myself. These conditions were standard, in the sense that corporations who were willing to accept the request all mentioned them and made sure that I accepted it before their final approval was given; at a certain point, I actually started to include them in the text of my initial email and this did indeed facilitate access. In addition, some corporations asked to be sent the images for, they invoked, using them in their brochures and other materials if needed. I agreed and sent them (low resolution) digital files (jpegs) of selected photographs (over which I pledged to maintain my copyright, which they agreed to). The few answers that I got back were polite thank you emails, and no one asked me, as I had anticipated, not to use any of the photographs.

At a ratio of nearly ten to one (ten offices contacted for each visited), it was indeed a long and time-consuming process, depending not on luck but on patience instead. As it unfolded, I became very familiar with the geography of London's office areas, and started to know by name who the offices in many of the identical, anonymous steel and glass buildings belonged to. The process had allowed me to see for myself a space that was otherwise inaccessible to those on the outside, in other words, to acquire the status of witness. It also showed how the office space is essentially a private space, that is difficult to access in independent terms, and that as result has remained largely unrepresented from an independent point of view—this in spite of its ubiquity in (service-based) society.

ii. Ostensive symbolism vs. functionalist modernism

The first visit was prescient in other ways. I was taken by the facilities manager on a tour of the 'photographable' areas of the office starting at what he called the "clients' area" just above the reception, moving then straight to the top

floor, where top executives had their offices and meeting rooms, and where the boardroom and dining room, used also to 'entertain' clients, were located. It was all richly furnished, in warm tones and soft lighting, recalling the decoration of a fashionable hotel. I read in an interview with the designers precisely that 'a lot of hotel techniques were applied' and that the aim was for the space to 'exud[e] quality of service without overt extravagance – slightly domestic but very classy' (Entwistle, 2011). The view from the top floor was impressive, a privileged sight over a London landmark. The main clients' area on the other hand was rather secluded, as if to shield clients from the outside and create a sense of intimacy. The décor here included curtains, sofas, and a warmer light tone than that in the executive floor.

These areas could not be further removed, in their function and their decoration, from the rational, functionalist office. Although modernism had already incorporated elements of luxury, as in Philip Johnson's modern interiors for the Seagram, or the typical presidents' mahogany suite, the design and fit-out of these areas that I was witnessing was of a different kind. In this office and many others that I visited, the clients' areas were designed not only to make clients 'feel valued and important' so that they 'go away with a strong impression of the office and team they are investing in', as the facilities manager of an investment management firm put it, they were conceived to actively promote a less formal interaction, blurring the boundaries between work and leisure. Economic geographer Linda McDowell (1997) locates this transformation in the new City of London emerging in the 1980s, when 'instead of money-making being serious work undertaken by men in specialised and exclusive spaces, service sector work was redefined as fun' (p60). Boardrooms and private dining rooms 'oak-panelled and beamed', more 'modern' rooms, and developments such as the Broadgate Centre next to Liverpool Street Station, with its interpenetration of work and leisure spaces - all testified to the fact that the 'workplace landscape ha[d] transgressed the boundaries between what is serious and what is fun', of 'spaces of work and play', a spatial segregation which had been established in nineteenth century cities (p60). McDowell is also struck by the parallel with hotels: 'inside these entrances [of the new offices], the common use of soaring, planted atria not only brings the outside inside but the similarities between contemporary hotels and offices confuse the unsuspecting visitor' (p62). One of the offices that I visited included a

piano lobby on the top floor, and had an art exhibition on display which, as the corporation's art consultant who was escorting me explained, had been curated with works belonging to the corporation's art collection and which changed periodically. Echoing designers' labelling of this as 'entertainment architecture' (Riewoldt and Hudson, 1994), in one of the offices the top floor was called precisely the 'entertainment floor'. In her semiotic analysis of the office space, Hofbauer (2000) refers to the 'ostensive symbolism' of the areas such as entrances and clients' areas that are 'the organisation's face to the world' (p174) – these were in fact the areas that corporations had no issues with me photographing, on the contrary (see below). The communication of a particular corporate image and the creation of an informal, leisurely atmosphere in these areas concur therefore in the objective of making business happen.

iii. Spatially induced interaction

Resuming the tour of the consulting corporation, after the top floor I was taken through an area with several formal meeting rooms, with art hanging on the walls next to oversized video-conference screens, and preceded by lobbies with more lounge-like furniture. Finally, I was shown the employees' canteen and a 'breakout area'. This was fitted with industrial coffee machines, (free) 'staff refreshments' and large kitchen-like communal tables with designer plastic (polypropylene, I read in the furniture designers website) chairs with and without armrests, some of them upholstered, aligned around the tables at regular intervals. All floors except the top one were equipped with an identical breakout area, located in a semi-enclosed space within the work area. A larger version of the office pantry, the breakout is conceived as an informal area, destined to provide employees with a space where to have a break from work while 'interacting' with each other. In a radical move away from Taylorist assumptions equating 'real work' with direct performance of a task and dismissing conversations between employees as a source of distraction and waste of time, employees are now actually encouraged to do exactly that, to make a pause in their work, walk down the office, sit for a coffee and chat to each other. The aim is to stimulate 'informal communication', 'unplanned contacts' and 'networking' between employees that would otherwise not have a reason nor a pretext to talk or meet. The underlying

idea is that contact and communication with (potential) discussion partners is the 'prime vehicle for transmitting ideas, concepts, and other information necessary for ensuring effective work performance' (Kornberger and Clegg, 2004, p1099). All this, designers suggest, may be achieved through good spatial design: corporations should create 'magnet spots' by providing high-quality coffee and food, as well as 'comfortable and interesting' seating areas with 'bar-like seating (deliberately not sofas and lounge chairs)'. These should be located in central, accessible areas, and structured in a way that maximises the potential for visibility and eye contact among employees. A few are enough – too many will make chance encounters more difficult (Becker and Steele, 1995, pp67-84).

I have seen areas like this in all the offices that I visited. The majority looked fairly immaculate, as if they were rarely used. Designers advert that there is the 'danger of low utilization when taking breaks is seen as “not done”' (van Meel et al., 2010, p85), and advise that this 'legitimacy issue' may be tackled, for instance, by having managers set a personal example by using the breakout areas to 'help [employees] feel that this *is* a part of the job' (Becker and Steele, 1995, p84). Similarly to what happens in the clients' areas, the boundaries between work and relaxation are also blurred. Relaxation and leisure become in fact a part of the job.

iv. Workspace and (non)territoriality

In this consulting corporation I was not allowed to photograph the work spaces, in spite of the fact that there was no 'sensitive and confidential information' in sight (a reason invoked recurrently for turning down the request) or, for that matter, no documents or other objects, including computer screens – all was utterly empty and perfectly ordered as if it had never been used. This office was the epitome of what organisation theorists and designers call the 'non-territorial' office: an office where no desks are personally assigned and employees must instead occupy an available desk upon arrival ('hoteling' or, if for a short period of time, 'moteling'), or the desk they had previously reserved ('hot-desking'), and which they must completely evacuate on a daily basis, by storing their belongings in portable carts and filing cabinets (Elsbach, 2003). In this office, the hot-desking system applied to all employees including the top executives, although for these private offices rather than desks in open spaces were available.

The non-territorial office emerged in the 1990s and has since become increasingly popular in corporate office settings (Elsbach, 2004). Designers praise its capacity to flatten hierarchies and remove functional divisions and as such promote collaboration and team work to employers eager to increase productivity and reduce 'occupancy costs', while organisation scientists, based on environmental psychology research findings, point instead to negative effects in employees' sense of identity leading to the reaffirmation of those very boundaries and ranks.

This new conceptualisation of the workplace appeared as a response to the 'territoriality' typical of organisations: 'life in organisations is fundamentally territorial. We make claims on and defend our control of a variety of organisational objects, spaces, roles, and relationships', manifested in 'artifacts, such as nameplates on doors and family photos on desks, and behaviours, such as resistance to the introduction of office cubicles and reluctance to let others join a key project' (Brown et al., 2005, p577). As organisation behavioural theory explains, territoriality is based on 'psychological ownership' ('the feeling of possessiveness and of being psychologically tied to a object') involving in addition the actions or behaviours for constructing, communicating, maintaining, and restoring territories around those objects towards one feels proprietary attachment. In other words, it is 'an individual's behavioural expression of his or her feelings of ownership toward a physical or social object' (ibid., pp578-9).

Territorial behaviours can be of two types: marking and defending (ibid., pp580-5). Marking refers to behaviours 'that construct and communicate to others at work the members' proprietary attachment to particular organisational objects', including physical markers (temporary, like a coat thrown onto a chair; and more permanent, such as hanging a painting in one's office), and social markers (a public pronouncement of one's idea to ensure everyone knows to whom it belongs, or using the voice to mark space around one's cubicle in an open plan office). Marking can be 'identity-oriented' (also known as 'personalisation'), enabling individuals to both 'construct and express their identities to themselves and to others', by displaying diplomas (professional facet), family pictures (personal life), or titles after their names (status position). It is related to individuals' need to be seen as unique, in such a way that 'those most motivated to express their distinctiveness through personalisation of their territories will be those who

perceive they are otherwise less able, for a variety of reasons, to be distinct' (ibid., p582). Moreover, marking can be 'control-oriented', that is, aimed at controlling access or use of the object towards one feels proprietary attachment, increasing proportionally to the degree of ambiguity regarding the ownership and boundaries of that object; ambiguity will be greater when there are no territory markers (for example, in an open-plan office, employees will engage more in control-oriented marking, in order to mark the separation between private and public space) or in periods of organisational change (ibid., pp582-3). Besides marking, territorial behaviour includes defending one's territory when this is menaced by an 'infringement' (eg., the use of a password to prevent access to a shared file), or as a reaction when the infringement has been produced with the aim of expressing frustration (eg., slamming doors), reestablish control (eg, yelling at a superior) or deter future infringements (for instance, lodging a formal complaint in order to regulate the issue). Territoriality, especially of physical space, has positive effects in that it 'engender[s] a sense of belonging, which may result in reduced turnover and increased performance; [and can be] beneficial in clarifying and simplifying social interactions, which ... might reduce conflict and enhance effectiveness'. It may equally produce negative effects, as when employees' preoccupation with communicating and maintaining proprietary claims diminish their focus and achievement. And it may prevent employees from venturing into certain areas, take on new roles or collaborate, for fear of infringing of another's territory (ibid., p577).

In the 1990s, a few companies started trying to replace organisation based on territoriality with its opposite (see chapter two, p119). One of the case studies repeated across the design literature is that of the advertising agency Chiat\Day. In 1993 its owner abolished assigned desks, executive suites and partition walls with the aim of creating an environment able to promote creativity, collaboration, autonomy and independent thinking among the employees, qualities he thought were not fostered (on the contrary) by a 'traditional hierarchical environment'. The model for the new space was the university, which provides libraries and other resources to students, but does not monitor where and when they do their work (Hine, 2000, p142). The experiment was far from successful—employees could not find each other, groups brainstorming felt exposed in the absence of a sufficiently enclosed space, people started taking the shared laptops home for the

night and reserving conference rooms permanently, employees felt uncomfortable not knowing where to go when they came to work in the morning (Vischer, 2005, p17)—until in 1995 the non-territorial arrangement was completely abandoned on the occasion of the merger with another agency, but it proved prescient. Besides the so called 'creative industries' (such as advertising, entertainment or the 'dot-coms') where non-territoriality first became popular, other corporations in the services industries such as consulting firms, started to adopt the hoteling system. The aim here was mainly economic - given that their employees spent a great amount of their time working away at clients' premises, they could accommodate the same number of employees with fewer work stations. Ten employees for seven work stations was established as a common ratio (Becker and Steele, 1995, pp119-124).

The hotel like atmosphere I experienced in the consulting office (albeit one with the inverted function of providing space for working and not to rest) is not only a question of terminology. These type of offices are, in the words of those who conceive them, 'run like a five-star hotel'. In a case study analysing the office of a similar corporation, designers Turner and Myerson describe how the log in electronic system registers the time employees spent at the work space, from where the cost of such use of space is calculated and in some cases billed to clients. The aim is to reduce occupancy costs by making employees 'do more of their work in their own homes and on the road, to get closer to their clients, not feel cosy and comfortable behind a desk'. The quality furnishings and 'staff amenities' (breakout areas, canteens, gymnasiums) typical of these offices come as a trade-off: 'you have to address the quality-ownership ratio on these projects. If you take away personally owned space, then you have to give back quality' (Turner and Myerson, 1998, pp104-7).

Organisational theorists however point to the fact that 'de-territorialisation' may originate losses at other levels, in particular in employees' performance, as it affects both their commitment and their identification with the organisation, both shown to be fundamental to higher productivity (Brown et al., 2005, p591). In result, the elimination of identity- and control-oriented marking has led in many cases not to the expected elimination of status and functional bureaucratic hierarchies, but on the contrary to employees' engagement in 'territorial behaviour' aimed at ascertaining those very boundaries and ranks, namely by 'squatting' in

offices that were supposed to be unassigned, by displaying family photographs on individual portable carts or books reflecting their educational background in mail racks, and engaging in (verbal) self promotion (Elsbach, 2003).

At a symbolic level, employees perceive deterritorialisation as a message from employers telling them they are 'like an interchangeable part. They make it very clear that you're not important. That the cost of saving real estate is what's important' and that through the environment employers are 'pushing us all to be at the same level' (Elsbach, 2003, pp639-40). For architects, designers and facilities managers, the absence of personalisation or other signs of use enables the materialisation of the order and uniformity they conceive in their plans, which they associate symbolically with efficiency (Sundstrom and Sundstrom, 1986, pp220-1)-an association which, despite 'its long history and apparently widespread acceptance', environmental psychology researchers state is not supported by empirical research (ibid.).

Theorists see the non-territorial office as signalling the end of work stability materialised in the expectations of a career at the service of an employer (Hine, 2000, p142).

v. Hierarchy and status markers

About two thirds of the corporations that I visited agreed to having their work areas photographed. The prevalent organisation of space was 'territorial' and, in terms of layout, consisted in an 'in-between' arrangement in which the majority of employees work in open-plan spaces, while enclosed or 'cellular' offices are provided for those in the higher positions (the 'managers'), usually located at the edge of the open-plan area by the windows—what designers call the 'combi' (combination) office. The exception are the offices of legal corporations, where the most part of the employees seats in enclosed offices (mostly for two), and secretaries, called 'personal assistants', occupy cubicles with low partition walls in the central open-plan area outside the offices.

In the open-plan, individual desks were placed contiguously and organised in parallel rows or face-to-face, mirroring each other; partition walls between desks were low or nonexistent, especially in the financial industries' offices. Although the 'non-territorial' system was exclusive to the offices of consulting corporations,

some offices in other industries included also hot-desking seats available for visiting staff. The open-plan, typical of the Taylorist office and the office landscape, is favoured by office interior designers, not only because it achieves an efficient, non wasteful use of space, but also because it facilitates communication and therefore enhances social relations (Duffy, 1992, p9). Organisational theorists however have questioned these benefits. They argue instead, on the basis of empirical research, that 'privacy encourages communication while the absence of privacy limits communication' (Hatch, 1990, p142). Further, they show that office space design is related to job satisfaction through the effects it has on status, that is, on 'the relative standing of an individual in the organisation's hierarchy of authority and influence' (Sundstrom and Sundstrom, 1986, p234). In this sense, changes to privacy (a measure of satisfaction) will only have an effect on satisfaction if they are not homogeneous. In this sense, 'if private offices are available in the firm, people will be relatively dissatisfied if they do not have one' (Hatch, 1990, p142). In result, they argue that 'office designs symbolize status and that symbolic meanings (rather than behavioural effects) dictate the relationship between office design and satisfaction' (Hatch, 1990, p142).

The use of physical space to signify status has been a constant throughout the history of the office, functioning as a physical and symbolic translation of the bureaucratic hierarchy which underpins its organisation. The use of location, accessibility, floorspace, furnishings, and personalisation to mark each person's position in the hierarchy and the power or powerlessness each person holds in result of that hierarchy, is seen as important both by individuals and corporations. Status markers perform several functions: they communicate the status hierarchy to the members of the corporation and to visitors, which allows people to know 'how to relate to others in the system' and as such 'keeps things running smoothly', so much so that in many corporations 'workspaces can be read as literally as military insignia' (Sundstrom and Sundstrom, 1986, 236). Spatial hierarchy functions also as 'incentive', whereby employees who get a promotion are compensated with the corresponding status marker (eg., a private office, proximity to a window, a larger desk, a chair with a higher back, a higher quality wood veneer, or even a chrome strip), which has value because others in lower positions do not have it (Sundstrom and Sundstrom, 1986, pp239 and 243).

Furnishings alone may perform this role, as virtually all elements in the

workspace can operate as a status marker: 'carpeting, draperies, artworks, extra work-surfaces, a coat rack, or even a sofa and coffee table', not to mention desks (both by their size and materials) and chairs (by their size, shape, contour, tilt and swivel, such that by looking at the chairs where they sit it appears that 'managers and ... secretaries [are] entirely different species' (ibid., p243). Furniture manufacturers reflect these distinctions by naming chairs as 'performance work chairs' and 'executive chairs' (e.g. Herman Miller), or through 'Accountable' and 'CEO' carpets (e.g. Mohawk).

Moreover, much of this codified 'language' of corporate spatial power is relatively universal, precisely because the general public share the same codified language regarding the meaning of spatial aspects such as, for instance, that those with power are entitled to larger offices with windows or better quality furnishings while cubicles are occupied by those with relatively less power. Otherwise, popular films such as *Wall Street* (1987) or *Working Girl* (1998) would not have made sense to their audiences, and therefore would not have had the box office success they did (Panayotou and Kafiris, 2011, pp265 and 280).

It is only with the 'non-territorial' office in the 1990s that the concept of hierarchical organisation was questioned, its detractors arguing against what they perceived to be a negative mentality resulting from such organisation of space:

I was really tired of working with all these business people that I kept having to tell what to do ... I thought it would be great to work with intelligent people that you could give an assignment, give them parameters, then they'd go off, do the research and come back with the completed assignment (...). The new concept of the office changed the way we looked at people (...) and in the end, the result was a group of people who were now able to operate independently and people who were more capable of taking control over their personal freedom that I don't think you can get from working in a traditional hierarchical environment (Zelinsky, 1998, pp72-3).

So the main point of contention for the 'non-territorialists' was actually spatial hierarchy—either because it was understood to stifle creativity and autonomy, to limit collaboration and teamwork, or because it was costly (in the consulting corporations abolishing assigned workspaces, the great majority of

status markers have also been eliminated). However, when corporations decided that spatial hierarchy was no longer useful to their ends and in result tried to discard it, the change was met with resistance on the part of employees, who felt that hierarchy and the order this represented were under threat and therefore engaged in reinstating it, by physical or other means (Vischer, 2005, Elsbach 2003, Zalesny and Farace, 1987). To give a recent example, the move of a financial corporation to a new office building implied that two categories of high ranked employees—the 'managing directors' and the 'vice presidents'—lost, respectively, private offices with windows (replaced in the new building by private offices with *no* windows), and private offices all together, as the later were placed in desks in the open plan. Only top executives ('partners') maintained their private offices with windows. Although this was 'compensated' by a 'sky lobby', a 'massive auditorium-like space' with staff amenities such as cafeteria and gym with fitness classes and steam room, the employees still felt they were losing their status: 'If I had been at a bench my whole life, it would be fine ... but I used to have an office' (Craig, 2010).

In the offices that I visited, the work space was divided according to functional areas of business. Within these divisions, the main one is that between 'core activities' (the services provided and billed to clients), designated as 'front office', 'support activities' (the administrative tasks necessary to the running of the corporation itself), known as 'middle office' (internal consulting, 'risk management') and 'back office' (account services, 'human resources', IT departments). The spatial ranking is more than a linguistic metaphor—as I could witness, middle and back offices were not only placed in floors located below those occupied by the front office (including in the basement, with no natural light, as in the offices of an investment bank), they were also recognisable by subtle and not so subtle differences in the way they *looked*: furniture and furnishings were more 'functional' and of lesser quality, the lights were brighter, less personal objects and any objects in general were visible on top of desks.

Karen Ho (2009), in her ethnographic study of Wall Street, shows how the 'spatial segregation' between front, middle and back office is illustrative of the system of values and power relations structuring financial services institutions (pp73-87). The separation is between what are perceived as the 'money-making floors' and the 'non-money-making floors'. In the offices of American investment

banks, she explains, front, middle and back offices are located quite literally at, respectively, the upper, middle and lower floors of the building, and each is served by its own set of lifts, with the result that employees in the different levels never cross each other's paths. These spatial boundaries are the reflection of the wider hierarchical structure that governs the institution, and of the social segregation that it (re)introduces. As Ho describes, job positions in the front office are organised into a pyramidal hierarchy, composed of defined levels (from bottom to top: analyst, associate, vice president, director and managing director), each subordinated to that immediately above; workers are recruited from elite universities, most of them are white, upper-middle-class and male; they are the most valued employees as they are understood to generate revenue for the corporation; there is a 'culture of overwork' (110-hour weeks) and high 'compensation'. In the middle and back offices, the pyramid is less stratified, with fewer levels. It are mainly those in the middle office and in the top hierarchical position that hold university degrees, from well-established but less prestigious universities. They come often from middle-class and working-class backgrounds and are less valued by the corporation, who sees them as a 'cost centre'. Their work schedule is 9-to-5 and their pay is substantially lower than that in the front office. Upward mobility between 'offices' simply does not occur.

Ho compares the offices of investment banks to a 'hierarchical white-collar sweatshop'. In her words, 'the daily environment of the investment banking workplace looks more like an austere white-collar factory than the popularly imagined series of luxurious (but intense) power meetings and lunches in gleaming, high-tech surroundings' (p83). Hence the designated areas that keep clients away from the work spaces, as they would find 'often run-down work spaces (...) chipped paint, worn carpets, outdated computers, and cramped cubicles (...) [in] bare and impersonal surroundings' instead of the 'marble halls' and 'mahogany executive suites' with which the corporation presents itself to them (pp81 and 83).

If what Ho is describing is the reality of the high-end financial services office in the late 1990s America, what I witnessed on this side of the Atlantic, more than ten years later, presents many similarities. In the nearly fifty offices of various services industries that I visited, productivity and hierarchy seemed to determine the organisation of space and how this, in turn, organises people in space.

In 'Space, Knowledge and Power', Foucault (2000) argues that 'there are a few simple and exceptional examples in which the architectural means reproduce ... the social hierarchies', the exception being the military camp where the place occupied by the tents and the buildings reserved for each rank 'reproduces precisely through architecture a pyramid of power' (p363). But from my photographic enquiry I found the office to be a space of this kind too. Like the army, the corporation is one of the institutions 'exist[ing] within and alongside the structures of the state, but without involvement in its democratic forms (...) like islands of late feudalism', writes Peter Wollen (2004, p13). Space in the office is not only the setting where hierarchical power takes place, but it constitutes, amongst others, one of the means for its enactment. In other words, space in the office is a tool both reflecting and creating the hierarchical power structure. Even the 'non-territorial' office, with its claims of flattened hierarchies, seems, as social scientists' studies show, only to exacerbate them. It is interesting how corporations' efforts to get rid of them (spatially, at least) is met with resistance by those subjected to it. Hierarchy has been internalised and it is those who are subjected to hierarchical power (and are by the same token entitled to exercise it over their subordinates) that call for its perpetuation. Hierarchy within this 'flat' space resurfaces in other forms, mainly symbolic, such as hierarchies in office décor and location (higher floors versus lower floors), which differentiate not only among workers, but also between workers and non-workers (clients, visitors). To adopt a symbolic perspective, the care and money put into clients' areas seems to signal, not only their power, affluence or whatever image the corporation wants to project to the outside, but it is also telling, internally, of who the corporation values first and foremost.

Conclusions

The tour style of my first visit to the office I have described largely anticipated those that were to follow. In the ten offices occupying full buildings included in the sample, I witnessed the same functional organisation of space, which was shown to me in a similar sequence: from the lounge by the reception, I would be taken straight to the top to photograph the clients and top executives 'ceremonial' areas, and from there I would be led to the formal meeting rooms (including boardrooms), usually on the same floor, and from there, if it had been

authorized, down to the work floors, until reaching the staff canteen and other 'amenities' (lounge, games room, gymnasium) located in the lower floors. Some of these offices had additional client areas on the floor right above the reception, accessible by a flight of stairs separate from those used to access the work floors, and I would be taken to these before or after the top floors. For the facilities manager or the security guard 'escorting' me, these were indeed the areas worth photographing. The rest had no 'distinguishing architectural features' and therefore were not 'worthwhile photographic subjects', as an 'associate director' in the 'investor marketing & communications' department of a corporation put it. By placing the clients' areas near the reception and on the highest floors, clients are kept away from the work floors, which remain hidden from the outsider's sight.

Smaller offices would also, in general, be organised into the same functional areas: reception (waiting) – clients' area (informal presential contact, 'entertaining', making business happen) – formal meeting rooms (presential, formal discussion and decision-making) – work spaces (production, through desk work, internal meetings and informal interaction) - 'staff amenities' (informal interaction and satisfaction of basic needs – eat, rest, exercise, and even health, as some of the larger offices had doctor's surgeries indoors).

Considering what I have witnessed in the offices in the light of Foucault's proposed 'guidelines' (Foucault rejects expressly that what his reflection provides either a theory or a methodology) for the study of power relationships (see p134), the space of the office arises as a means of 'bringing power relations into being'. These power relations are enabled by a system of differentiations based in hierarchy, whose goal is productivity and the resulting accumulation of profits. Its form of institutionalization is the corporation or, in a broader sense, any organised form of business. Their degree of rationalisation is very high, provided by the very 'representations of space' studied above, especially by their normative branches. An extensive knowledge of the effects of space at a personal and social level (namely organisation theory, environmental psychology, and organisation behaviour, which objectify the productive subject) underpins a sophisticated conception of space (carried out by organisation theory, architecture, interior design), where nothing is left to chance. It would certainly not be exaggerated to apply to the office the same description that Foucault uses to describe the exercise of power relations:

It is a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting-subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action. A set of actions upon their actions (Foucault, 1993: 427)

The aim is to transform the worker into a 'productive subject'. The ways of achieving this through the office, as well as the definitions of what a productive subject is, have varied throughout the history of the modern office—from visual surveillance in the Taylorist open office, to status markers in the territorial office and induced interaction in the non-territorial office; from the silent productive worker to the talkative and relaxed productive worker. In the offices that I witnessed, people are made into 'productive subjects' not so much through visual surveillance (in spite of the pervasive open plan arrangement) or functional hierarchy, but by status hierarchies and subtler, symbolic means. As Hofbauer puts it:

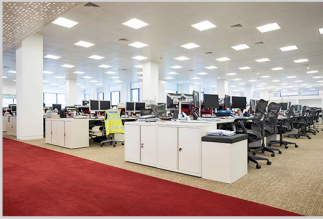
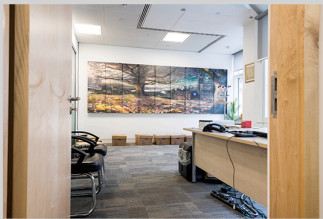
The fact that discipline at the modern, post-Taylorist workplace, too, is produced by forces acting upon bodies, through the design of equipment and space, is less obvious. Sophisticated design concepts suggest that workplaces can be adapted to human needs. The overall goal of modern management ... is to meet the expectations of workers and thereby arouse their intellectual, emotional and social skills for new tasks. Modern office design accordingly attempts to mirror informal relationships or emphasize social bonds among team members, and to create workplaces that attract employees to the extent that an attachment to the workplace as 'second home' is generated (2000, p171).

The analogy between the office space and the domestic setting had already been applied to the design of offices. As seen in chapter two, during the 1950s and 1960s 'offices began to resemble the contemporarily-furnished homes of the wealthy', in order to attract clerical workers who were able to find better paid jobs in factories at a time when much of office work, consisting in processing data for use in the computer, was similar in terms of monotony and repetitiveness to

factory work (Forty, 1986, p140). By radically transforming the physical environment of the office through attractive entrances, carpeted floors, tasteful colours, stylish table-like desks, and 'cosmetically treated' office machinery such as typewriters with light-coloured, all-enveloping steel cases which concealed the mechanism, or adding machines enclosed in pressed steel or moulded coloured plastic covers, employers sought to enhance the respectability and enjoyability of office work in relation to factory work, and enforce its image as middle class. If the contemporary office has maintained these traits of domestic comfort, the most apt analogy to describe its newly acquired fashionable, leisurely appearance, seems to be that of the hotel. This resonates with, on the one hand, what I have witnessed and, on the other, with corporations' goals and designers and facilities managers' preoccupation with spatial efficiency. For employers, the dream must surely be a space that workers have to pay in order to use, instead of using it as part of the employment contract package, for 'free'. Dazzled by the high-end décor and staff 'amenities', workers perhaps will not complain too vehemently.

The next chapter discusses how the visual work represents these spatial power relations witnessed in the offices, and how the photographs may intervene.

Workspaces







4

Witnessing and Intervening



4.1. Ezra Stoller, Seagram Building, New York, 1958



4.2. Jacqueline Hassink, 'Total S.A., 2 place Jean Millier, Paris, France', in *The Table of Power 2*, 2011



4.3. Jacqueline Hassink, 'Daimler Benz AG, Haus 4, Epple Strasse 225, Stuttgart, Germany', in *The Table of Power*, 1996



4.4. 'Boardroom. Audit, tax and advisory services firm', author's photograph

How can the space of the office, designed to act upon the subject in order to make them productive, be represented through photographs devoid of the very subjects which it aims to act upon? As I argued in chapter one, by focusing on the office empty of office workers, the photographs of Hassink and Cohen were able to address the space of the office itself, and at the same time to incite a more inquisitive engagement by the spectator. The question underlying my empirical visual enquiry was then how to bear witness to the power relations exercised through the space of the office *productively*, that is, how to describe these and, at the same time, how to intervene, as Bate puts it, in the representations of it.

Unproductive photographs: empty space and capitalism

In an essay discussing the existence of a 'socialist space' through the analysis of a photographic archive from the German Democratic Republic (GDR), art historian Philip Ursprung (2013) argues that depicting spaces empty, without the people or, for that matter, the workers who normally inhabit it, is characteristic of capitalism or, as he puts it, of the 'capitalist system of representation' (pp68-9). As an example, Ursprung invokes the empty industrial buildings of Bernd and Hilla Becher, and the early photographs of empty urban sites by Thomas Struth. His point is that, contrary to the representation of workers as 'satisfied workers, doing their job under good conditions', concentrating on their tasks or 'in dialogue with others, learning and teaching' (pp65 and 72) contrary, in sum, to their thoroughly positive representation in the numerous photographs of offices and factories included in the GDR archive, 'capitalist' representations of workers portray them as alienated and as victims or, most often, do not show them at all. This 'implicit prohibition of images of human labour' is due, Ursprung argues, to capitalism's bad conscience about workers, whose alienation and exploitation it wants to repress; work is a taboo, Ursprung writes, which modern art, architecture and Realism alike lack the means or the political will to represent (pp65-7). Ursprung cites the project of the Farm Security Administration during the American 1930s depression as an example of a realist negative depiction, showing workers as victims, and as such reiterating their exploitation. Or the work of August Sander, which abstracts the workers from their surroundings and the product of their work, by posing them against a 'stage-like background' (p68). Blurred backgrounds,

shallow depth of field, as well as the emptying of space, in particular the space of production, are for Ursprung the modes of expression typical of capitalist space.

His critique resonates with Bertolt Brecht's comment, famously quoted by Walter Benjamin (2005), that '[a] photograph of the Krupp works or the A.E.G. tells us next to nothing about these institutions. ... The reification of human relations – the factory, say – means that they are no longer explicit' (p526). The complaint was against realism, in particular that of the German 1920s 'New Objectivity' movement, their point being that 'the mere reflection of reality reveal nothing about reality' and therefore that 'something must ... be *built up*, something artificial, posed' (Benjamin, 2005, p526). For Benjamin, photographs of the factories of large corporations such as Krupp (the largest steelmaker and armament manufacturer at the time in Europe) or AEG (Germany's then main electric company) showing impressive vistas of the massive, well equipped factories' buildings empty (as in the photographer's Albert Renger-Patzsch 1928 manifesto and best-seller photobook *The World is Beautiful*), were anathema to what he believed should be the author's commitment to the 'class struggle' (Benjamin, 1998). Photography as practised by the New Objectivity, Benjamin (1998) writes, can only say 'How beautiful' of 'a river dam or an electric cable factory', as 'it has succeeded in turning abject poverty itself, by handling it in a modish, technically perfect way, into an object of enjoyment' (pp94-5). In *The World is Beautiful*, Renger-Patzsch's photographs of plants, animals, landscapes, industrial objects and buildings all receive the same visual treatment, based on the conventions of the objective, 'tripod-photography' mode: depth of field, high-fidelity information, perspective correction. The spectator is invited to delight in the spectacle offered by form and light, of the familiar presented in a new or spectacular way.

How then to photograph space in a *productive* way? Given that, as I argued in chapter three, the space of the office is a means for exercising power relations, photographs of factories or, in this case, of offices, may actually be able to tell us something about the 'human relations', as Brecht puts it, that those subsume. The question is then: how can space be addressed through photography in a way that makes apparent those power relations, all the same avoiding, as Cohen (2012) puts it, 'the trap of making "beautiful pictures"' (p149)?

Productive photographs: empty space and crime scenes

An example of productive photographs showing empty spaces are, Benjamin suggested, the photographs of Paris' deserted streets by Eugène Atget. During the span of thirty years until his death in 1927, Atget made photographs of the old Paris which was about to disappear, that he would then sell to artists, archivists, antiquarians, designers, builders and institutions such as public libraries (Nesbit, 1992). Atget worked at dawn, using a bulky view camera and tripod to produce views of empty streets, alleyways, courtyards, and parks; he eschewed the picturesque and the anecdotal, the 'great sights and so-called landmarks' (including the Eiffel Tower, erected in 1889), focusing instead on the overlooked, the 'unremarked, forgotten, cast adrift' (Benjamin, 2005, p518). For Benjamin (2005), the emptiness of the photographs, their utter lack of mood, create a 'salutary estrangement between man [sic] and his surroundings', constitutive of a 'new way of seeing' (p519). Atget's deserted streets, he writes, 'demand a specific kind of approach; free-floating contemplation is not appropriate to them. They stir the viewer; he [sic] feels challenged by them in a new way' (Benjamin, 2005, p226). Atget is to Benjamin no less than the precursor of modern photography, the one who 'initiate[d] the emancipation of object from aura (...) suck[ing] the aura out of reality like water from a sinking ship'. By depopulating the image, Atget had done away with what was for Benjamin photography's ultimate servitude to the task of preserving the singular and the unique: the person, as immortalized in the portrait, and had 'allowed that space, the space in which they lived, to get onto the plate' (Benjamin, 2005, pp518-9). In result, Atget's photographs demanded not psychological identification nor empathy, but interpretation and analysis. Like forensic photographs, 'they become standard evidence for historical occurrences, and acquire a hidden political significance' (Benjamin, 1969, p226).

The comparison of Atget's photographs to the scenes of crime that Benjamin endorses here had been suggested in an article written in 1928 by the surrealist Albert Valentin, for whom Atget's empty streets 'constitute the natural theatre of violent crime, of melodrama' (Nesbit, 1992, p196). Like forensic photographs, they offer evidence of an event whose contours the spectator is 'stirred' to find out. In his essay about 'crime scene' photography, Peter Wollen (1997) posits the crimes to which Benjamin refers as 'a social crime, a political

crime, rather than an individual incident or a human destiny', the 'political significance' of Atget's photographs resulting from the evidence of 'historical occurrences' they provide (p28). However, Wollen casts doubts on what he calls Benjamin's 'optimistic reading' of Atget. For Wollen, Atget's empty streets do not incite the productive analysis that Benjamin had hoped for. In his words, 'perhaps the removal of human beings from the landscape leads not toward analysis but toward a new mode of aesthetic contemplation precisely because there is no moral reason behind Atget's look but simply a documentary impulse to record' (Wollen, 1997, p29).

The association with crime scenes arising from Atget's photographs had to do, Wollen argues, with the fact that they provide 'a banal and uninteresting setting into which we could project our own images of violence and melodrama' (p30). Empty rooms, the broken pane of glass, isolated objects and piles of debris, 'an acute sensitivity to the trite, the futile, the banal, and the insignificant', all rendered through the conventions of the neutral forensic photograph, are the signifiers of the form of aesthetic contemplation that Atget inaugurated, what Wollen terms as an 'aestheticism ... of atmosphere and of detail [where] by 'atmosphere' I mean a sense of the uncanny or the abject as psychic spaces suggested by a work, [and] by 'detail', the need for fixation on a single item of interest' (p32). This type of crime scene photography would not encourage the spectator to speculate about the circumstances of the crime (who committed it, how, why), nor wonder about the victim, nor even enjoy the scene as a morbid spectacle. On the contrary, it offers a depressive view of the world, a 'radical desemanticization' which uses violent crime as a 'pretext for aesthetic asceticism and a paradoxical, perhaps ironic, postminimalism", and leaves the spectator 'mourn[ing] for a meaningless future' (Wollen, 1997, pp32 and 34).

To this aesthetic of apolitical crime scenes, Wollen counterposes the 'politicized crime scenes' of photographer Anthony Hernandez's *Landscapes for the Homeless* series. In these, he shows the makeshift shelters of Los Angeles's homeless on the edges of the freeways that serve the bustling city. Their inhabitants are absent, only the traces of their existence at the margins of society are visible as evidence for the spectator to interpret. The crime here, Wollen (1997) writes, 'is surely a crime with political significance. The perpetrator is the logic of the untrammelled free-market capitalism, but ... also us, as citizens of a

democratic society that has dismantled its safety nets and reduced its outcasts to a kind of human garbage' (p29). Hernandez photographs these spaces not out of a (commercial) necessity to record, nor due to aesthetic motivations, but, as he puts it, 'because nobody else was looking'. His position is that of a moral witness, 'looking at things so that they can be reshow to those who would prefer not to look' (p29).

A similar emptying strategy was employed by Martha Rosler in her influential critical piece on documentary photography, *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems* (1974-5). Dealing with the subject of homelessness and alcoholism in the Bowery, an 'archetypal skid row' in New York extensively covered by documentary photographers (Rosler, 2004b, p177), Rosler produced a photo-text conceptual art piece, juxtaposing photographs made by her with text consisting in slang words for being drunk. The photographs, shot in a reportage style (employing a hand-held 35 mm camera, black and white film, and frontal shots and close ups that draw associations with Walker Evans' 'documentary' style), show storefronts, empty sidewalks and doorways where bottles have been left behind, as traces of those who were there, deliberately refusing to show these very people, most of them too drunk to be conscious of the presence of the camera, and therefore abstaining from victimizing them further, a pernicious act which documentary photographers, Rosler argues, by the very aim of 'helping' them and 'exposing' their situation, had engaged in. Against the limitations and inadequacies of documentary mimetic representation, Rosler employs the rhetorical figure of metonymy, consisting in the use of a part for the whole, that is, the street for the social problems that it houses, in her words, the 'setting implying the condition itself' (2004b, p195). Despite Rosler's insistence that *The Bowery...* is essentially a critique of documentary, a 'work of refusal' as she puts it, and that the photographs are 'powerless' and present 'nothing new' (pp191 and 194-5), her photographs of the empty Bowery are productive in that they bear witness to the (squalid) space where painful events take place. The effect is to reshow this space and the traces of those events to those who usually avoid looking (including those she calls the 'professional managerial urban gentry' that 'must still step over the sleeping bums in the doorway'), while triggering reflection about what the photographs are about (an effect expanded by the text that accompanies the images) but intentionally refuse to depict. In this way, the

photographs intervene in its 'normal' representations which evoke concern or pathos instead.

If photographs of empty space might have the ability to engage the spectator in interpretation and reflection, how do then photographs of empty offices 'work'? In what measure and by which means can they be productive?

The rhetoric of the 'strict, registering, architectural eye'

The expression is Hassink's and refers to the visual approach she employed for *The Table of Power 2*. In her words: 'the tables were photographed using a similar approach for each room—without people in the frame and with a strict, registering, architectural eye' (2011a, p4). As seen in chapter one (pXX), Hassink uses the conventions of the objective mode to bear witness (the expression here is mine) to the secluded space of the corporate boardrooms. My aim is now to examine how her photographs work, what is their effect, in other words, *how* do they bear witness.

My hypothesis is that, to paraphrase Benjamin, their effect is not, primarily, to 'stir' the spectator. This occurs not because, as Benjamin puts it, the photographs are 'beautiful' or 'aestheticise' the subject, handling it in a 'modish, technically perfect way" and thereby eliciting the spectator's 'free-floating contemplation' (after all, spectacle is, as I argued, inherent to documentary and therefore should be put at the service of its project), but rather due to the set of formal choices that construct the visual coding as argument of the picture. These formal choices include, as we have seen, the use of a medium-format camera with a tripod, placed fixedly at a relatively high camera position. If the images created in this way convey neutrality, the photographs themselves, contrary to what Hassink seems to imply by the expression 'strict, registering, architectural eye', are not themselves neutral. As Bate makes clear,

the points-of-view, chosen by the photographer, are a crucial decision for the signification and later meanings given to the subject matter in the picture. In this process of visual construction, the camera-photographer represents a scene to the viewer like a painter or theatre director constructs a 'scene' for actors. (...) The spatial description provides information, however 'neutral' its appearance, and in

this aspect it is the lens that constructs the visual coding as argument of the picture. In contrast, it is the moment of taking the picture via the camera-shutter that gives prominence to the instant and time of the image. In this way, time and space are configured as photographic meanings about the things (objects, places, people) in the picture (2010, p6).

In Hassink's photographs, the boardrooms are presented from a position and 'composed' in a way that essentially makes them look powerful. Hassink selects this position in the following way:

Entering each boardroom I ... walked around the table looking at it from different angles. Characteristic elements in the room, together with the view, decided the angle from which the table would be photographed (Hassink, 2011a, p4).

The 'view' that Hassink will then (re)produce through her 'registering' eye is in fact a constructed scene, created through the use of wide angle lens and a particular camera height. This 'tableau' scene renders the space of the boardrooms in a scale that is not that of a human being standing in the room, presenting a view that is not accessible to the human eye as such. It creates a nearly panoramic view of the room, a total vision that, together with the descriptive power of photography, lends the photographed boardroom its own particular power (e.g. illus. 4.2).

If this effect might be coherent with Hassink postulate that the boardrooms are the very symbol of corporate power, it is not however a necessary effect of the representation of that room—a different visual strategy would have produced a different argument about the same space. Hassink's photographs provide detailed descriptions of the boardrooms and give visibility to a largely hidden and inaccessible space to the general public. To be sure, this is important, as it enlarges the ambit of the visible. But, I argue, this does not *intervene*. Going back to Bate's definition of documentary, he writes that the ambition of works that offer a documentary knowledge about the world is

to represent social spaces, people and events in ways that intervene in the understanding of them and consequently also the perception of the world. This demands, in one hand, a description of the represented world already familiar, on

the other, an intervention within it (2010, p5).

The rhetoric of Hassink's pictures has, on the contrary, the effect of uncritically reaffirming the generally received idea of the corporate world as powerful—an 'image' of power that corporations themselves pursue publicly and ostensibly, namely by choosing imposing skyscrapers for their offices. Hassink's photographs fall short, in this sense, to intervene in the general understanding of the corporate space and, by extension the corporate world, as powerful. On the contrary, they show it as the spectator would generally expect it to be: opulent, and therefore powerful. Not for nothing did Hassink's photographs feature in the business newspaper *Financial Times*. The representation they put forward did not shock its audience, rather it offered an apt subject for the newspaper's weekend supplement, in the form of a piece of docu-entertainment to which the audience of this newspaper could easily relate and even engage with by discussing for instance the merits and disadvantages of particular boardroom décor (Kellaway, 2011). The reason they do this is because of their seemingly unaware deployment of the codes and strategies of 'architectural' photography—which, as I explain below, is implicated in the production of those generalised meanings.

Furthermore, *The Table of Power 2*, through its large, heavy, high production value book, reciprocates the luxury of the boardrooms. This is in contrast however with the book produced for the first project, *The Table of Power* (1993-5). Passport size (a reference to the identity documents corporations often asked her to show), its small pages transform the boardrooms into pocket size miniatures that can be held in the hand, in this way altering the perception of the boardrooms as immense, distant, imposing—powerful (illus. 4.3). It is also interesting to note that this project was shot with a 35 mm reflex camera (Hassink, 2011a: 4) and that, in result, although it is unlikely that the camera was hand-held (the ambient light in interiors is generally not sufficiently bright to permit a shutter speed fast enough to prevent blurring by camera movement), the photographs look more like snapshots and less like architectural photography vistas, a look they had in *The Table of Power 2*. This is due mainly to the tilt down of the camera indicated by the slightly diverging vertical lines, an axial downward movement of the camera aimed at adding background to the framed area which, had the camera (that is, the film or digital sensor) been level, that is, parallel to the plane of the scene, would not have been included. Perspective correction—the

avoidance of perspective distortion such as diverging and converging vertical lines—is characteristic of the commercial, high production value images produced by architectural photographers, who aim to create an 'authentic representation' of buildings and other architectural subjects by trying to replicate two-dimensionally how they appear to the human eye in the real world (Schulz, 2012, p7).

These formal aspects of the first *The Table of Power*—small print size, images printed to the edge of the book page, 'distorted' vertical lines and snapshot looking images—*do* something to the boardrooms. This strategies concur, I argue, to *intervene* in the represent the boardrooms, working against the general perception, cultivated by corporations themselves, of the corporate world as powerful.

Witnessing and intervening

How can my photographs then bear witness to spatial power relations in the office? And how can they intervene in existing representations of the office? What are these representations?

I experimented through the practice and, based on this experimentation, I selected a lower than eye level height (slightly over 3 ft above ground level) to position the camera, which permitted precisely to see things from closer to the ground: tables and chairs are seen not from the top but from the side and therefore occupy a larger portion of the frame, the flooring occupies a large area of the frame and presents more detail and thus its texture is visible, the area occupied by the ceiling is sensibly reduced, that is, less of it is visible (e.g. illus. 4.4). The effect is to make the spectator feel more grounded and to present space in a more human scale. This position feels subjectively more realistic, I argue, than the eye level height, which produces instead an uneasy feeling of seeing the photographed scene from an elevated position, of being suspended in mid air (e.g. illus. 3.1). This happens because the angle of view of wide-angle lenses is wider than the field of view of the human eye. On the other hand, the lower height reduces the visibility of things located behind the furniture in the foreground, as this obstructs the sight of them. In the lower height shot image, what is now placed at the eye level of the spectator-camera is the furniture, in particular the chairs, instead of the area wide above tables and chairs in the eye level shots, where the

eye has to move down in order to focus on them. This new distribution of the elements within the frame accentuates the chairs' resemblance to persons, their anthropomorphic qualities. Similarly to what occurs in Lynne Cohen's 'Office' discussed above (see p81), the chairs become metaphors for people in a way that they do not in shots taken from a higher position. In this way, the power relations materialised by furniture and its disposition within the space of the office become the subject of the photographs.

I tried also to intervene in the viewpoints that the space naturally 'imposed' on the framing and composition. The square and rectangular floor plans, the lines of the tiled ceiling, the lines formed by the aligned desks, the vastness of the open plans, all provided a geometrical ordered scene with elements placed at right angles that echoed the orthogonality of the frame and encouraged frontal, including symmetrical, compositions with dramatic vanishing lines creating a strong sense of depth. Although the offices I visited were less geometrical than the Taylorist and Modernist offices (e.g. illus. 2.9), especially in what refers to furniture, as colourful, round shaped furniture and cushioned chairs have replaced standardised metallic desks and cabinet files, the structure of the contemporary office space is basically the same, owing to the offices location in vast high-rise speculative open floors, what Fredric Jameson terms, after the architecture theorist and critic Charles Jencks, an 'extreme isometric space' (Jameson, 1998, p186). In order to free the frame from this photogenic geometry of the office space, I introduced less obvious viewpoints by privileging diagonal compositions. As Blundell Jones (2012) writes in relation to the work of the architect Hans Scharoun, who in the 1920s proposed 'aperspectivity', a spatial system rejecting the right angle in favour of irregular environments, 'escape from the dominant central axis and symmetry was an escape from both aristocratic and fascist power, leading to a democratic situation where people were permitted equal but diverse points of view, both literally and metaphorically' (p53). In Scharoun's constructions (namely the Berlin Philharmonic concert hall), perspective views are skewed by the changing angles, and there are no viewpoints from where to take the ideal shot, making them difficult to photograph. The same characteristic was noted by Jameson in relation to the architect Frank Gehry's house in Santa Monica, California built in 1979, which Jameson defines as a 'postmodern building': the house 'block[s] the choice of photographic point of view, evading the image

imperialism of photography, securing a situation in which no photograph of this house will ever be quite right' (Jameson, 1991, p125). Through my photographs, I aimed to do the reverse, within the limits of course of the 'perspectivity' that lies at the core of the medium: to introduce this 'freedom from the right angle' that the space of the office itself lacked by not framing the subject at right angles with the picture frame. The resulting images are less pleasing for the spectator: they rarely show a room's or an area's full view, they direct the look of the spectator away from 'great sights' such as the view from the top of high rise buildings or do not show them at all, there is often in the photographs, as Blundell Jones (2012) puts it in relation to photographs taken of Scharoun's buildings, 'a sense of the frame being cut off arbitrarily at the sides because one wants always to see more' (pp54-5). The asymmetric, awry compositions create tension instead of the harmony and balance prescribed by the architectural photography canon. The images do not show space as especially attractive nor seductive. Tension arises also from the way furniture, especially chairs, are positioned: I did not align them with a vanishing point nor the wall, nor tidied the spaces (they were spotless any way), on the contrary, I photographed as I found them, either neatly arranged or showing the signs of recent use.

Despite what might sound like an 'anti-architectural-photography-aesthetic' visual approach, I employed several of the conventions of the objective mode favoured by that type of photography: I used a tripod, a small aperture set at f11 and a low ISO sensitivity set at 100. I wanted the photographs to convey high information, to not compromise on detail. My aim was to provide a thorough, largely unprecedented, description of the office space, hence the high-fidelity information. I also used wide angle lenses (with 24mm and 35mm of focal length) for an angle of view large enough to enable the framing of the furnishings as well as the architectural structure of the space, and shot level to the scene plane to avoid perspective distortion. By offering visual detail and a reassuring illusion of depth, the photographs still afford the spectator a spectacle involving 'an entertaining of the eye through form and light', as Cowie puts it (2011, p13). Given the conditions the corporations imposed for the visits (one visit only, with 'escort' throughout, and usual duration of one hour), I used a digital camera (a 35 mm full frame single lens reflex) and available light only in order to be able to work as fast as possible, and also, more deliberately, because the cold, sharp look of digital

photography was adequate to represent the look of the offices.

Through the approach just described, the visual work aims to bear witness to the space of the office from a particular position, both physical (the low camera height), and figurative (from the position of a human being, namely an office worker). To recall Bate's assertion, 'being a witness always implies a definite point of view, standing here or there, which makes a difference. Documentary photography is no different, and it can be thought of as the point of view of a witness (...) [It] *always has a point of view*' (see above p127). It is this point of view that the photographs, to use Burgin's words, bestow upon the spectator. Given that the geometric perspective system built into the camera implies a unique point of view (that of the camera), the photograph depicts at once a scene and the gaze of the camera, and it is this gaze and this point of view that the spectator is put into when they look at the photograph, 'as an offer you can't refuse' (Burgin, 1982, p146). As Burgin writes, when the photograph meets the viewing subject in a 'seamless join', that is, with no interferences in the perspective system, the effect of representation is to recruit the viewing subject and made them complicit 'in the production of ... meaning' (p150). In this way, through its 'grounded' point of view, somewhat 'awry' framing avoiding great sights/tes, the visual work, I argue, recruits the spectator not in enjoying the spectacularity of the space of the office as s/he would be encouraged to do if the space was photographed from a higher position. Rather, it bestows upon the spectator a position involved in the (photographed) space, looking at space itself, at its division into functional areas, at the disposition of furniture in specific arrangements, at its hierarchical organisation, witnessing as such the space, and engaging perhaps in thinking this space organises people, how it 'makes them subjects', to paraphrase Foucault. Do the photographs created in this way *intervene*? How do they intervene, in relation to what?

When developing the textual study of the relation between power and space in the office, I draw also on architecture and office design literature. In contrast to the organisation theory and other social science literature, this was richly illustrated (the 'coffee-table' book type is very common), with photographs with 'high production' values showing orderly and perfect spaces. This idealising representation of the office is not only provided in architectural photographs taken a posteriori, it is also, as architecture historian Beatriz Colomina shows, what lies

at the core of space itself, following her thesis that modern architecture is a form of mass media (Colomina, 1994)--and the office, as we have seen, is largely a product of modern architecture. In her words, architecture 'is built as image in the pages of magazines and newspapers. This is not just because architects are ... making advertising images of their spaces ... but before that, the image is itself a space carefully constructed by the architect' (Colomina, 2006, p21). The relationship between architecture and images is so intertwined, she argues, that 'images are the new architecture (...) [and] an endless flow of images now constitutes the environment. Buildings become images, and images become a kind of building, occupied like any other architectural space', so much so that 'photographers ... become architects' (Colomina, 2006, p43).

The political theorist Fredric Jameson (1991) has identified this interdependence also within postmodernism. As he puts it, the 'appetite' for architecture is an 'appetite for photography: what we want to consume today are not the buildings themselves (...) [but] the glossy plates, in all their splendour' (p99). The reason for this being that buildings in photographs have remarkable and distinguishable qualities which they lack in the actual world; architectural photographs show 'real colour', 'brilliance', 'phosphorescence', offering a commodity that affords 'avid relish', where what is consumed first and foremost 'is the value of the photographic equipment ... and not of its objects' (p101).

Images become 'substitutes for reality', writes the late Robert Elwall, historian of architectural photography, their 'promotional power ... [and] dramatic visual impact ... selling to an unwary public a glossy dream of perfection attained that leaves the audience unprepared for "the shock of the real"' (Elwall: 9). As the architectural photographer and one of the most celebrated practitioners of the genre Julius Shulman puts it, architectural photographers are in the business of 'selling architecture to the public' (Rosa and Shulman: 88). Following Elwall, the transition to colour photography and the expansion of interior photography fostered by 'the continuing popularity of voyeuristic peeps into the lifestyles of the rich and famous', has contributed to a 'degeneration [of architectural photography] into a series of 'fashion shoots' (...) [and] an edited world of sanitized perfection', where 'buildings glow in the effervescence of eternal youth; appearance and style are lauded to the neglect of structure, spatial planning and use; graphic drama and visual excitement are prized above exegesis' (Elwall, 2004, p201). Elwall

advocates instead 'an architectural photography that communicates the experience of the building not just as the architect hoped it might be but as it is perceived in reality by the user' (ibidem).

How are these images produced, what are their visual strategies and codes? My argument is that through the visual strategy described above, my visual work intervenes in these 'dominant systems of representation' and 'ideological' uses of photography by institutions who define 'our sense of coherent recognisable styles in photo-practice ... of what is "appropriate" to certain types of photography as opposed to others' by employing visual styles 'taken for granted ... concerning the selection, construction and repetition of particular motifs, camera angles, grades of paper, and so on' (Holland et al., 1986, p7). Intervention means then to 'challenge both the content and the context' of these photographic practices (ibid.) that, in relation to the office, define our very sense of what and how an office is and, by extension, corporate space.

These rules refer to perspective and composition, among other variables. Perspective is the system that allows to represent the effect of three-dimensional space and depth two-dimensionally, as seen by the human eye, by projecting the rays emanating from each of the points constituting the subject to the 'centre of projection' (the human eye) onto a flat surface or 'projection plane' located in between the two. This 'cone of vision' constitutes, as Roland Barthes (1977) reminds, the very structure of representation: 'there will still be representation for so long as a subject (author, reader, spectator or voyeur) casts his [sic] gaze towards a horizon on which he cuts out the base of a triangle, his eye (or his mind) forming the apex' (p69). The geometrical system of perspective is built into the photographic camera and lens, producing images that imitate the human eye perception. However, when the camera (that is, the film or image sensor) is not parallel to the projection plane, perspective 'distortion' occurs: vertical lines do not look parallel but instead they converge (the effect of buildings 'leaning' within a picture) or diverge (as in the photographs from the *The Table of Power* discussed above), an effect that does not occur in human vision because the brain automatically 'corrects' the distortion. In result, photographs that present these distortions interfere with the illusion of three-dimensionality the image affords. In photographs of interiors for instance 'even slightly off-kilter verticals quickly make interior shots look strange' (Schulz, 2012, p129). In result, 'an unwritten rule

dictates that architectural photographers generally try to keep vertical lines vertical in their images' (Schulz: 59). Exceptions to this rule would be the deliberate use of distortion for adding 'drama or artistic impact' (Schulz, 2012, p60).

Architecture historian and critic Peter Blundell Jones (2012) points out that perspective correction is dictated by the frame of the picture, as this 'limits the angle of view, imposes a geometrical composition, and presents both a horizontal and a vertical datum with which to compare the content' (p49). When the image echoes the frame with the geometry of the scene, perspective 'allows one to feel that one could almost step into the space, and walk to the other end of the building', which gives the spectator a psychological 'sense of control' that is 'reassuring' (p49). The perspective effect in a photograph depends exclusively on the viewpoint and therefore perspective correction dictates which ones are the 'right' camera positions.

The other main determinant of camera position in architectural shots is composition. Composition is, as one manual defines it, 'the controlled ordering of the elements in a visual work as the means for achieving clear communication (...) enabling [the photographer] to influence the viewer physically, emotionally, and intellectually' (Grill and Scanlon, 1990, pp8 and 14). Less dramatically, we can say that composition refers to how space (as opposed to time, and therefore including not only places, but also people and objects) is organised within the frame to make visual arguments and create meaning. Manuals invariably include 'shooting techniques' and formulas like the 'golden section', the 'rule of thirds', and other geometrical relations like symmetry, for achieving 'good composition', generally understood as that achieving 'balance', 'harmony', or 'order', and thus producing a 'pleasing' photograph that 'captives' the spectator (Grill and Scanlon, 1990, pp22-3). This 'imaginary force, [this] real power to please' of the 'well composed' photograph is due, Victor Burgin (1982) argues, to its capacity for prolonging our 'imaginary command of the point-of-view, our *self*-assertion' that occurs in virtue of our identification with the look of the camera (p152). 'Good composition', Burgin writes, 'keeps the eyes of the spectator away from the edges of the frame, delaying the moment when this encounter will happen and the spectator will lose their 'imaginary command of the look, to relinquish it to that absent other to whom it belongs by right – the camera' (p152).

In architectural photography, good composition involves not only making the

architectural subject look 'attractive' (a feature of the trade, according to Shulman, but a negative aspect for Jameson and Elwall), it also requires conveying its 'essential structural and design elements' (Shulman, 1977, p13), in order to achieve an 'authentic representation of the inner values of a building' (Schulz, 2012, p7). In photographs of interiors, where what is portrayed is not a 'solid body that fills space' but 'the space enclosed by an external structure', the focus is on the 'relationship between the building and its fixtures and fittings', and the aim is to produce 'realistic-looking' (although 'disproportionate' reproduction of size and space—as that which might result from the use of wide-angle lenses—are also accepted) and 'interestingly composed, well-lit images with a clear message' and 'feeling' (ibid., pp121 and 129). In this way, frontal shots, where walls are oriented parallel to the sensor/ film plane, are generally 'pleasing ... but unspectacular ... too two-dimensional and flat' if the room is small, but 'dynamic' in larger rooms, as the horizontal lines will converge, and ideal if the room is symmetrical and the aim of the photograph is to emphasize its symmetry (ibid., pp57 and 126). Shooting diagonally into the space produces images that convey a 'feeling of style and depth' but it may be 'too dramatic' and create 'inharmonious compositions' in narrow spaces (ibid., p126). The camera height in particular has an impact on composition: eye level height (approximately 6ft above ground level) produces 'natural-looking' interior shots, as the spectator 'instinctively recognises' this position, while lower camera positions increase the 'risk of objects within the space blocking the view of others' (ibid., p129), makes 'individual furniture pieces less important' and places emphasis rather on the 'texture and expanse' of the floor covering (Shulman, 2012, p37). Lenses have also a great influence: wide-angle lenses induce a 'quality of spaciousness and extended perspective' (Shulman, 1977, p36), but they can also create 'misleading proportions', the 'rule of thumb' consisting in selecting the lenses' focal length 'as short as necessary but as long as possible' (Schulz, 2012, p129).

The presence of objects and how they are positioned is also crucial: everyday objects like newspapers and fruit bowls 'immediately grab a viewer's attention' and can 'detract from ... the room's design', therefore 'purely architectural interior shots often appear almost clinically uncluttered' (ibid., p122). In the same way, surfaces and the floor should be spotlessly clean, showing no fingerprints, smudges, or dirt; it is advisable that photographers 'carry a cleaning

cloth for removing dust and grease' (ibid., p124). The positioning of furniture is key: 'chairs that aren't quite aligned with a vanishing point axis or tables that are not quite aligned with a wall can cause unwanted tension in an image' (ibid., p125). Julius Shulman explains how, for a set of photographs of a bank interior, he created a 'sweeping perspective ... by lining up the chairs in the foreground workspaces – even the casters were straightened!' (1977, p82). Hassink used the same technique to photograph the boardrooms: 'entering each boardroom I arranged the chairs' (2011a, p4), she states, and often the tables and the floor were cleaned just before she took the photograph, as for the boardroom of 'Banco Santander' (2011a, p28) (illus. 3.1). Space arranged to look neat and orderly is necessary to produce images, like those in *The Table of Power*, that foreclose 'tension' and convey a sense of balance and order.

For further intervening in these power structures of photographic representation, in addition to a low vantage point and 'awry framing', I avoided the obvious viewpoints and eschewed, like Atget, the 'picturesque and the anecdotal', the (figurative) 'great sights and so-called landmarks' (see above p40). By 'obvious viewpoints' I mean here the 'most revealing point of views' selected by architectural photographers for producing 'good composition', 'truly well-balanced photograph[s]' and 'graphic photographic statements' (Shulman, 1977, p13), which are subsequently used for various purposes and circulated in different contexts, namely for feeding the work of architects and designers, for corporations' marketing, annual reports, and many other corporate material, in office design and architecture publications, in the myriad online forums, blogs and websites on 'the best', 'the most popular', 'the coolest', 'the most impressive' offices. Such 'correct' viewpoints are dictated by precise visual 'rules'. As one manual puts it, 'if you deliberately bend the rules of photography ... you have to make sure that this artifice is clear at first glance so that the viewer isn't led to believe that the photographer simply wasn't in control of the situation' (Schulz, 2012, p42).

Installation

As part of the visual strategy, I staged the photographed spatial power relations through the presentation of the photographs as an installation, opting not to show the work as single prints. In contrast to Lynne Cohen, I did not want to

'make prints that are as seductive as they are disorienting, as physically striking as they are mentally unsettling' (hence her large prints), nor did I pursued through the images an effect whereby 'viewers will be drawn in and "walk into" the spaces' (Cohen, 2012, p151).

The use of installation, a format derived from the art world, in documentary photography goes back to the late 1970s and early 1980s and the 'new documentary' movement. This includes works such as Martha Rosler's photo-text work *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems* discussed above (p159) and Allan Sekula's photo-text piece *School is a Factory* (1980), to name but a few. In an essay published in 1987, art historian Grant H. Kester discusses how through the use of formats and formal strategies that were extraneous to how documentary photography had been presented and seen until then, the photographers and artists engaging in this movement aimed, as Abigail Solomon-Godeau put it, 'to rethink documentary in a rigorous and serious way' (no page number). In this way, Rosler chose to exhibit *The Bowery...* work in a grid pattern 'to minimize further the single-print aesthetic', while Sekula used the 'ensemble', a sequence of photographs combined with an accompanying text, 'to counter the tendency to incorporate photography into the museum, the tendency to produce work designed for judgement and acceptance by that institution' (Kester, 1987, no page number). The critique by the 'new documentary' was both directed at the modernist art documentary aesthetic, typified by the Museum of Modern Art 1967 exhibition *New Documents* showing the work of Diane Arbus, Garry Winogrand and Lee Friedlander (Rosler, 2004a, p113), and to conventional documentary alike. Kester argues that the grids, the photo-text ensembles and other similar formal strategies, used to 'frustrate aesthetic co-option (or alienate us from a literal reading of the photo-as-fact)', came to define the movement and kept it primarily within the institutionalized art photography world. For Kester, Rosler and Sekula in particular confined themselves to the art world. As he puts it in relation to Rosler, the *Bowery* piece 'is fully situated in an art context (it was published and exhibited by the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design) and depends on a reading 'educated' as to the historical conventions of social documentary' (Kester, 1987, no page number).

My aim in choosing the installation format to present the work is far from any intention to situate it within any such form, as Kester puts it, of 'conceptual art

austerity'. My intention is instead to appropriate the format as a useful tool for materialising the arguments put forward by the work.

The installation is titled *The Politics of the Office*. It comprises 128 photographs and five text panels with the titles: 'Reception/ Waiting Area', 'Clients' Area', 'Meeting Rooms', 'Workspaces' and 'Amenities', borrowing the terms used to designate the areas in the offices that I visited (please refer to Annexe 2 for the installation's technical details).

The photographs are sequenced horizontally, from left to right, starting at the Reception/ Waiting Area, continuing to the Clients' Area, Meeting Rooms, Workspaces and ending at the Amenities. This sequence reproduces the order in which I have been shown the offices that I witnessed, reflecting the hierarchical relations between different spaces within the office (see above p157). The text panels introduce each of the areas, indicating to the spectator the sequence of the reading. The sequencing of the images follows also formal criteria, which intervened in the selection of the photographs. I took in average fifty photographs per office, which times fifty offices visited makes approximately a total of 2,500 images, which has required extensive editing.

In addition, the photographs are also arranged in vertical series that expand each of the areas in the horizontal sequence, echoing the broad range and large number of offices visited and activities covered by the 'sample' of the empirical enquiry. The expansion occurs both upwards and downwards from each of the photographs placed in the horizontal sequence, creating a hierarchy of spaces that alludes to the hierarchical organisation of people in and by the office, as it 'ranks' the photographs borrowing the 'language' of spatial 'status markers' that in the office communicate power or lack of it: degree of enclosure, amount of space, number and quality of pieces of furniture (see above p151). I did not arrange the hierarchical series per office, rather I grouped images independently of their provenance, according to the type of area and position in the ranking. As in the horizontal sequence, formal aspects also intervened the selection of the photographs. The vertical series stage the power relations exercised through hierarchy in the office, how these create a total system that acts upon people's way of acting, to paraphrase Foucault. They force the spectator to a *looking up* and *looking down* movement, which elicit their (involuntary) participation—hence the installation format—in this allegoric representation of the hierarchical system

that governs the office. The rankings are of course my creation, and the spectator might disagree with where I have placed a particular photograph(ed space)—but here, I contend, the spectator is already 'recruited' in this system, and thereby made to think according to its rules, *subjected* to it in its imagination.

The photographs are all captioned, with generic titles that refer to the type of corporation and specific name of the office area to which the photo refers (e.g. 'Lobby, Advertising agency' or 'Clients' top floor, Law firm'). A sheet with the list of the captions and installation plan is available to the spectator.

The fact that the work does not name the corporations involved is, I argue, significant, and is part of how the photographs are able to be about spatial power relations. Had the corporations' names been revealed—as in Hassink's work—the *subject* of the photographs would have changed: the photograph 'Lobby, Advertising agency' would be now about the lobby of corporation X, and thereby about corporation X, engaging the spectator in a different interpretation of the image, which is I argue, more narrow, because the subject has now been identified and therefore the list of possibles to which it refers has been reduced. For an example, see above (p82) my comparative reading of Hassink's 'Ms. Mickey Ryder, MTS Design' (illus. 1.12) and Cohen's 'Corporate Office' (illus. 1.13). It is important that the photographs have the generic captions—that is part of their argument on spatial power relations—but it is also important to the argument that, through the generic captions, the photographs remain open to the general as opposed to the particular. Certainly Hassink's *The Table of Power* would work very differently if the corporations were not named. It would likely be a very different work.

As I have written above in relation to Cohen's work, the photographs generically captioned present images of a space that is both concrete (this is an actual office in the world) and abstract (this is how these offices are designed to look like), singular (this is how this particular office looks like) and universal (any office looks like this).

Amenities





Conclusion

This research grew from a concern with what seemed to me to be a paradox between the ubiquity of the office in society, and the poorness of its documentary representation, especially if compared to its abundant photographic representation in the nineteenth century, when the modern office emerged. The office then must have fascinated photographers and public alike with its orthogonality and hypnotic deep space, where hundreds of neatly aligned 'white-collars' worked with machine-like precision. So much so that the interiors of the massive open plan floors figured among the subjects shown in the stereoscopic views popular at the time.

The office is the defining space of modernity, its most representative everyday space, its least avoidable space, and it has not yet disappeared—to prove it are the ever expanding office skyscrapers going up in the City and Canary Wharf, as well as in other parts of London. After I started this research in 2010, and especially since 2011 when I became for a period of time a regular visitor to those 'financial centres' in order to photograph the space where their activities took place, the urban landscape has changed quite dramatically.

My curiosity was not so much about what hundreds, millions of people spent their time (and they do very long hours) doing there, but moreover about the space itself. It seems to be the default space of the lives of urban professional, corporate, creative, academic, administrative, and civil servant workers. It upsets as well as bores people, it frustrates and enervates, it makes them unhappy. It rarely provokes indifference. But people, in spite of being *subjected* to it, seldom have a saying. The office is a space one must bear, much like the tube or the bus station, only longer. Unless one works in one of those glass and steel towers, with views over the c/City, or then in one of those new cool and fancy Google-type offices, with many slides and few cubicles. People must feel happy there, productive even. Certainly, they must feel superior.

I have tried, through this research, to address this disconnection between presence and absence, visibility and invisibility of the office space. My hypothesis was that space in the office has a role on how office workers are made to work and are made to feel, that it has not been sufficiently nor adequately addressed in documentary photography. The aim of the research was then to investigate the relation between power and space in the office, through documentary photography, which raised the following questions: how is space a means to

exercise power in the office? Can this question be investigated through documentary photography? How, given the critique of documentary's (positivist) claims to truth?

Studying existing documentary representation about the office that documents actual offices within the geographic ambit of the research, I identified two main types of work, generally corresponding with two rhetorical modes of documentary representation: photographic projects that show office workers in the office photographed through a 'fly-on-the-wall' approach (Cartier-Bresson's, Friedlander's, Fox's, Tünbjork's); and photographic projects showing the office devoid of people, that employ the visual conventions of the objective, neutral approach (Hassink's, Cohen's). In the works showing office workers, the spectator is too caught up in gazing at the people unawares to be able or willing to concentrate on the space itself (see discussion p82). I showed why it is the latter that are about space itself, through their 'emptying' strategy (p170). Moreover, I argued, Cohen's work is more successful at addressing spatial power relations, as her framing stages something of those power relations in the space of the photograph itself. Differently, Hassink's clinical, quasi-anthropological approach shows space from a seemingly disembodied position, which does not offer a critical point of view, rather it tends to normalise them.

This effect is produced by the framing, as visual argument for the picture. It is simultaneously a question of *how* to represent and *what* to represent. This is why I contend that Hassink's photographs fall short of *intervening*: because they do not engage with the question of *how*, rather they seem to take for granted the 'strict, architectural, eye', as some sort of default, a degree zero of representation. But 'objectivity' is no less than extreme tilted framing a code for the picture, an argument.

The research has tried to extend the existing representation of the office in two ways: through the *what* (spatial power relations in relation to the totality of the office space), and by the *how* (empty space, low vantage point, 'awry' framing, and installation).

The ensuing questions—what and how exactly to *re-present*? How can photography be *documentary*? How can it say something about reality, without neither making positivist claims to truth, nor cornering itself as the personal, the individual, the Humanist? Which theoretical concepts can underpin its practice?

What can it aim for?—were engaged by the research mostly from the perspective of the practitioner. The aim of the discussion of theory was to find and to develop concepts for enabling and sustain theoretically the practice, not to discuss them for its theoretical sake. This why the research did not draw for instance of the writings of photography theorist John Tagg and other critics of the institutional uses of photography and its 'disciplinary frame', to borrow Tagg's expression (Tagg, 2009).

In search of a constructive, enabling theory of documentary, the research has draw on documentary film theory for the notion of documentary that underpins it, as the project that 'seeks to enable the citizen-spectator to know and experience reality through recorded images ... of reality', by 'enabl[ing] reality to “speak” at the same time as it “speaks about” reality' (Cowie, 2011, p1). To this conception of documentary as discourse (as opposed to presentation of facts that speak for themselves), I added to my tool box Cowie's idea that documentary engages directly in pleasure, combining 'the fascinating pleasure of recorded reality as both spectacle and knowledge' (ibid., p3). This allows to cut short critiques of 'aestheticisation' of the documentary image that dismiss its content if it is produced and viewed (also) for spectacle. Instead, we as spectators should ask 'what is being documented here? What is being transmitted to me? What is being asked of me as a spectator?' (Emerling, 2012, p113).

I drew then on trauma studies, media studies and the legal sphere to extend the understanding of the concept of witnessing within documentary photography theory and to answer the questions posed by the practice of 'why record reality?', and 'how to record reality?'. Through this theoretical discussion, I developed the concepts of witnessing and of intervention as the method for the practice, positing documentary practice as the deliberate process of recording reality from a critical point of view, with the aim of making that reality visible through images understood as visual arguments, thereby aspiring to criticality. It may not be a sophisticate, elegant formulation, but it contains all the elements that were fundamental to guide the practice: recording *reality*; making visible; images as arguments, through the notion of images as representation as transformation; intention, informing point of view, leading to criticality or intervention.

The last theoretical positioning about documentary but not the least: the practice is based on the epistemological assumption that reality may not be apprehended by visual means only—such is the case of the relation between

power and space in the office that the practice was to investigate. I arrived at this conclusion through the practice itself: when I had to select a 'sample' for the visual enquiry, I could not find a valid criterion. When I visited the first office, I could not make fully sense of what I was seeing, rather was left to select what to photograph in light of its photogenic qualities. It was necessary therefore to develop a study to inform the practice.

The first step was to try to understand what the office is, how and when it emerged, what functions it fulfils. Drawing on sociology, as well as architecture and office design theory, I developed the 'short' textual and visual history of the office presented in chapter two, describing how in less than two centuries, industrialising society where the bookkeeper worked alongside the business owner in the latter's living room, mutated into service-based society where everyone (employed) works in an office. During that time, the office went from producer and processor of paper, to paper less; from orthogonality and surveillance, to lounge chairs and interaction; from 9/5 to 'university'; from 'factory' to 'club'. The argument of chapter two, which is essentially descriptive, was thus to posit the office as a defining space of industrialised and service-based society, where the question of power enacted through spatial means poses itself with not dissimilar urgency to those posed by prisons, schools or hospitals.

The reference here to Foucault is not fortuitous, as his theory on power was instrumental to the development of the practice. Rejecting the existence of 'power' as such, Foucault understands power dynamically as power relations, that are to be studied not in abstract but in relation to defined institutions, and not theoretically but empirically, from the point of view of power relations themselves (e.g., the study of discipline and surveillance in relation to the prison), not by defining them but by establishing their main characteristics. Hence the adequacy of photography to study spatial power relations in the office, given the medium's empirical proclivity and its particular suitability to spatial description. Following Foucault, such study should establish: 1) the 'system of differentiations' permitting individuals or groups to act upon the actions of others; 2) the types of objectives pursued by the first; 3) the means by which they exercise power; 4) the 'forms of institutionalisation' within which these power relations occur; and 5) the 'degrees of rationalisation', referring to the level of sophistication and effectiveness of those power relations.

This study was developed through an empirical visual inquiry carried out in relation to actual offices with the aim of witnessing those spatial relations through photography, and through the study of organisation theory, organisation psychology and architecture and office design, as 'producers' of the space of the office (the equivalent to Jeremy Bentham in relation to the prison). The sample for the visual 'inquiry' consisted in the offices of the services industries, where the questions of power and space posed themselves more acutely, as the history of the office had revealed. London as one of the 'world's financial capitals' was a privileged site where to pursue this inquiry. The business dedicated areas of the City and Canary Wharf, home to corporations and corporations' branches of all types, sizes and in all areas of business on a global scale, offered seemingly endless square feet of office space. During a period of almost two years, I contacted nearly five hundred financial, corporate and legal institutions, and eventually was able to obtain access to nearly fifty offices in the areas of finance, accountancy, insurance, law, and advertising. The process made clear the extent to which the office is essentially a private space, that is difficult to access in independent terms, and that as result has remained largely unrepresented from an independent point of view—this in spite of its ubiquity in (service-based) society.

Through this study, it was possible to establish, in answer to the research questions to do with the relation between power and space in the office (what is the relationship between space and power in the office? Is the office, as space, a means to exercise power? What type of objectives are pursued through it? How are they pursued?), and answering Foucault's list above, that 3) the space of the office arises as a means of 'bringing power relations into being'. These power relations are 1) enabled by a system of differentiations based in hierarchy, 2) whose goal is productivity and the resulting accumulation of profits, but also other ends not directly related to production such as normalisation, social order and control. 4) Its form of institutionalization is the corporation or, in a broader sense, any organised form of business. 5) The degree of rationalisation of those power relations is very high: an extensive knowledge of the effects of space at a personal and social level (namely through organisation theory, environmental psychology, and organisation behaviour) underpins a sophisticated conception of space (carried out by organisation theory, architecture, interior design)—in the office, nothing is left to chance. The aim is to transform workers into 'productive subjects'.

The concrete spatial means for this and the very definition of 'productive subject' have varied throughout the history of the modern office, as chapter two shows. In the offices witnessed, people are made into 'productive subjects' not so much through visual surveillance (in spite of the pervasive open plan arrangement) or functional hierarchy, but by *status* hierarchies and subtler, symbolic means. Already in the 1950s and 1960s, employers had sought to attract office workers over better paid factory work by designing the offices to look less like factories and more like the domestic space, enforcing the image of the office as middle class and thereby projecting an image of respectability and enjoyability of office work. In offices now, the analogy seems to be rather with the hotel. Not only in terms of design concepts that recreate the latter's fashionable and leisurely appearance in lobbies and clients' areas, but at a more fundamental level, as the concept governing its functioning: in exchange for losing assigned desks and personal 'territory', workers are being given 'high-end' décor and staff 'amenities', which might as well be enough to incite them. From here, the idea of workers having to pay, like guests in a hotel, to use the workspace, instead of using it for 'free' as part of the work contract, does not seem too far-fetched.

The visual strategy for witnessing these spatial power relations, that is, the question of the *how* of the practice, posed itself the moment I stepped into the first office: where to place the camera? How to frame what I want the images to bear witness to? What to include in the frame, what to leave out? The argument about the point of view of the witness, both literal and figurative, was useful here. To choose a physical point of view was already to construct, or start constructing, the argument of the picture, and therefore to choose a figurative point of view, as I discussed in relation to Jacqueline Hassink's images in *The Table of Power 2*.

Both through theory and by experimenting through the practice, the visual strategy for witnessing spatial relations of power was defined as comprising: (1) employment of a low vantage point; (2) the 'awry' framing and asymmetric composition; (3) the conventions of the descriptive mode; (4) installation; (5) generic captions.

(1) The effect is to bear witness from a particular position, both physical (the low camera height), and figurative (from the position of a human being, namely an office worker). The photographed space makes the spectator feel more grounded, and presents space in a more human scale. It is this point of view that the

photographs, to use Burgin's words, bestow upon the spectator, given the geometric perspective system built into the camera.

(1) On the other hand, the lower height operates a new distribution of elements within the frame, when compared to photographs taken from a higher vantage point. In the lower height shot image, what is now placed at the eye level of the spectator-camera is the furniture, in particular the chairs, instead of the area wide above tables and chairs in the eye level shots, where the eye has to move down in order to focus on them. This new distribution of the elements within the frame accentuates the chairs' resemblance to persons, their anthropomorphic qualities. The chairs become metaphors for people in a way that they do not in shots taken from a higher position. In this way, the power relations materialised by furniture and its disposition within the space of the office become the subject of the photographs.

(2) The asymmetric, awry compositions avoid the view points naturally suggested by the photogenic geometry of the office space, and the frontal, including symmetrical, compositions with dramatic vanishing lines creating a strong sense of depth. Instead, they create slight tension, and the space in the photograph does not look especially attractive or seductive. Tension arises also from the way furniture is positioned, especially chairs as they were not aligned nor made to look neat.

(3) The conventions include: use of tripod, small lens aperture, parallel vertical lines and parallelism of camera sensor to the projection plane. The aim is that the photographs convey high-fidelity information, and do not compromise on detail and offer a reassuring illusion of depth, thereby affording the spectator a spectacle involving 'an entertaining of the eye through form and light' (Cowie, 2011, p13), an effect which is integrant part of their conception as documentary.

(4) The installation comprises 128 photographs organised in an horizontal sequence that follows the spatial organisation of the different areas within an office (Reception and waiting areas, Clients' areas, Meeting rooms, Workspaces, Staff amenities), and vertical series that expand upwards and downwards from the horizontal sequence, creating hierarchical relations between identical functional spaces.

(5) The work does not name the corporations involved, it provides only generic titles (e.g. 'Lobby, Advertising agency'), which has the effect of enabling

the photographs to refer to a space that is both concrete (this is an actual office in the world) and abstract (this is how these offices are designed to look like), singular (this is how this particular office looks like) and universal (any office looks like this).

The visual work produced is titled *The Politics of the Office*. The combined effect of the elements of the visual strategy described is to recruit the spectator not in enjoying the spectacularity of the space, rather it bestows upon the spectator a position involved in the photographed space, looking at space itself, at its division into functional areas, at the disposition of furniture in specific arrangements, at its hierarchical organisation, as such witnessing the space as photographed, and engaging perhaps in thinking how this space organises people, how, to paraphrase Foucault, it 'makes them subjects'. The installation further stages the power relations exercised through hierarchy in the office, requesting from the spectator a *looking up* and *looking down* movement, which elicit their (involuntary) participation in the very hierarchical mentality that governs the office.

As such, the practice claims to intervene in the power structures of existing photographic representation, in particular those manifested in architecture and interiors commercial photography, as the photographic production in this mode is widely circulated and is in fact a predominant form of visual and photographic representation of the office (among other spaces) in society. Through the visual strategy employed, I have sought to intervene in the rules of 'good composition' that form the rhetoric of this widespread type of representation, and their effect in engaging the spectator in enjoyment of the photographs as spectacle and moreover as fantasy, trying to challenge the impoverishing effect their dominance has on the understanding of images of space, in particular of offices.

In this way, the thesis makes claims also to have intervened in the understanding of the space of the office and the power relations materialised by means of this space, by witnessing through photography the space of actual offices, giving the spectator the opportunity to, in turn, witness images of these offices, which are not only largely inaccessible to the general public, but which have not previously been represented from an independent point of view.

Contribution to knowledge

The research produced a documentary photographic work titled *The Politics of the Office* comprising 128 photographs that give visibility to spatial power relations of hierarchy and control, physical and symbolic, and intervene in the structures of the photographic representation of the office space, through their visual strategy and their presentation as installation, thereby extending the documentary representation of the office space;

The research contributes to the theory of documentary photography by developing the concepts of witnessing and intervention;

The research contributes to the understanding of the relation between space and power in offices, by offering the spectator the opportunity to witness images of actual offices, which are largely inaccessible to the general public.

Annexe 1

List of contacts

Due to confidentiality obligations, the list of contacts cannot be made public.

Annexe 2

Notes on installation

Work:

Installation comprising 128 photographs and 5 text panels;

Dimensions:

Individual size of photographs and text panels is 19x30 cm;

Total size of installation is approx. 14 meters in length by 3 meters high;

Technique:

C-type prints mounted on aluminium, printed in glossy paper with glossy laminate finish;

Display requirements:

The work should be installed ideally on a single wall; the walls should be painted light grey;

The text is to be stencilled onto the wall, in black Helvetica;

Captions to individual photographs to be made available to the spectator on a separate sheet, size A4.

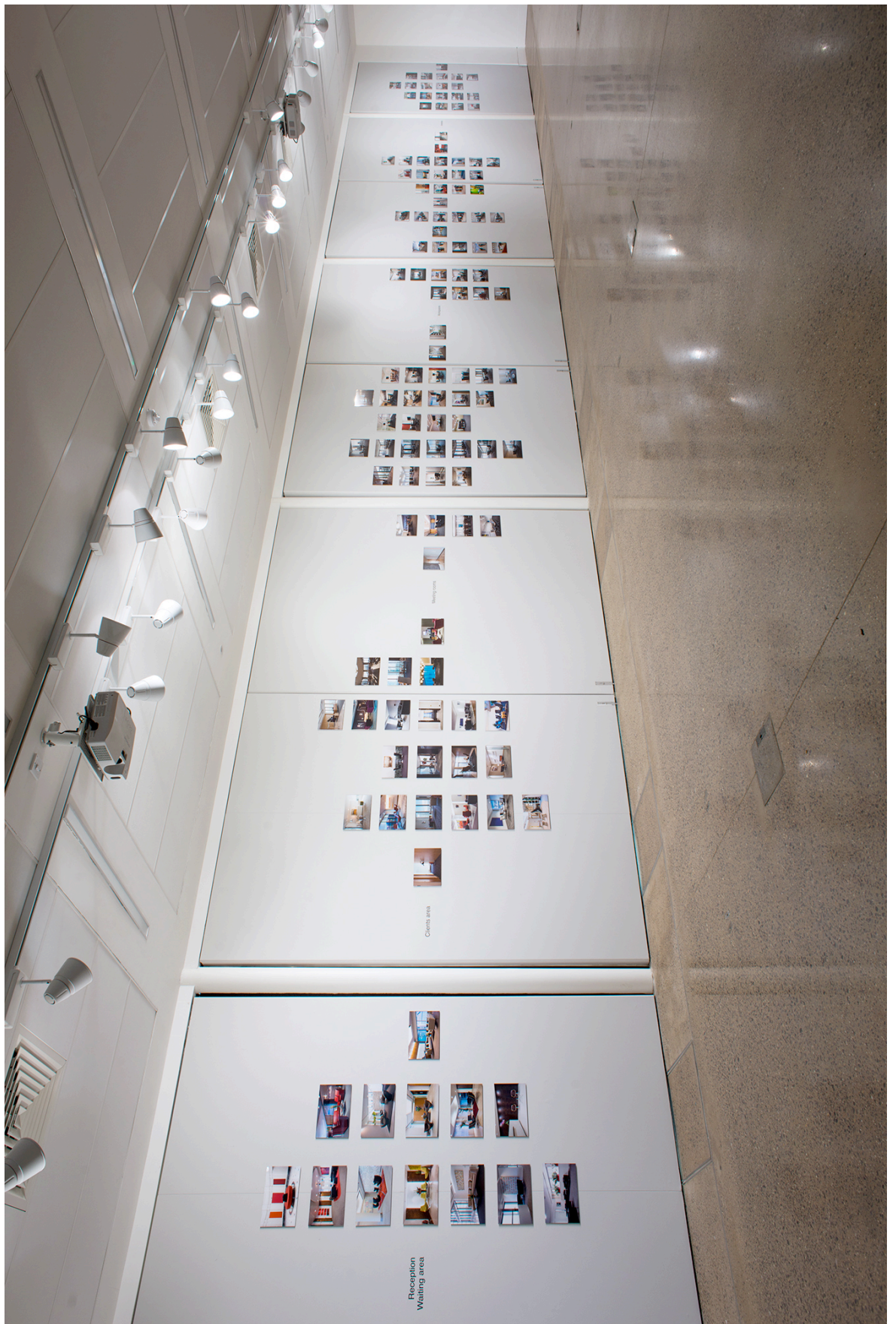
Enclosed CD:

Folder with 128 high-resolution jpeg files, corresponding to the photographs that comprise the installation, plan of the installation, and captions list;

Next page:

View of the work as installed at London Gallery West in December 2014

(exhibition held between the 5th of December and the 11th of January 2015).



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