

## Witnessing the Future

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**Key words:** actor-network theory, witnessing, new economy, future, epochalism

**Abstract:** The paper explores the phenomenon of witnessing the future through a case study of how a Scandinavian new economy firm managed to persuade a number of business journalists that it was "the future". It describes the procedures and rhetorical strategies that the manager deployed to turn the journalists into witnesses. It compares the manager's strategy to other cases of effective witnessing in courtrooms and in science. It concludes that the manager's persuasiveness is derived from his ability to articulate a series of pointed contrasts between the attractive working life within the firm and the problematic work life elsewhere. Finally, it notes that the manager's strategy enacts a time-world characterised by dramatic epochal changes, which is radically different from the more stable and knowable time-world that is enacted in ordinary scientific discourses.

### Table of Contents

- [1. Introduction](#)
- [2. United Spaces—The Office of the Future?](#)
- [3. A Pragmatic View of Persuasion](#)
- [4. Tricks of the Witnessing Trade](#)
  - [4.1 Boyle's programme: machines, ingenious men and virtual witnesses](#)
  - [4.2 The master strategy of science: drawing things together](#)
  - [4.3 Courtroom strategies: highlighting, categorising and undermining](#)
- [5. The Case against the Old Economy](#)
  - [5.1 Community in contrast to social isolation](#)
  - [5.2 Boundarilessness in contrast to demarcations](#)
  - [5.3 Flexibility in contrast to stable patterns of work](#)
  - [5.4 Trust in contrast to distrust](#)
- [6. Future and Furniture](#)
- [7. Drawing Contrasts Together](#)
- [8. Discourses and Times](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)

[References](#)

[Author](#)

[Citation](#)

## 1. Introduction

The articles in this special issue display a broad range of approaches to discourse and time. Some articles say that a particular discourse was established *at* a particular time (e.g. WALL, 2007), whereas others, including the present one stand on the other leg, arguing that a particular discourse does something *to* and *with* time. To take the latter stand is risky. It breaks with our most immediate and everyday idea of time as an independently given scale of reference: The idea that

nothing we say or do can change the established calendar and the ticking of the clock. But of course such a notion of time gives everything to chronology and leaves out the richness and complexities of how time and timing is done in practice (JONES, MCLEAN & QUATTRONE, 2004). It also leaves out possibilities to think about the simultaneous presence of different times, which Michel SERRES eloquently brings out with the following remark

"What are things contemporary? Consider a late-model car. It is a disparate aggregate of scientific and technical solutions dating from different periods. One can date it component by component: this part was invented at the turn of the century, another ten years ago ... Not to mention that the wheel dates back to neolithic times. The ensemble is only contemporary by assemblage, by its design, its finish, sometimes only by the slickness of the advertising surrounding it" (SERRES & LATOUR, 1995, p.45). [1]

The present paper is also about an ensemble of times. It is about a Scandinavian new economy firm that persuaded a number of business journalists and other visitors that it was "the office of the future". The future, then, was not something that would eventually come with the passing of time and the turning of so many calendar leaves. It was a present reality, which the visitors could see with their own eyes. Borrowing SERRES' terms, I could say that my interest in this article is to explore the work of "assemblage", "design", "finish", and "slickness of advertising" that makes it possible to bring the future into the present<sup>1</sup>. I pursue this interest by studying persuasion and witnessing. How did the manager of the firm arrange a situation where the visitors were persuaded that they witnessed the future? This question allows me to draw on ideas from science studies, actor-network theory and studies of witnessing and court room rhetoric. It also brings me in line with a small but growing field, which has been called the sociology of expectations, or the sociology of futures and anticipation (BROWN & MICHAEL, 2003; BROWN, RAPPERT & WEBSTER, 2000). The crucial move in this stream of work is to shift the analytical angle from "*looking into* the future to *looking at* the future, or how the future is mobilized in real time to marshal resources, coordinate activities and manage uncertainty" (BROWN & MICHAEL, 2003, p.4). Correspondingly, my interest is not to study the Scandinavian new economy firm as a device for predicting the future; my interest is to explore how this firm successfully mobilised claims about the future in such a way that, for a given period of time, it was able to increase its powers of persuasion and by implication its power to marshal resources. [2]

Towards the end of the article, I discuss time from a slightly different angle. At that point, I hope to have demonstrated how the manager becomes persuasive *with* time, i.e. how "the future" is deployed as a resource within a particular rhetorical and material strategy. The relationship between persuasive discourse and time is however a *recursive* one<sup>2</sup>; Time "feeds" the manager's attempts to persuade but the persuasion process also enacts a particular notion of time.

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1 Stated in these terms, the present article has a lot in common with MOTZKAU's article [in this issue](#). Her article is (also) about the difficult work of bringing together two different time zones: investigative time and courtroom time.

Something is done *to* time. In the last part of the article, I discuss the notion of time that is enacted through the manager's strategy. [3]

The outline of the article is as follows. First, I introduce the new economy firm and the specific situation where the manager invites the visitors to witness the future. Second, I present the notion of persuasion that I employ, and a range of examples of persuasive witnessing. Third, I analyse in some detail the rhetorics and the materialities of the manager's strategy of persuasion. Finally, I attempt to characterise the notion of time that is enacted through this persuasion process. [4]

## 2. United Spaces—The Office of the Future?

In May 2001, a company called *United Spaces* opened its new office in Copenhagen. The company was founded three years earlier in Stockholm by two Swedish consulting firms with the support of venture capital from the international contractor NCC Real Estate. Basically speaking, United Spaces was an office hotel; its business was to rent office space and office facilities to other companies on a monthly basis. But the ambitions of United Spaces went far beyond the provision of space and photocopy machines. Their vision was to create a "united space", that is a strong and mutually supportive community between the member companies. The managers of United Spaces in Copenhagen worked hard to attract small and interesting start-ups, to stimulate the networking between the firms, and to create an atmosphere of creativity, playfulness and success. They frequently described themselves as "the office of the future" and they worked hard to communicate this claim to a larger Danish public. They were, as we shall see later, quite successful in this endeavour. Clearly, the managers were inspired by phenomena like the rapid development of the Internet, the rise of dot-coms, and the success of networking environments like Silicon Valley. They proudly announced United Spaces to be a part of the New Economy. [5]

In February 2002 I became a member of United Spaces in Copenhagen for a month with the intention of conducting a field study of "networking"<sup>3</sup>. I was present in the offices full time and had ample opportunity to observe the daily work. I interviewed the managers and a number of the members. I was invited to participate in meetings, seminars and parties. And I was allowed to copy various written materials about United Spaces including their collection of press reports about the company. In November 2002 the Swedish owners closed United Spaces in Copenhagen. The owners did not think that the Copenhagen office had been able to sell a sufficient number of memberships. United Spaces in Stockholm is still in business and has recently moved to new and bigger offices. [6]

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2 In Science and Technology Studies there has recently been a renewed focus on the idea that particular types of talk, practices, or methods are implicated in the enactment of the objects they address (see LAW, 1994, 2002, 2004; MOL, 2002; LAW & MOL, 2002). The present article is roundly inspired by this strand of work.

3 The field study was conducted as a part of the research project "Relational Identities in Temporary and Scattered Work Practice" at the Department of Organization and Industrial Sociology, Copenhagen Business School. I participated in this project together with Professor Ann WESTENHOLZ and Ph.D. student David METZ. See also ELGAARD JENSEN (2004).

The purpose of this article is to examine how the managers of United Spaces in Copenhagen managed to persuade a number of visitors that they were witnessing *the office of the future*. This, I would like to stress, is no ordinary achievement. When it comes to witnessing the past, we are on familiar territory: We watch documentary movies about bygone events, we read articles about scientific investigations conducted several years ago, or we look at photo albums presented to us by older family members. But how does one arrange for the witnessing of the future? What tools or props may be used, and what rhetorical devices may be deployed? To explore this remarkable achievement, I will describe in some detail the situation in which United Spaces' claim to be the office of the future was routinely presented. This situation, which I have observed a number of times, is the "standard tour" given by one of the managers to new visitors at United Spaces in Copenhagen. Through the synthesised account below, I invite the reader to imagine being a first time visitor to United Spaces. [7]

You arrive by taxi just in time to your appointment at the newly opened office hotel. The manager, a smiling and energetic man in his early thirties, greets you at the doorstep. He invites you in and shows you where to hang your coat. "Welcome to the office of the future", he says and asks you a few questions about your work. He then walks you to a large open office space, which he calls "the networking arena". You see a large rectangular room furnished with 70 workstations that are scattered across the floor in small clusters or faced against the windows. You see people busily working with papers, mobile phones, and laptops that are all connected to a wireless network. Each workstation consists of a relatively small table about the height of a bar table. At the front of each table there is a transparent Plexiglas screen, shielding the user to the shoulders, but allowing him or her to talk to the person sitting opposite. Between the screen and the table there is a small lamp, and sockets for electrical plugs. Each workstation comes with an office chair—tall as a bar stool—and a roller cabinet. The office space has a wooden floor, a concrete ceiling and nicely designed lamps. Large panorama windows on the right wall make the room very light. The view of the harbour is magnificent. Along the left wall there are 12 small and large conference rooms, separated by glass partitions and sliding doors. The manager tells you that people from 35 different small innovative companies work here, and that people work in constantly changing constellations. As you walk by a group of four young people sharing a cluster of tables, the manager tells you in a lowered voice that "the people over there actually come from three different companies". "So at United Spaces you are not just stuck in a closed office with your own little business". We also have a special rule here, he explains: everybody must clear their desk at night and sit at a new workstation the following day. In that way, he tells you, you will automatically meet a broad array of people, companies and competencies. United Spaces is a perfect place to grow your network. And then he makes the assertion again: "it is the office of the future". [8]

During my field work, I often observed the manager give the standard tour; sometimes more than once a day. It was difficult to know whether he managed to persuade visitors or not. Sometimes the manager gave the standard tour to a potential customer, who then joined United Spaces the very next day. Sometimes

we never saw the visitors again. A significant number of business journalists also visited United Spaces, and I often noticed new press clippings on a pinboard in the photocopy room. Months after my fieldwork period, it occurred to me that the journalists' articles might allow me to make a rough estimate of the manager's persuasive power. To what extent, one might ask, would the journalists be willing to forward the manager's statement to their readers? From United Spaces' complete file of press clippings I selected all the articles which were written about United Spaces' Copenhagen office within the time span of one year<sup>4</sup>; a total of 27<sup>5</sup>. In each of the articles, I identified the journalist's strongest and most positive statement about United Spaces. In this highly selective reading, I focused exclusively on statements that journalists made on their own behalf; when the articles included quotations of the manager, which they often did, these statements were disregarded. In the following table, the journalists' statements are sorted into categories according to their strength. The strongest claim is "utopia": a very bright future. Less strong is the more neutral claim that United Spaces is "the future". Still weaker is the claim that United Spaces is something "new".

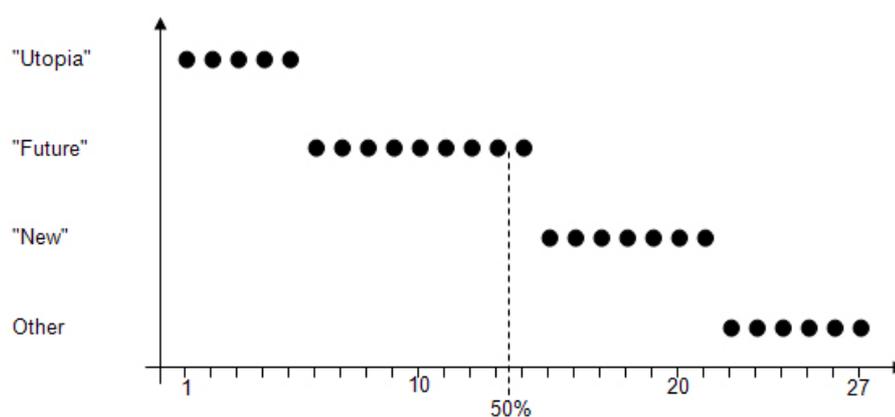


Figure 1: The strongest positive statement about United Spaces as "office of the future" in 27 articles. [9]

4 From March 2001 to February 2002.

5 The 27 articles in order of publication: Børsen. Iværksættere i kreativt kontormiljø. 30.3.2001; Erhvervsbladet. Fremtidskontor på vej i København. 3.4.2001; Computerworld. Højteknologisk fællesskab. 10.4.2001; Ingeniøren. Netværkets mester. 18.5.2001; Computerworld. Netværksmiljø: Skift skrivebord hver dag. 18.5.2001; Sydsvenskan. Det nya kontoret är som en jättelik lägerplats. 20.5.2001; Børsen Informatik. Et nyt mekka for den ny økonomis iværksættere. 22.5.2001; RUM. Future Workplaces. May 2001; Reboot. Spagettikontorhotellet. May 2001; Freelancer.dk. United Spaces of Chaordia. May 2001; Personalechefen. De frie agenter deler kontor, kopimaskine og kultur. May 2001; Freelancer.dk. Hun arbejder med det hun elsker. May 2001; Søndagsavisen. Paradis for unge iværksættere. 17.6.2001; SheVita. Vild med netværkshuset. 29.6.2001; ASE Nyt. En ny tids løsarbejdere. June 2001; Spektrum: Indkøb, IT & E-handel. Det nye hus på Christianshavn. June 2001; Byggeindustrien-Byggeforum. Nyt fleksibelt kontorhus. June 2001; Erhvervsøjendom. Kontor omkring ild power. 21.8.2001; Job.Karriere. Den urbane landsby. 6.9.2001; BNY. Fremtidens kontorkultur. 10.9.2001; Erhvervsbladet. Flokdyr på kontoret. 18.9.2001; MetroXpress. Zap, zap, et ny job, tak ... 21.9.2001; Berlingske Tidende. Arena for inspiration. 25.9.2001; Computerworld. Kunsten at lede et fællesrum. 21.12.2001; Ingeniøren. Kontor med netværk. 11.1.2001; SAS Magasinet. Fællesskab inspirerer. January/February 2002; Ingeniøren. Arbejdslivet bliver fleksibelt. 18.1.2002.

Each category covers a small variety of statements<sup>6</sup>. But what I want to focus on here is the key observation, which can be made from the figure: *A majority of the journalists are willing to report to their readers that United Spaces is the office of the future*. Most of the journalists are thus lending their time and energies to extend and distribute the statement, which they received from the manager. It is this phenomenon that I will try to explain. By what means and by what strategies was the manager able to persuade journalists that they had witnessed the future? To answer this question, I will go further into the content of the articles and further into the details of the standard tour. I will also compare the visits at United Spaces to other accounts of effective persuasion and witnessing. First, however, I need to specify what I mean by persuasion. [10]

### 3. A Pragmatic View of Persuasion

What does it mean to say that the journalists were *persuaded*? Could it not be argued that the journalists were fanciful witnesses because they never were meant to buy United Spaces' product? Could it not be argued that journalists sometimes just write a good story even if they do not believe the stories themselves? And could it not be argued that readers often do not believe what they read? Ultimately, this list of questions suggests that the content of the articles does not tell us anything about persuasion; that we simply do not know if the journalists (and their readers) were persuaded or not. I would argue to the contrary that if we define persuasion pragmatically, we do in fact know that persuasion took place. To make this point, I will briefly introduce the analysis of power and persuasion which has been developed by Actor-Network Theory<sup>7</sup>. [11]

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6 The category labelled "Utopia" contains five articles which evaluate United Spaces extremely positively and set the company apart from any normal business. These articles describe United Spaces as "a mekka for the innovators of the new economy", "a giant playground", "a well-ordered chaos for 'free agents'", "a goldmine of sparring partners" and a "Paradise for young innovators". The second category contains nine articles, which claim that United Spaces is the future. A number of these statements are relatively unspecific about how United Spaces is the future. They merely call it "the future office", "a future oriented office concept" or claim that the manager and the members of United Spaces "look into the future". Other articles are somewhat more specific by saying that United Spaces is the future workspace, the future office culture, or the future corporation. The third category contains seven articles that describe United Spaces as "new". Four of these articles use the term "a totally new concept" whereas three articles merely describe United Spaces as a new concept or say that United Spaces frames a new way of working.

Finally, there is a mixed group of six articles, where the journalist does not make any particularly strong statements about the utopian nature of United Spaces. The articles do however contain quotations suggesting that United Spaces might be something out of the ordinary. One article quotes the manager of United Spaces saying it is the office of the future. Another article quotes him saying that in addition to being an office community it will be developed into a cultural and social community. One article is based on an interview with a member of United Spaces. She declares that she is crazy about the place, and that she fell in love with it at first sight. Two articles report that the vision behind United Spaces is to create "a physical network, where people from different companies can share knowledge, network and creativity". Finally and most modestly, one article says that United Spaces is merely one take on how our workplace will look in the future.

7 Actor-Network Theory (ANT) is a theoretical school within the sociology of science and technology. It developed in the 1980's with inspiration from American Pragmatism as well as French poststructuralism (in particular semiotics, but also FOUCAULT). The early and seminal work of ANT focused on how natural science researchers construct scientific facts in their laboratories and how they persuade others that those particular statements truthfully represent nature (LATOURET & WOOLGAR, 1986; LATOURET, 1987). Later, the analytical scope was

LATOUR (1991) tells the story of a hotel manager who faces the problem that his guests forget to leave their keys at the reception desk before they leave the hotel. First, he tries to remind them verbally: "Please, bring back your keys". The effect is negligible. He then puts up a sign: "Please leave your room key at the front desk before you go out". This has some effect, but the majority of the guests still leave the hotel with their keys in their pockets. Finally, the hotel manager talks to an innovator, who suggests that he attaches a metal block to each key. This works. Now the majority of the guests happily rid themselves of the keys at the reception before they leave the hotel. LATOUR depicts this little story as a battle between two "programs": leaving vs. not leaving the keys. The first program gains more and more strength by loading itself with more and more elements: a verbal statement, a written sign, metal blocks. Consequently, the first program becomes more and more persuasive in a quite literal sense. The manager's statement gains strength by means of the elements enrolled into his network and by means of the cooperative actions of the customers. The manager's power is thus not inherent in him or in his statements. His power is a consequence rather than a cause of actions (LATOUR, 1986). Following this perspective, we can define persuasion in a very pragmatic sense: Persuasion has taken place if a second actor follows a first actor in such a way that the first actor's program is strengthened. The guests are thus persuaded to leave their keys. This conclusion stands regardless of whether the guests responded to the written sign, to managerial authority or to the need of getting rid of the bulky object<sup>8</sup>. In a very similar way, we can see the articles about United Spaces as the office of the future as pragmatic evidence of persuasion. By repeating and disseminating the manager's words, the journalists lend their force to the manager. In this way, they strengthen his program, even though they do not buy his product. The dissemination of the manager's words (see Figure 1) is the crucial pragmatic fact that must be taken into account if we are to estimate the importance of the journalists. And this pragmatic fact stands regardless of the journalists' motives and regardless of whether they doubt their own articles. [12]

What the readers believed and did is a different matter, which unfortunately is beyond the empirical scope of the present article; I simply did not have the opportunity to trace this phenomenon. I must concede that it is perfectly possible that readers of business articles are sceptical or even that they will flatly reject the claims that are presented to them. But I would also like to point out that a reader of a particular newspaper lives in a world full of other newspapers and other readers. When a particular statement is broadly cited and repeated, it tends to support the non-sceptical side of the argument. "Look, it is in this newspaper, in that magazine and I have heard several people say the same thing". Nothing is of course guaranteed. The fate of statements remains in the hands of the receivers.

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extended to broader issues of technological and scientific domination and expansion (LAW, 1986; CALLON, 1986; LATOUR, 1988).

8 Many theories about the reception of statements hinge on assumptions about "the audience". ANT follows an entirely different analytical strategy. It follows the statements and their translation, but it carefully avoids *a priori* assumptions about the identity of the actors (CALLON, 1986, p.200).

But when a number of papers repeat a particular claim it gradually becomes easier to agree and more difficult to disagree (cf. LATOUR & WOOLGAR, 1986). [13]

The topic of the present article is thus not control in the absolute sense; it is about specific rhetorical and material moves that *increased* the persuasive power of United Spaces as the office of the future. If the manager had no power to persuade, if the standard tour made no difference, we would not expect any particular statement to do very much better than any other. The journalists would write a little bit of everything about United Spaces. But the fact was that one particular statement—it is the office of the future—was repeated by a majority of journalists. It is the causes of this improbable event that I will try to uncover. [14]

#### 4. Tricks of the Witnessing Trade

To this point, I have talked about the events at United Spaces in two slightly different ways. At times, I have talked about the persuasive powers of the manager, and at other times I have talked about witnessing. It is commonplace to uphold a distinction between the two. Managerial persuasiveness is taken to be a rather manipulative kind of power, whereas witnessing is taken to be a more natural, unintimidated and unmediated process. The studies of witnessing that I will introduce in the following blur this distinction. They challenge the "naturalness" of witnessing. They demonstrate that witnessing is an artificial and constructed situation. And they argue that witnessing is in certain ways similar to a carefully planned managerial plot. The studies that I will present describe cases in which witnessing worked well; people were persuaded that true and reliable knowledge was gained. By exploring these cases, I will search for well-established tricks of the witnessing trade, and I will discuss how or to what extent the witnessing of the future at United Spaces might be understood in these terms. [15]

##### 4.1 Boyle's programme: machines, ingenious men and virtual witnesses

Historians of science Steven SHAPIN and Simon SCHAFFER have made a comprehensive study of Robert BOYLE's airpump experiments in 17<sup>th</sup> century England (SHAPIN & SCHAFFER, 1985). They argue that not only did Boyle develop particular scientific instruments; he also made literary and social inventions, which established a new programme for the proper generation and evaluation of knowledge. A key point of BOYLE's programme was to generate matters of fact by a *multiplication of the witnessing experience*.

"An experience, even of a rigidly controlled experimental performance, that one man alone witnessed was not adequate to make a matter of fact. If that experience could be extended to many, and in principle to all men, then the result could be constituted as a matter of fact. In this way, the matter of fact is to be seen as both an epistemological and a social category" (SHAPIN & SCHAFFER, 1985, p.25). [16]

Accordingly, BOYLE arranged for assemblies of "ingenious men" to witness his experiments, which he performed in the Royal Society's ordinary public rooms in

London<sup>9</sup>. The conduct of experiments in public was one important move that set BOYLE apart from contemporary alchemists who conducted their experiments in private settings. But BOYLE also multiplied and extended witnessing in a way that was even more significant. In his scientific texts, he facilitated what SHAPIN and SCHAFFER calls *virtual witnessing*. By providing very detailed and naturalistic pictures (engravings) of his air-pump, and by describing the procedures and outcomes in dense detail, he offered the readers a possibility to trust and to validate that the experiments had taken place. Through BOYLE's literary technology his readers were recruited as witnesses. [17]

Today, BOYLE is considered to be the father of experimental science. His programme for fact-making and witnessing was victorious and is practically taken for granted. "To a very large extent we live in the conventional world of knowledge-production that BOYLE and his colleagues amongst the experimental philosophers laboured to make safe, self-evident and solid" (SHAPIN, 1984, p.482) [18]

United Spaces is not in the business of experimental science. But it is interesting, nonetheless, to note a number of rather striking similarities with BOYLE's programme. A wider public—business news readers—are recruited as virtual witnesses through the articles and the accompanying photographs. This virtual witnessing depends on direct witnessing by a select group—journalists—and through a particular kind of live public demonstration: the standard tour. Finally, one could argue that United Spaces itself is a kind of machine that generates phenomena which cannot be seen elsewhere: The open office plan, the carefully designed office furniture, the collection of small start-up firms, the wireless internet access (fairly novel at that time), all combine to make this particular arrangement a "machine" that affords unique opportunities for witnessing. In particular, it becomes possible to see how flexible networking between companies and day-to-day changes in work constellations can take place in real-time. [19]

There are of course also differences. In the case of United Spaces, it is the witnesses—rather than the chief experimenter—who write the account. Moreover, BOYLE's strict separation of observations and interpretations is somewhat relaxed in the case of the journalistic accounts. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to say that the standard tour and the articles that followed it mimic BOYLE's classic programme. One explanation of United Spaces' ability to persuade might thus be that it works within a well-established genre of fact-making. The reader can recognise the invitation to witness virtually. The journalists can recognise their role as invited witnesses. Everybody can recognise the steps and division of labour involved. Will this organisation of material, social and literary technologies establish the fact that United Spaces is the office of the future? To the sceptic, the question is still open, but modern Westerners living three centuries after BOYLE would tend to think that there is something about the whole set-up that looks right. [20]

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9 BOYLE's assistant ensured that a certain number of witnesses signed the register, and in the case of particularly crucial experiments, the names and qualifications of witnesses were recorded.

## 4.2 The master strategy of science: drawing things together

Science, as we know it today, may be seen as a very late and very mature descendant of BOYLE. This descendant, it is generally recognised, constitutes a most valuable and most powerful form of knowing in modern western societies. Apart from occasional controversies, mistakes, and fraud, science is generally believed to deliver the truth, which we all can and must accept. Bruno LATOUR, who we have seen commenting on a hotel manager's rough-and-ready attempts to persuade, has also explored the sources of science's extraordinary persuasive capabilities. In the article "Drawing Things Together" (LATOUR, 1990, p.23) he approaches the question in a refreshingly MACHIAVELLIan spirit.

"Who [, LATOUR asks,] will win an agonistic encounter between two authors and between them and all the others they need to build up a statement S? Answer: the one able to *muster on the spot the largest number of well aligned and faithful allies.*" [21]

LATOUR then relates to the specific situation where two scientists are arguing over a particular matter. To turn the discussion in his favour, one scientist is likely to put a sheet of paper on the table: a figure, a diagram, a text, a silhouette or the like; "You doubt what I say? I'll show you" (LATOUR, 1990, p.36). The crucial function of the paper, LATOUR argues, is that it makes a connection between the present situation and objects or situations which are absent. By placing the paper on the table, one scientist is able to gather "allies" for his viewpoint, and hence become comparatively more convincing. LATOUR calls attention to a host of inventions that make this method of persuasion possible. On the most basic level, there is the invention of paper, of writing, and of printing technology. Another crucial invention is perspective drawing that allows objects to be transferred onto paper in a consistent manner. In addition, there are countless schemes, categories or machines that are used to transform material objects into "inscriptions" such as data or marks on piece of paper. LATOUR argues that two particular aspects of inscriptions explain their persuasive power. First, they are "immutable"; they don't change form, they retain their representation of some material object. Second, they are mobile; inscriptions can be transported from one situation to the next or from one place on earth to another. The combination of immutability and mobility makes it possible to gather inscriptions on particular locations, such as institutions of government, scientific laboratories or business enterprises, and to generate second order inscriptions by comparing, juxtaposing, or superimposing inscriptions. Through these manipulations, one might generate spectacular new representations of phenomena such as the movement of a galaxy, the changes in weather conditions during a century, or the Gross National Product<sup>10</sup>. [22]

LATOUR's overall argument, then, is that the power and persuasiveness of science and technology is achieved through a process of *drawing things together*. Particular actors become powerful because they are able to draw (i.e. pull) vast

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10 Scientific work also includes specific methods for witnessing the future, such as prognosis or forecasting. These methods essentially consist of extending the patterns, which have been established through earlier inscriptions.

number of allies into a present situation<sup>11</sup>. And this persuasive power is achieved through the process of drawing things together, i.e. inscribe them in ways that make it possible to accumulate and compare. From this analysis follows a particular view of scientific controversies; these battles of persuasion are *fact races* similar to arms races. The parties build up ever-increasing amounts of facts, which force the dissenters to either quit the race or to make an even greater investment. What we learn from LATOUR is that a distinctively MACHIAVELLIan strategy may be at play in witnessing situations. The actor who can bring in a multitude of allies, in whatever shape or form, will seize the day. Drawing things together is, and has been, a very victorious strategy in this game. [23]

Turning the attention back to United Spaces, we might ask what kinds of inscriptions the manager brings into the situation. Does he present graphs that show the decline of old forms of work? Is he displaying figures on the growth rate of his member companies compared to other start-ups in Copenhagen? Does he cite studies of productivity in open versus closed offices? [24]

In fact, he does neither of this. He is surprisingly "unscientific" in spite of the widespread scientification of business management. He shows the company to the visitor, he takes him for the standard tour, he claims that it is the office of the future, but he doesn't seem to "draw things together" in order to strengthen this claim. For this reason, it remains a bit of a mystery why a substantial number of the journalists are persuaded to forward his claim. If we follow LATOUR's assumption that a statement wins because well-aligned and faithful allies are mustered on the spot, then we must conclude that we are unsure what the manager's allies are, and we don't know which strategy of alignment and mustering he pursues. In what follows, I will attend to a set of strategies that are far more comparable to the manager's approach. At the end of this article, I will return to "drawing things together" as a point of comparison. [25]

### **4.3 Courtroom strategies: highlighting, categorising and undermining**

So far we have concluded that United Spaces mimics BOYLE's programme, but that the manager doesn't follow a recognisable strategy of drawing things together. Now, I will turn the attention to *courtrooms*. This is clearly another setting where witnessing and persuasion play a key role, and it is a setting that has inspired numerous studies of effective tricks and strategies. [26]

It is generally recognised that courtroom interaction can be described as an adversarial game, where each side seeks to establish one particular version of the facts and to undermine and discredit the alternative version proposed by their opponent. In this sense, battles in court are no different from the scientific controversies described by LATOUR. Studies of courtroom interaction, however, add important new strategies and tricks to our list. Thus conversation analyst

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11 From this it follows that persuasive statements depend on carefully crafted alliances with many allies, which again implies that not just anything can be said. On the contrary, LATOUR argues, statements become more and more real, precisely because they multiply their dependency on others.

Paul DREW (1992) gives a detailed account of the craft of undermining. In a study of cross-examination in rape trials, he shows how the defence lawyer asks questions that attempt to expose contradictions and inconsistencies in the account of the alleged rape victim, thus discrediting her testimony. She, on the other hand, undermines the defence lawyer's version by describing the events in other terms than the ones he wants, thus denying him the materials he needs to build his version<sup>12</sup>. [27]

Another conversation analyst, Charles GOODWIN, has described some of the work and strategies that makes a particular version persuasive in the eyes of witnesses (GOODWIN, 1994). The witnesses, in GOODWIN's case, were the jury in the trial against five LA police officers, who were charged with beating Mr. Rodney KING. The beating had been filmed on a videotape by a man in an apartment across the street. The tape had been shown on television, and most viewers were certain that it proved beyond doubt that the five officers had brutally beaten a man lying helplessly on the ground. When the tape was shown in court, however, the police officers' lawyers introduced a series of devices that made the jury view the tape in completely different terms. Subsequently, the officers were acquitted. The defence, GOODWIN shows, introduced a particular way of categorising and highlighting events on the tape. The defence divided the tape in brief episodes which were categorised as escalating force, de-escalating force, or assessment period. The defence argued, in part using an expert witness, that police officers are trained to use force in a highly professional way. "If a subject is aggressive the proper police response is escalation of force in order to subdue him. When the suspect cooperates then force is de-escalated" (GOODWIN, 1994, p.622). Following this scheme, the defence argued that the officers were responding appropriately and professionally, and that it was Mr. KING rather than the officers who was responsible for the amount of beating. [28]

Taken together, DREW's and GOODWIN's analyses suggest a series of ways in which one side of an argument may strengthen their claim. The opponent may be weakened by exposing his problems; vision may be directed through categorisation schemes or particular acts of highlighting. And as the Rodney KING case shows, the effects of these moves may be rather dramatic. [29]

Acts of highlighting, categorising and undermining are recognisable in the actions of United Spaces' manager. As I mentioned earlier, he points out to the visitors that "the people over there actually come from three different companies". In this way he highlights this part of the scenery, and he evokes a particular way of seeing or categorising, which was previously inaccessible to the visitor: People are representative of particular companies and the phenomenon that needs to be seen is the high extent of interaction across company lines. This move by the manager can also be interpreted as undermining the alternative. Elsewhere, in

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12 Influential works on rhetorical theory make a distinction between associative and dissociative argumentation schemes (PERELMAN & OLBRECHTS-TYTECA, 1969). SHAPIN and SCHAFFERs account of BOYLE's work to recruit witnesses and LATOUR's "drawing things together" are examples of an associative scheme that persuade by appealing to common grounds and realities. The "undermining" courtroom strategies are examples of dissociative schemes, which gain support for an idea through devaluation of the opposing term.

the old economy, people are confined within companies, but here they work together. In the same vein he says that at United Spaces, you are not stuck with your own little business, which again suggests a particular contrast to another and much less attractive version of work. There are thus several indications that undermining contrasting versions is an important part of the manager's strategy of persuasion. To explore this issue further, I conducted a second reading of the 27 articles. On this occasion, I have searched for all statements that evoke a contrast. Typically these statements are identifiable by linguistic markers such as: "rather than", "not", "instead of". I identified 44 such contrast statements. Together, they give an extensive picture of the contrasts that build up United Spaces' version and the categories used to establish this contrast. It is the manager's case against the old economy, if you will. [30]

## 5. The Case against the Old Economy

Each of the 44 statements suggests that United Spaces is alternative, different or other to something else. To get a firmer grip on the contrasts thus evoked, I have sorted the statements into four broad categories. In each of these categories, a particular *other* is defined. The categories are (1) social isolation, (2) professional demarcations (3) stable patterns of work, and (4) distrust<sup>13</sup>. Positively speaking, the contrast statements argue that United Spaces is a place of community, boundarilessness, flexibility and trust. In the following I will spell out these four dimensions in more detail<sup>14</sup>.

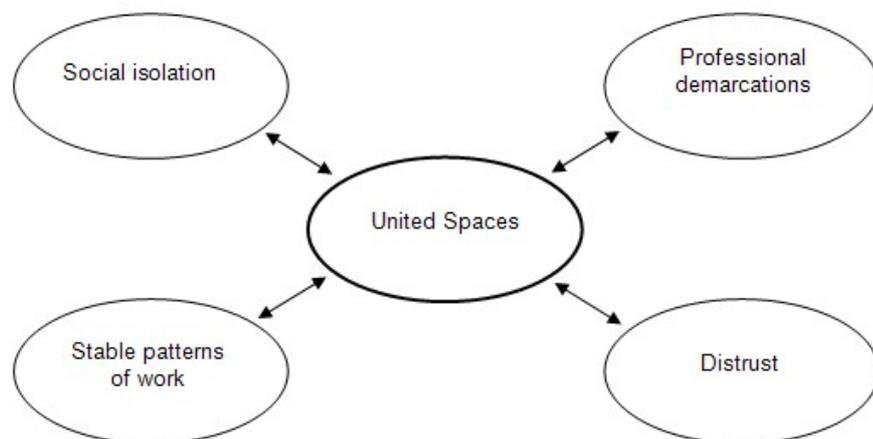


Figure 2: Themes of contrast in 44 statements [31]

13 The quantitative distribution of the 44 contrast statements were as follows: Social isolation: 11; Professional demarcations: 13; Stable patterns of work: 9; Distrust: 11.

14 Note 5 contains references to all 27 articles. To avoid an excessive number of references in the main text, the articles will be treated as one text in following, and hence not referenced individually. All quotations are translated from Danish or Swedish by the present author.

## 5.1 Community in contrast to social isolation

Several articles strike the theme that life as a "free agent" is not always as pleasant as one might think. With the absence of colleagues, the free agent runs the risk of loneliness, boredom, lack of professional contacts, and lack of inspiration. United Spaces, however, is presented as a possible solution to these problems. United Spaces is "an office community for free agents ... that have had enough of closed offices with no contact to the outside world". Another article quotes the manager for saying that "free agents [...] do not need an office with four walls and a closed door. They need to surround themselves with other people, and let themselves be inspired and fertilized (sic)". [32]

Moving into United Spaces, it is suggested, is to enter a different kind of social interaction. "The spirit is different here", one member is quoted for saying. "[P]eople come over and ask what you are doing. And then perhaps, we set up a meeting and see where it leads". Another article quotes a member for the idea that visibility is an important difference between United Spaces and other working locations. "In many organisations people tend to duck—here you must make yourself visible". [33]

Taking the themes of interaction and visibility one step further, a number of articles make the point that mutual involvement is more than an accidental feature at United Spaces. It is in fact an obligation. The manager is quoted several times for saying that the members are obliged—through the signing of a so-called cultural agreement—to share knowledge and to participate in the community culture. A crucial vehicle of this participation is the obligation to sit in a new seat every day. The emphasis on community—and the contrast to the isolated lives of free agents elsewhere—is summed up by the manager with the following statement "to put it shortly, United Spaces is a kind of an urban village" [34]

## 5.2 Boundarilessness in contrast to demarcations

The lack of boundaries between members is a second recurrent theme in the articles. One of the founders of United Spaces recalls: "it was our goal to create an interactive environment where people could use each other, join networks and in that way develop and renew themselves". The room for unbounded interaction is further commented by a member of United Spaces "No one here thinks that you are weird because you go into creative lab [a meeting room with playful interior decoration, including toys] and throw a ball, when you need to loosen up. A lot of people do that here". Another article concludes that the concept of United Spaces works because "people with different backgrounds, agendas and ages use the place and the competencies of others in each their way". [35]

Whereas the three statements above loosely suggest that boundaries between people or members are transgressed at United Spaces, there are a number of articles that point more specifically to the types of boundaries that are crossed. Some articles argue that United Spaces makes it possible to work across *companies* and in joint network projects. In relation to this it is argued that

different *types of companies* (start-ups, large corporations and small companies) meet at United Spaces. Other articles talk about the meeting and mutual enrichment of different *cultures*. And yet other articles highlight that *different lines of business* (e.g. market research and computer games) are joined. Again the manager stresses the importance of the seating arrangements "Traditional open offices in a company do not have the same effect, because they do not create the same exchange of ideas, as when you are sitting with people from other lines of business". [36]

Finally there are articles which quote enthusiastic statements about the plurality of connections at United Spaces. In the words of one member, "Here we get access to an ocean of knowledge that we don't have ourselves. We are seven employees, in here we become seventy". Or in the words of one of the founders: "[United Spaces] is like a physical Internet, where people participate in a community and break down boundaries between cultures, genders, religions, and races. In the cooperation between people, there is a force and an energy which is completely unheard off". [37]

### **5.3 Flexibility in contrast to stable patterns of work**

So far, two contrast themes have been described: United Spaces is *not* a place of social isolation, and United Spaces is *not* a place with boundaries between people. These two arguments spill into the third type of distinction between United Spaces and the rest. The argument here is that work at United Spaces is characterised by flexibility and constant change as opposed to the putative stability or repetitiveness of work elsewhere. [38]

Again, the argument and the evoked contrasts come in various shades. One article talks about the dynamism and development that is created by mutual inspiration and networking. Other articles quote the manager for saying that the physical movement to a new seat every day create new impressions and contacts, and hence a "mental" movement. Taking the theme of constant change one step further, another article argues that "change is born out of chaos. Therefore, personal development and company growth can be stimulated by the simple means of sitting at a new place every day, as opposed to going into a closed office". Finally, one article draws up a stark contrast between the rigidities of a "traditional office" and the flexibility of United Spaces.

"The traditional office with time clock, working time schedules, and other kinds of rule bound surveillance is losing ground to the modern workplace. You must be able to move the entire office to the desk that is most appropriate for the work of a particular day. Mobile phones and laptop computers are self-evident". [39]

### **5.4 Trust in contrast to distrust**

The fourth and final theme running through most of the articles is about trust. It is suggested that outside United Spaces, people and companies view each other as adversaries or competitors. In United Spaces, by contrast, there is a culture of

sharing. One member remarks: "I do not miss having my own workspace because I am more interested in networking than in building a fortress". The manager explains the overall ethos by saying that "to give is to gain". Another member says that she "fell in love, head over heels, both with the physical environment and with the thought of 'networking' and sharing knowledge with others". What is given and shared at United Spaces is not only professional knowledge. According to a number of articles the sharing also includes ideas, inspiration, network, creativity, and even business opportunities. In sum, the articles describe United Spaces as a community where a variety of resources are shared or even given away in an atmosphere of mutual trust, and with the confidence that good deeds will be returned. [40]

From this exploration of 44 contrast statements, we now have an outline of the key contrasts between United Spaces and the rest, the manager's case against the old economy, as I have called it. The story goes like this: At United Spaces community replaces social isolation. Boundarilessness replaces professional demarcations. Flexibility replaces too stable patterns of work. And finally, collaboration and trust replace distrust. The contrasts are constructed in such a way that United Spaces' version appears attractive and that the alternative appears problematic. Trust is better than distrust, flexibility is better than too much stability, etc. With this selected list of contrasts, the manager seems to suggest that "the old economy" or "traditional kinds of work" are plagued by some inherent problems, which by some sort of necessity will propel people in the direction shown by United Spaces; people won't put up with the old hassles any more when the alternative is at hand<sup>15</sup>. It looks like a strong case. The advocate who can discredit his opponent is in a good position to win, given of course that he is not undermined himself. This is also true for United Spaces: a strong attack is good, but your own case must also be able to hold up. The manager seems to be able to discredit "traditional forms of work" by highlighting four specific contrasts. But to be really convincing, he still needs to show the journalists that United Spaces is indeed a workable alternative. If he fails to do this, the manager himself will be undermined. [41]

## 6. Future and Furniture

To explore how the manager might have persuaded journalists that United Spaces was in fact a workable alternative, I will focus again on the standard tour. What in this tour, along with the manager's words, might have convinced the journalists that United Spaces occupied the positive ends of the four dimensions of contrast? How did the journalists become eye-witnesses of community, boundarilessness, flexibility and trust? [42]

Let us examine first the claim that United Spaces replaces social isolation with community. Guided by the manager, the visitor can see that United Spaces offers an office space that is shared rather than divided. The visitor is shown people

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15 Thomas SCHEFFER's discussion of "procedural regimes" and "fact-finding machines" [in this special issue](#) describes a seemingly similar process: The subject is pressured into compliance through a steady accumulation of contradictions.

talking to other people or sitting near other people at the workstations. The contrast between this spectacle and the individual cell offices known from countless other workplaces is directly evoked in some of the already-mentioned quotes brought by the journalists. United Spaces is "an office community for free agents ... that have had enough of closed offices with no contact to the outside world". "Free agents [...] do not need an office with four walls and a closed door. They need to surround themselves with other people, and let themselves be inspired and fertilized (sic)". These quotations make at least two moves. First, they conflate or fuse together any difference between traditional ways of working and the physicalities of traditional offices. An office with four walls and door is almost by definition a "closed office" with no contact to the outside world. A closed office in this usage becomes both a physical description as well as a generalised characterisation of an isolated way of working. With this conflation in place, the second move is to evoke a strong contrast between these closed offices/ways of working and United Spaces, which is of course an "open office". At this point the full implication of the previously described conflation becomes clear: when the office at United Spaces is "open" in the material sense, then this by implication means that the way of working is also "open". The clearly visible physical contrast between United Spaces and the dis-united spaces of cell offices becomes a strong indication that a different way of work is taking place here. So when the journalists are guided to see that the office of United Spaces is different, then this material structure becomes evidence that a different way of working is taking place here. [43]

What is at play here is akin to the rhetorical undermining described by sociologists of courtroom interaction: Support for version A (United Spaces) is generated by undermining the alternative version B (old forms of work). But the rhetoric of the contrast argument is combined with and enforced by materialities in a crucial and novel way. Old forms of work are translated into the material form of old forms of offices, and this material form is contrasted to an alternative material form of the open office space, which is presented as identical to a new form of work. The implication is that not only is United Spaces completely *different* from old forms of work; it is also a realistic, already materialised alternative. It *is* the office of the future. I will call this rhetorical-material configuration a *materialised contrast argument*. It is a combination of rhetorical and material resources whereby the manager gathers support and "realism" for United Spaces by contrasting it to an absent, problematic alternative, and by suggesting that a set of tangible and observable materialities proves that a different form of work is present. [44]

The materialised contrast argument is also important to the other differences between United Spaces and the rest. The second claim of contrast in the articles is that work elsewhere is associated with boundaries and professional demarcations as opposed to the boundarilessness of work at United Spaces. What a visitor to United Spaces can be guided to see is a number of people from different professions, companies, and lines of business located in the same room. The argument then goes that elsewhere these different kinds of people are held apart, which is associated with the lack of interactivity, the lack of creativity and

the lack of mutual enrichment. At United Spaces these people are together—as we have just seen—which implies that interactivity, creativity and mutual enrichment is taking place. Again the translation from a way of working to office materialities is crucial to the argument. Unproductive boundaries between professions, companies etc. are translated into the physicality of not being in the same room. This in turn is contrasted to the shared space at United Spaces, which implies that boundaries have been broken down at this location. Again, the articles weave a seamless rhetorical web of office materialities and of forms of work, thus one article explains that ideas are exchanged "when you are *sitting* with people from other branches of business" (emphasis added). So, when visitors are shown people sitting together, it works to persuade them that ideas will be exchanged. [45]

The third claim of contrast, according to the articles, is between the too stable patterns of work elsewhere and the flexibility at United Spaces. On this issue, the visitor will hear the manager explain that everybody is encouraged to sit at a new place every day. The visitor is shown that the workstations do not seem to belong to anyone particular—they are not marked by personal belongings—and that each member has a roller cabinet and a locker, where his or her papers can be stored. Again the articles deploy a materialised contrast argument: "change is born out of chaos. Therefore, personal development and company growth can be stimulated by the simple means of sitting at a new place every day, as opposed to going into a closed office". In this argument the lack of change and a closed office are conflated and then contrasted to "sitting at a new place every day", implying that this physical environment will generate change and growth. In the same vein, the manager is quoted for arguing that mental change will follow from the physical movement. [46]

The fourth and final claim of contrast is about trust. Work at United Spaces is characterised by trust and collaboration, whereas people working elsewhere tend to see each other as adversaries or competitors. It is perhaps difficult to see how trust is materialised or argued materially at United Spaces. I suggest, however, that the positioning of the workstations provide an important clue. The majority of the workstations are placed in clusters with four or six inwardly facing tables. The rest of the tables are placed "shoulder by shoulder" facing the windows. This arrangement enables a person at any location in the room to see the faces of the people sitting near him, either frontally or through the corner of his eyes. This arrangement precludes certain antagonistic and distrustful social arrangements. Hidden surveillance, as described by FOUCAULT (1991) with the famous example of BENTHAM's prison, is ruled out. People at United Spaces are highly visible to each other, the room is light and open, but there is no privileged location from which one person can survey all others; Visibility is evenly distributed. The arrangement of tables also inhibits *hidden* observation. People who are sitting near each other are also facing each other; any observer can be looked in the eyes. [47]

Another version of social distrust is described by SERRES (1982) as parasitism. Like pickpockets, parasites are small actors that are close up but still lurking

behind your back and trying to stay out of sight. But again this form of sociality is contradicted by the arrangement of the workstations that allow no one to sit closely behind the back of others. The furniture at United Spaces can thus be seen to arrange an environment where the members can interact in a trustful way. One could say, perhaps, that the arrangement of furniture is a solution to the following problem: How can you place a lot of people in the same room and still make it possible for anyone to have a fair measure of control over who watches or interacts with her? And again, the physical structures, the arrangement of furniture, may persuade visitors that a new and trustful form of work is taking place here: safe networking.

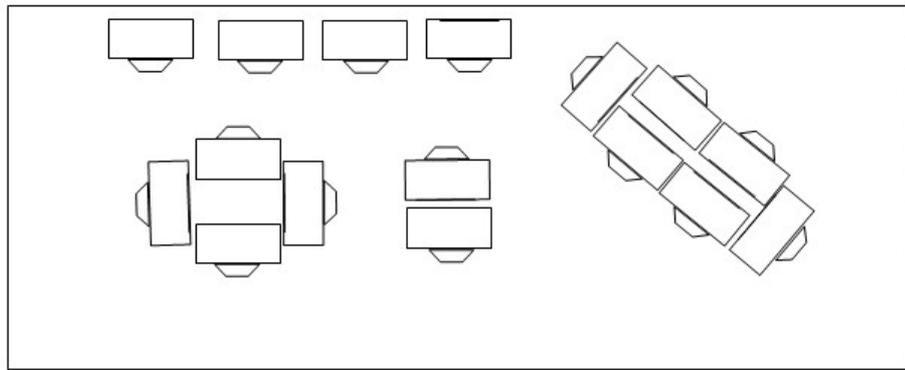


Figure 3: The arrangement of workstations in inwardly facing clusters and along the wall. [48]

## 7. Drawing Contrasts Together

The article began with a question: How can the witnessing of the future be arranged?; and with the empirical observation that a majority of the business journalists who visited United Spaces did in fact report that this company was the office of the future. I will now try to patch together an explanation from the theoretical and empirical material explored in this article. [49]

The witnessing at United Spaces *mimics* BOYLES's programme, as described by SHAPIN and SCHAFFER. There is a "machine" in the form of a physical building, office furniture, people, etc. that produces unique events. There is a select public, business journalists, who are invited to eye-witness the workings of the machine. And there is a broader public who is invited to become virtual witnesses by means of articles published in the business press. A part of United Spaces' credibility as a fact-maker, I have suggested, is derived from the fact that it works within BOYLE's well-established genre. This genre-affiliation goes some way to explain why United Spaces appears to be credible. But to explain how *the future*, rather than the past or the present, can be witnessed, we need a different set of explanations. [50]

I have suggested that the manager's persuasive strategy depends on the articulation of four contrasts to the forms of work that exist elsewhere. These contrasts suggest serious problems with existing types of work (social isolation, distrust, inflexibility, etc.) and simultaneously locate United Spaces on the other,

positive pole of the same dimensions. By undermining the opponent (existing forms of work), the manager of United Spaces thus implies that the future will be different. It must be. Existing forms of work are deficient. This case against existing work, and in favour of United Spaces, is further strengthened by what I have called a materialised contrast argument. The manager conflates old forms of work with the physical layout of cell-offices, and he conflates new forms of work with an open office plan. Through these moves, he is able to imply that the new forms of work are already realised at United Spaces, as evidenced by the open office plan. This, as I have argued in detail, also means that the journalists can be guided to view the physical layout of United Spaces' offices as *evidence* of a new form of work. In this way, a situation is arranged where the journalists, with their own eyes, can witness a future of work, which has already been realised. [51]

Having said this, it is important once again to stress the situated and pragmatic nature of persuasion and witnessing. What I have tried to explain is not some universal or abstract truth about United Spaces. The phenomenon I try to explain is indicated in Figure 1; it is the fact that the particular statement "it is the office of the future" is accepted, passed on, and hence strengthened by a number of journalists. What I have tried to explain is not how the manager gains full control—he does not—but how he increases his persuasive power. If all things were equal, we might expect all possible statements to have an equal and very low chance of being carried on by someone else. What I have tried to explore here are the means and strategies that made a certain statement do far better than expected. [52]

It is interesting to compare United Spaces' articulation of contrasts to the "drawing things together" account of persuasive power, which has by now become well known within Science and Technology Studies. LATOUR (1990, 1999) argues that strength, power, and truth is attained by establishing a progressive chain of translations that allow later entities, such as a scientific paper, to speak on behalf of earlier "entities" such as samples of matter. The strength of the scientific paper is thus derived from its ability to faithfully re-present others. However, the persuasiveness of United Spaces' manager vis-à-vis the visiting business journalists does not fit this image. The materialised contrast argument does not work by creating a similarity or reference, but by articulating difference and contrast. The strength of United Spaces is not that it accumulates information about working conditions elsewhere, but that it disconnects from them. More specifically, United Spaces becomes persuasive by representing the opposite of social isolation, professional demarcations, too stable patterns of work, and distrust. [53]

LATOUR's model suggests that persuasive power is generated by establishing a progressive chain of inscriptions, and by gathering and accumulating these inscriptions. Persuasive power is thus associated with vast centralised enterprises, "centres of calculation", such as research laboratories or bureaucratic organisations. In the case of United Spaces, the metaphor of a *kite* seems appropriate; United Spaces gains upward drift by blocking and resisting. It works by posing itself up against something else. Thus United Spaces' source of

persuasive power is that it draws *contrasts* rather than things together. With its arrangements of tables and with the rule of sitting at a new place every day, it has found a way to articulate a number of problems or even absurdities of "normal work". And like a protest movement, it lifts off the ground at the moment when it is able to channel diffuse dissatisfaction with the existing state of affairs into support for a clear rallying point. LATOUR argues that the most persuasive author is the one "able to muster on the spot the largest number of well aligned and faithful allies" (LATOUR, 1990, p.23). In an equally MACHIAVELLIan spirit<sup>16</sup>, and along with researchers of courtroom interaction, I would like to add that the winner might also be the one who is able, on the spot, to launch the most devastating attack on the allies of the opposing author. The strategy of drawing contrasts together is precisely this: a way of gaining strength by attacking the alternative. [54]

## 8. Discourses and Times

Under what conditions, one might ask, is it effective to draw contrasts rather than things together? To explore this question, I will attend to the particular worldview that was formulated by enthusiastic promoters of the new economy in the late 1990's in magazines such as *Fast Company* and *Wired*<sup>17</sup>. Kevin KELLY, chief editor of *Wired*, wrote the book "New rules for the New economy", which is often considered to be the bible of this movement<sup>18</sup>. In the introduction, he outlines the state of the world in 1999:

"Of all the endeavours we humans are now engaged in, perhaps the grandest of them all is the steady weaving together of our lives, minds, and artifacts into a global scale network. This great work has been going on for decades, but recently our ability to connect has accelerated. Two brand-new technological achievements—the silicon chip and the silicate glass fiber—have rammed together with incredible speed. Like nuclear particles crashing together in a cyclotron, the intersection of these two innovations has unleashed a never-before-seen force: the power of a pervasive net. As this grand net spreads, an animated swarm is reticulating the surface of the planet. We are clothing the globe with a network society" (KELLY, 1999, p.1). [55]

On the back cover of the book, the view of a dramatically changing world is even more pronounced:

"The old rules are broken ... Forget supply and demand. Forget computers. Today, communication, not computation, drives change. We are rushing into a world where connectivity is everything, and where old business know-how means nothing. In this new order, success flows primarily from understanding networks, and networks have their own rules". [56]

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16 See for instance MACHIAVELLI's Chapter 8 "Concerning those who have obtained a principality by wickedness".

17 See WYATT (2004) for an analysis of the use of metaphors in *Wired* Magazine.

18 *Wired*, *Fast Company*, and Kevin KELLY's book were all placed on a bookshelf in United Spaces' café area.

It is almost trivial to point out that the worldview outlined by KELLY is essentially incompatible with a strategy of drawing things together. Since the new world has just appeared (as in a crash), there has been little time to build up effective chains of translation. Moreover, since literally everything is believed to have changed (the globe is now being clothed with network society), previously gathered facts are now likely to be wrong (old rules are broken, old knowledge must be forgotten). On the other hand, KELLY's worldview is much more hospitable to the strategy of drawing contrasts together. If dramatic change has rendered any existing solution obsolete then the most important thing is to do something different. Hence, the burden of explanation is shifted: Old things don't work; new and different things might. The heyday of the strategy of drawing contrasts together thus seems to be shortly after a dramatic change. [57]

But has the world then changed dramatically? Do we live in an era where drawing contrasts together is the order of the day? Or are we back to normal, as commentators at a safe distance from the burst of the "dot-com bubble" would have it, with the value of drawing things together restored? Although these questions beg a yes or no answer, I am reluctant to give one. The reason is that if we play the language game of assuming that "the" world is in one particular state, then the effectiveness of strategies merely becomes a derived phenomenon: This world benefits this strategy. It may be true, of course, that at certain times and at certain locations, the world favours a particular strategy. But the reverse is also true. Particular strategies enact particular worlds. When contrasts are drawn together, a world of dramatic change is enacted. The manager must draw on the idea that a new economy has arrived, to argue that his contrasts are appealing. And in so doing he contributes to the enactment of a rupture between the old and the new. The strategy—so to speak—helps to create its own conditions of existence. Similarly, when an actor builds up a statement by means of drawing things together, he draws on and adds to ideas and practices that enact the world as relatively stable and knowable. [58]

At present, the talk of dramatic change is widespread to say the least. The new economy was not the last time that all-encompassing changes were announced. Since then we have been presented with the knowledge economy, the new globalisation, modus II, the nano-revolution, the global war on terror and many more world-shaking images of a new future that has just begun. The British sociologist Paul DU GAY (2003) has recently talked about the tyranny of the epochal in a harsh commentary on the incessant use of change rhetoric by sociologists and business writers. The suggestion of the present article is not to take these futures too seriously as detached, objective descriptions of the (entire) world, but to take them very seriously as parts of the rhetorical-material strategies that work to solidify certain actors and certain projects. The new economy firm, United Spaces, is merely one example of a rhetorical-material configuration that raised persuasive power. But the endless popularity of epochalist discourses suggests that a significant amount of persuasion may depend on the strategy of drawing contrasts together, even today. The strategy of drawing contrasts together thus remains one distinct way of making matters witnessable, one type

of attempt to generate reality, and one mode of engaging in situated struggles over the nature of the future. [59]

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