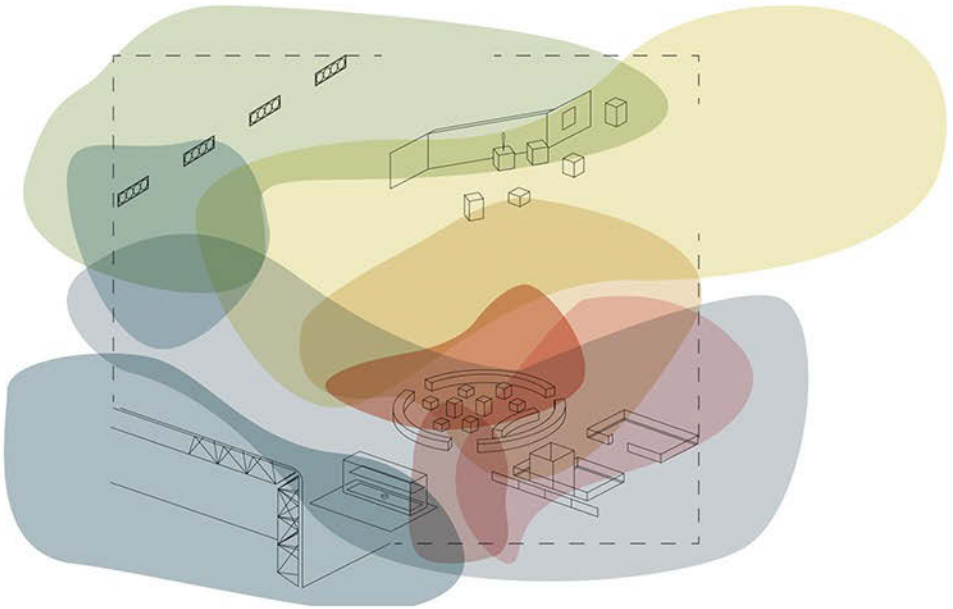


Sabine Hansmann

# Monospace and Multiverse

Exploring Space  
with Actor-Network-Theory



Sabine Hansmann  
Monospace and Multiverse

## Editorial

The series is edited by Gabriele Klein, Martina Löw und Michael Meuser.

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Sabine Hansmann

# **Monospace and Multiverse**

Exploring Space with Actor-Network-Theory

**[transcript]**

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While *Monospace* and *Multiverse* in a certain sense stand for the beginning and end of this study, I would like to stress that this work is not about a path from the former to the latter. On the contrary it is a journey into architectural space that could unfold only in this field of tension. A decisive factor for this work, however, was a further exceptional place, the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts in Norwich. I would like to thank the team of the Sainsbury Centre Institute, the university's teachers, students, visitors, and others who took the time and participated in my research in the period between 2016–17. In particular, I would like to thank Meryl

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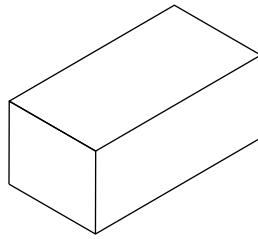




# 1

## Introduction

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**Fig. 1.1:**  
Box containing space.

Can there be a building with only one space? If you are an architect, your answer will be most likely, yes of course. Depending on your age, you might think of the KAIT Workshop (2008) by architect Junya Ishigami in Kanagawa, Japan. Or a bit larger, the Neue Nationalgalerie (1968) by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe in Berlin, Germany. But maybe you had a glance at this sketch above first (**Fig. 1.1**), and you are simply thinking of a shipping container, frequently used as site offices. No matter what reference you have in your mind, let us call these buildings ‘monospace’. We will then have to see why this might be interesting.<sup>1</sup>

Can there be a movement *with* space? The answer is not quite so simple. That said, we indeed can consider movement as an action *with* space, a movement that is shaped and re-arranged by many ingredients and which generate space

---

<sup>1</sup> I take up the term ‘monospace’ from the architect and urbanist Finn Geipel (Geipel, Koch, and Thorwarth 2011) who groups under this typology buildings which distinguish themselves by one outer shell with a maximally open floor plan.

in the course of action. This is not about a movement that occurs *within* a pre-existing space but is instead a movement that is actively producing space. Let us call this process of space-making ‘spacing’ and see why this concept might be challenging for the notion of monospace, and revealing for our understanding of buildings, architects and ‘users’, and thus for architectural theory in general.<sup>2</sup>

## 1.1

### Rethinking Space with Monospace

Rethinking space with monospace starts with a paradox. Concerned with a building, which is often called a ‘box’, ‘shed’ or ‘aircraft hangar’, and that comprises so much space that it can be described as the ‘container space’ par excellence.<sup>3</sup> This book sets out to challenge a traditional understanding of space in the field of architecture. Opposing a space that can be entered and a view of architecture as an objective frame that surrounds and contains, I approach the typology of monospace and argue that space is not what happens *in* a building but space happens *with* a building. What at first sounds like a little intellectual pun quickly turns out to be a fundamental shaking of belief systems in the discipline of architecture. After all, the question of space is closely linked to the question of the relationship between architecture and social life. Both of which are currently being re-negotiated in an interdisciplinary context (Jacobs and Merriman 2011; Yaneva 2012, 2009b; Delitz 2009a; Löw 2001; cf. also Heynen 2013). This undertaking to explore a monospace through ‘spacing’ is thus not only an empirically based study on the topic of space in the field of architecture but furthermore aims to contribute to recent scholarship in re-thinking and re-conceptualising architecture’s relations (Till 2013; Yaneva 2017; Latour and Yaneva 2008).

However, let us take a step back and define more precisely the subject at hand. Monospace is a specific form of open plan building.<sup>4</sup> To understand a monospace seems at first glance rather simple as it consists—in its most radical

---

2 I take the term ‘spacing’ up from French sociologist and philosopher Bruno Latour (1997) and not as might be expected in German-speaking countries from sociologist Martina Löw (2001). Both approaches are examined in more detail in Chapter 2.

3 Albert Einstein coined the term ‘container’ space in distinction to a relational understanding of space (Einstein 1954, XV).

4 The first tentative steps toward a definition of monospace and its interrogative potential for the topic of space in the field of architecture were elaborated previously in a co-authored article by myself and Finn Geipel *Über Hüllen und Werden* (Geipel and Hansmann, forthcoming).

cases—of only one room. The KAIT Workshop (2008) by Japanese architect Junya Ishigami, a studio and workshop on the campus of the Kanagawa Institute of Technology, Japan, is such a radical monospace building (Fig. 1.2, 1.4).<sup>5</sup> Comprised of roughly 2000 square meters in a single room, this flat single-storey structure has all-glass façades. The room is not empty but structured into various zones by 305 thin columns of different proportions scattered about in various densities. In between there are plants, chairs, tables, workbenches, machines and all sorts of things. Such a rich material world loosely defines different possibilities of action. Clay is processed at the turntables near the water basins, wood close to the circular saw on the workbenches. That said, the daily hustle and bustle, the trajectories of the objects, the circling and meandering movements of the students, the three to five workshop managers who are present teaching, supervising and coordinating this field of possibilities, quickly reveals that this monospace is highly complex. To grasp this building in its architectural quality we have to move ‘inside’ to take a closer look. The glass shell surrounding the container space gives little indication of the actual possibilities that emerge in the course of action. In contrast to buildings divided by walls into a sequence of rooms, monospaces are determined far less by the building shell than by a reciprocal relationship between space and practice and objects, materials and human bodies. The architect Ishigami compares this situation with the emergence of a landscape in which the notion of architecture as framework disappears:

When a state of equilibrium is reached by the architecture and other elements in the process of giving form to a space, the result is more like a landscape than like architecture. The character of architecture as the framework that forms space disappears. This phenomenon can be linked to people, cars, vegetation and buildings becoming equal components in a landscape without any particular hierarchy. (Ishigami 2010, 24)

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5 For additional information on the KAIT Workshop, see Junya Ishigami: *Small Images* (2008, particularly 28–43).

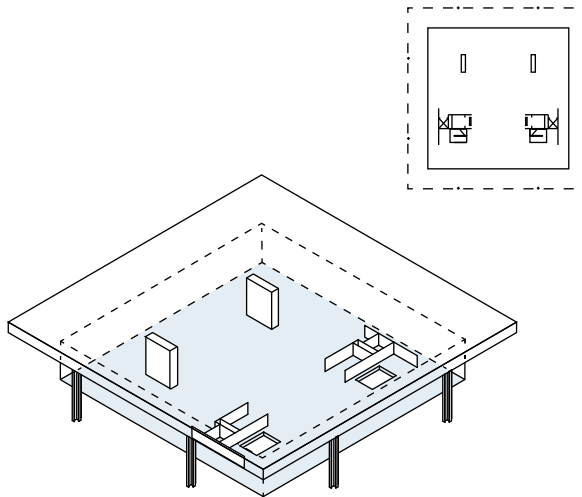
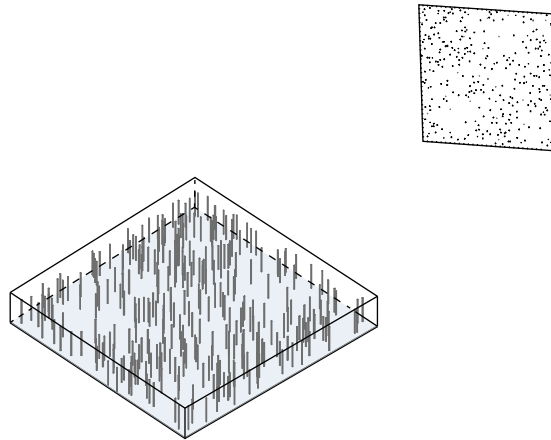


Contemporary studies of another monospace, the Neue Nationalgalerie (1968) by Mies van der Rohe in Berlin (Fig. 1.3, 1.5),<sup>6</sup> reveal the challenges of conceptualising and analytically grasping this architecture, which is apparently open to constant change. As I argue, to account for the reality of such buildings it is insufficient to do so on the basis of their technicality. In other words, monospace buildings cannot be understood simply by focusing on the material object. To merely read their plans, sections or static pictures (Woelk 2010) is not enough. Nor is it sufficient to study them through the movements of the 'phenomenological' body that pass through them, focusing on sensorial perceptions and atmospheres or decoding symbolic meanings (Leyk 2010). With monospace buildings, it is particularly essential to turn to the reality of the building in the process of use in order to overcome the separation of 'objective' and 'subjective' space. The former defined by numbers and measurements, the latter emerging around the human beings that perceive it. This very dichotomy that reduces the building to passive material, however, while making human life into the active component is very much anchored in the prevalent way of thinking about space in architecture.

In the course of the 20th century, space was declared the 'essence' of architecture (Scott 1914; Giedion 1954 [1941]; Zevi 1957 [1948]). In this respect architects became *shapers* of space: 'If, for a particular purpose, we separate, limit and bring into a human scale a part of unlimited space, it is (if all goes well) a piece of space brought to life as reality.' (Rietveld 1958, 162) Consequently, architecture became a discipline concerned with the task of shaping space. Ideas of space are by no means homogeneous (Denk, Schröder, and Schützeichel 2016; Forty 2004). Nevertheless, traditional spatial concepts still predominate most contemporary discussions, such as the idea that space is what is contained within an object (Hilger 2011; Till 2013; Awan, Schneider, and Till 2011). This goes hand in hand with the ambiguity that German architect Oswald Mathias Ungers has isolated in his article on the Janus face of architecture: 'architecture is, by its very nature, body of representation or container, figure or vessel, mass or void, core or shell, fabric or envelope.' (Ungers 1991, 231)<sup>7</sup> Thus, architecture is most commonly either concerned with the design of walls, which contain space, or the design of volumes within walls. In each instance, architecture represents a form of thought about containing space, which has roots in an absolutist understanding of space. The idea of an absolute space has existed since ancient times, however, Isaac Newton elaborated this notion as homogeneous and endless space (Newton 1872). Absolute space is independent from action—it is pre-existent. Albert Einstein then intro-

6 For additional information on the Neue Nationalgalerie, see *New National Gallery, Berlin* by Vandenberg (1998).

7 My translation. German original: '[...] ob die Architektur ihrem Wesen nach Schaukörper oder Behälter, Figur oder Gefäß, Masse oder Hohlraum, Kern oder Schale, Stoff oder Hülle sei.'

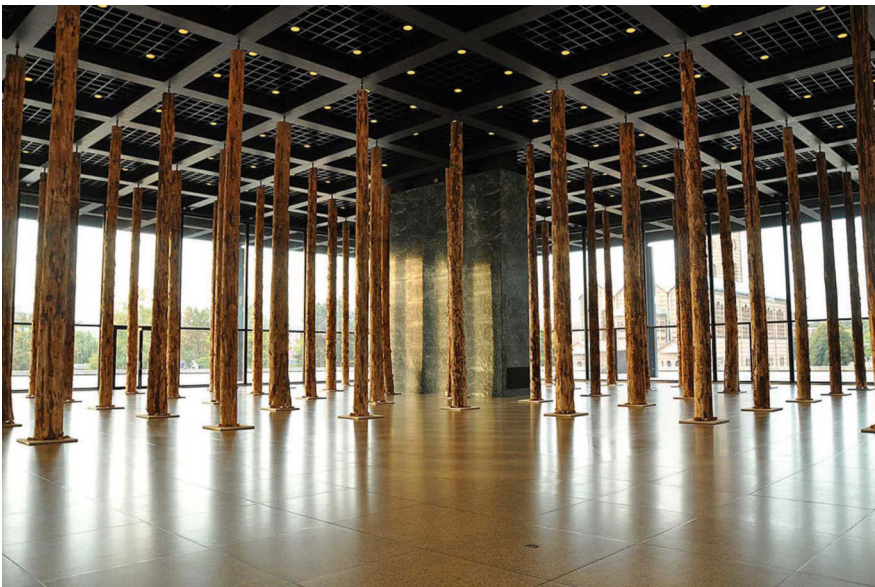


**Fig. 1.2:**

Isometric view. Junya Ishigami + Associates,  
KAIT Workshop, Kanagawa Institute of  
Technology, Japan, 2008.

**Fig. 1.3:**

Isometric view. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe,  
Neue Nationalgalerie Berlin, Germany, 1968.



**Fig. 1.4:**  
Interior view (2014). KAIT Workshop.

**Fig. 1.5:**  
Interior view (2014). Neue Nationalgalerie Berlin, exhibition *Sticks and Stones, eine Intervention* by David Chipperfield.

duced the term 'container' (as a negative demarcation from a relational notion of space) and ever since we have talked about 'space as container' (Einstein 1954, xv).

The term monospace originates from this very understanding of space as contained and to some extent can be considered representative of the difficulties that the entire architectural discipline has been facing for some time. As the Canadian designer and architect Bruce Mau has put it with respect to the major challenges civilisation is facing: 'The problems we share are plural. Architectural practice and education, however, are still locked to the idea of the singular [...]' (2004, 33). There are nuances to this. Indeed, some architects have started to address topics like 'flow, mobility and transformation' in their projects and have thereby turned away from 'stylistic, formal, static spatial' considerations (Lefavre and Tzonis 2000, 58). Nevertheless, such ideas tend to stay *within* space and are seemingly unaffected by the current spatial discourse, a discourse for which we can learn from other disciplines.

In the wake of the *spatial turn* a vivid interest in space from the early 1990s onwards has permeated the humanities and social sciences (Soja 2011 [1989]; Döring and Thielmann 2008). Anthropologists and sociologists, for instance, describe how bodily self-perception has changed from a physical body as a container to an open immune system (Martin 1994); they have also addressed a new spatial understanding within the context of virtual networking (Löw 2001). With this awaking interest in the capacity to understand social phenomena through space, new concepts to investigate and theorise space were developed (e.g., in actor-network-theory (Latour 2005), practice theory (Schatzki 2002), sociology of space (Löw 2016)). Space turned into a complex social process, which can never be abstract, singular and enclosed by a shell. This should be enough of a reason to shift the focus and transform the field of a discipline involved in the shaping of space. Yet while we confront in recent decades in many spheres of life a change in spatial phenomena, this development has remained largely without effect in the field of architecture. There may be various reasons for this. The German trade journal of the Association of German Architects (BDA), *der architekt*, devoted a whole issue to the discussion of the spatial turn in architecture, stating that the discourse on space in the humanities has remained too abstract for architects and therefore had little effect on design (Denk, Schröder, and Schützeichel 2008). These authors consider architecture to be an object-oriented science, the reality of which has little need of such abstract theoretical approaches. Furthermore, as architect and academic Jeremy Till explains with regard to the task of the architect: '[t]he supposed neutrality of metric space provides a comfort zone in which dimensions can be shared as uncontested values [...]' (Till 2013, 122).

Indeed, architects are entrusted with the planning of three-dimensional objects amongst other things. An absolute spatial thinking is linked to mathematical Euclidean geometry and Vitruvian architectural theory, which still today remains

the basis for dealing with the constructional parameters of the physical building elements (Hilger 2011). In this sense, architecture is concerned with a material spatial construction and thus preoccupied with a space that is contained in buildings. That architects can shape and control this space bolsters the authority of architecture as such. Accompanying this focus on the object, however, criticism begins elsewhere. Because it leads to

the dominance of aesthetics, style, form and technique in the usual discussion of architecture, and with this the suppression of the more volatile aspects of buildings: the processes of their production, their occupation, their temporality, and their relations to society and nature. (Awan, Schneider, and Till 2011, 27)

Excluding the processes buildings are part of, they are still understood as stable and rigid objects, which contain space. As such, they are widely designed, theorised and analysed, supported by a recursive architectural discourse (Hilger 2011; Awan, Schneider, and Till 2011; Latour and Yaneva 2008).

Nevertheless space offers the possibility of overcoming these limitations. Architecture must not be located *in* space and remain isolated from the course of action (Latour 1997).

Everybody knows—and especially architects, of course—that a building is not a static object but a moving *project*, and that even once it is (sic) has been built, it ages, it is transformed by its users, modified by all of what happens inside and outside, and that it will pass or be renovated, adulterated and transformed beyond recognition. (Latour and Yaneva 2008, 80; original emphasis)

Sociologist and philosopher Bruno Latour and architectural anthropologist Alben Yaneva programmatically demand the overcoming of the three-dimensional understanding of architecture in their article *Give me a Gun and I will Make all Buildings Move* (2008). What they propose is to integrate the numerous dimensions, processes and relations in which a building lives into the (spatial) understanding of architecture.

In the following study, I pursue the demand for earthly accounts into a ‘building-on-the-move’ made by Latour and Yaneva (ibid. 87), and turn to the process of spacing as a way of exploring the multiple dimensions of the monospace. What such an approach prioritises is the rich life buildings possess in reality. Exploring the monospace as a field of possibilities with the help of actor-network-theory (ANT) (Latour 2005), this book aims to enrich the understanding of (architectural) space as a complex process emerging out of the shared agency between architects,

buildings and the people who occupy and use them. ANT, as it is rooted in science and technology studies (STS), is a method of inquiry that allows us to re-conceptualise architecture from an experiential perspective. Appropriating the term ‘spacing’ from Bruno Latour (1997), the focus of this study are the consequences of a symmetrical processual approach to space (as rooted in ANT) for the understanding of architecture and its relations. Concentrating on the process of spacing instead of discussing its nominal form ‘space’, allows us to witness the emergence of space in activity. Actors here are humans as well as materials, objects, techniques, texts, norms, etc. that form networks with other actors. The power to act is distributed within these networks and can therefore never be attributed to a single actor alone. With spacing, space is no longer singular and no longer contained but actively created during multiple interactions: between objects, materials and humans. The term monospace is thus misleading, as there is not one homogeneous space but a complex and rich variety of temporally limited spaces generated *in* and *through* action. For this reason, I focus on the ‘doing in common’ of architecture and people. In other words, I analyse the shared process that takes place between people and a given building. Hence I abandon the still predominant static and passive understanding of architecture. The monospace *in* space turns out to be a ‘multiverse’ with spacing.<sup>8</sup>

## 1.2

### A Realist Account on Architectural Space

In foregrounding interaction, practice and experience I follow a host of different scholars who are concerned with moving past the traditional divide between active subjects and passive objects, mind and matter (Mol 2002; Latour 1991). Some of these scholars have been particularly concerned with architecture as well. There is a turn towards design and architecture *in the making* (Loukissas 2012; Houdart and Minato 2009; Yaneva 2005b, 2009b, 2009a), as well as a shift in the approach to architecture that *is made* (Yaneva 2012, 2013, 2017). Albenia Yaneva who introduced ANT into the field of architecture, demands a ‘dynamic understanding of build-

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8 On reading an article by Albenia Yaneva *A Building Is a “Multiverse”* (2005a), I was inspired to take up this term. Also Latour and Yaneva speak of ‘a complex and multiverse argumentative space’ (2008, 87). The term was originally coined by American philosopher and psychologist William James (1895, 10). Camacho-Hübner and Latour explain it elsewhere: ‘Since there is no good accepted term—which in itself is odd since it is the only world we all inhabit, human as well as nonhumans!—we will use James’s term, *multiverse*, indicating by this word that it is indeed just as real as the ‘universe’ of commonsense but that it has not been prematurely unified through a continuous “physical space”, in effect the *res extensa*.’ (November, Camacho-Hübner and Latour 2010, 595; original emphasis)

ings' (Yaneva 2010, 142). 'Realist accounts of architecture are to be made in a situated and pluralist fashion' she notes and claims that 'if we really want to understand the meaning of buildings, we need to [...] make a detour to practice.' (Ibid. 145)

The interest in practices is not new. There is a broad turn to practices within the social sciences and humanities (Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina, and Savigny 2001; Reckwitz 2003).<sup>9</sup> In the field of social and cultural geography, Jane M. Jacobs and Peter Merriman introduce the concept of 'practicing architecture' to elaborate an understanding of 'architecture *in practice*' (Jacobs and Merriman 2011, 211; original emphasis). This includes various architectural actors from the process of creation and occupation, change or manipulation to decay and dismantling. These actors are not only human but also include animals and insects as much as processes and forces like weathering and rusting. In this way they 'wish to animate architecture' and understand it 'as an on-going process of holding together [...]'. '[T]he stabile architectural object (architecture-as-noun)' is turned into an 'effect of various doing (architecture-as-verb).' (Ibid. 211–12)<sup>10</sup> However, there is 'no unified practice approach' and while

most practice theorists would agree that activity is embodied and that nexuses of practices are mediated by artifacts, hybrids, and natural objects, disagreement reign about the nature of embodiment, the pertinence of thematizing it when analyzing practices, the sorts of entities that mediate activity, and whether these entities are relevant to practices as more than mere intermediaries among humans. (Schatzki 2001, 11)

To what extent the world divided into lifeless matter and active life should actually be left behind thus remains contentious ground. Current practice-oriented accounts of space, such as Theodore Schatzki (2002) and Martina Löw (2001), while acknowledging materiality in their ordering capacity in social spatial production, nevertheless give (in different ways) preference to human action.<sup>11</sup> Even if current scholarship interested in architecture investigates 'the doings of built spaces' (Reh and Temel 2014), considering relational, processual and practice based architectural experiences (Leuenberger 2018), there is nevertheless some kind of partiality

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9 On ANT as a 'stringent' sociology of processes see Laux (2011).

10 See Jacobs and Merriman also for an introduction into the literature on geographies of architecture (2011). They emphasise that '[m]uch of the existing geographical scholarship does stay resolutely interested in this human-centred view of architecture: its users, its producers and (re)designers, its meanings.' (Jacobs and Merriman 2011, 218)

11 Schatzki distinguishes two types of action, one of which is intentional and thus a distinctive feature of humans (Schatzki 2002). Löw on the contrary stresses the aspect of human synthesis as an element of the constitution of space (Löw 2001).

given to the subject. The same can be said of the accounts that begin from the co-production of atmospheres (Böhme 1993). This is indeed something that pushes the boundaries to overcome the subject-object dichotomy in space. That said, such accounts ultimately stress an intentional, reflexive, perceiving subject and/or its biographical vantage point. In general, studies that not only make a discursive contribution but also move into material reality are scarce. This has been pointed out by architectural theorist Hilde Heynen as well as sociologist Martina Löw (Heynen 2013; Löw 2001). The present study wishes to address the current gap in the literature through exploring the potential of an ANT-perspective approach, which is a different way of looking into the realm of (architectural) space.

Following humans and nonhumans by means of ANT is to approach them symmetrically.<sup>12</sup> In this way it will be possible to circumvent the predominant mode of assessing such things through the principally human-centred perspective on a given course of action. I claim that this approach to reality is particularly revealing for architecture's concerns. Here, it is not the point to 'catch reality as it really is. Instead it is to make specific, surprising, so far unspoken events and situations visible, audible, sensible.' And hence 'to attune to reality differently.' (Mol 2010, 255) What ANT offers is the possibility of showing the difference things make and tracing their social life. It will thus provide a way of including buildings in social space, but a social space that is as much non-physical as it is physical and that distributes agency without separating these two domains. Quite simply, agency emerges through the doing in common of people and architecture. Latour refers to the social then as '*a type of connection* between things that are not themselves social.' (Latour 2005, 5; original emphasis) When 'faced with an object', he explains, we should not aim to explain it through 'social aspects surrounding it' but 'attend first to the associations out of which it's made and only later look at how it has renewed the repertoire of social ties.' (Ibid. 234) While STS-inspired approaches in the field of architectural research produce(d) rich accounts into design practice we can find scholars in the field of cultural geography who discuss (architectural) space under its influence (Thrift 2006; Murdoch 1997, 1998). The work of Kevin Hetherington is of particular interest here since he addresses the relationship between material culture and spatiality in the context of a museum setting, which will be the empirical setting for this study (Hetherington 1997).<sup>13</sup> This study therefore takes up influences from an interdisciplinary field of research at the intersection of anthropology, sociology and cultural geography. It takes its inspiration from such work and wishes to convey it to the spatial discourse of archi-

12 Speaking in the following of the pair human and nonhuman I follow Latour's concept which is 'not a way to "overcome" the subject-object distinction but a way to bypass it entirely.' (Latour 1999b, 308)

13 For research into spacing and timing in relation to organising see Jones, McLean and Quattrone (2004).



tectural theory. Turning my attention to the typology of monospace, I argue that an absolutist-substantialist understanding of such space particularly obstructs the ability to grasp the reality of these types of building. The built structure of a monospace is essentially a shell. If we fail to address the processes along with the building itself, then we have no access to the real complexity, to the tangled and messy reality of these buildings.

This book engages with a specific building located at the edge of the campus of the University of East Anglia (UEA), in Norwich, England by Foster Associates (Fig. 1.6, 1.7).<sup>14</sup> The Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts (SCVA) opened its doors in 1978. From the outside, it is a white tube with a prominent steel framework at both ends oriented into the greenery. It houses, under one single outer shell, several different institutions and activities: the university's art gallery, a café, restaurant and shop, the School of Art History and World Art Studies and the Sainsbury Research Unit. As the architects of the building Foster and Partners put it, the Sainsbury Centre 'integrates a number of relative activities *within a single, light-filled space*' (Foster + Partners 2018; emphasis added). Is it indeed just a *single, light-filled space* that contains activities? How can we have access to the relationship between architecture and the manifold activities that emerge with it? The literature provides little insight here. From the existing accounts of this building we do not understand what this specific building does, how it fosters, hinders or supports in particular ways the daily life of the Sainsbury Centre.

Since the case study is concerned with a building of a so-called star architect and as I am speaking about 'architectural' space one could easily assume that this study is occupied with high style architecture. However, in the following it will become evident that this study is in no way preoccupied with stylistic architectural pretensions. On the contrary, the research is about 'mundane' processes—that is the understanding of the word as something earthly or worldly—that arise with buildings. Since space here is to be discussed as a complex ongoing process with buildings and people, I am not using the term 'built' space as it echoes a discrete/complete object. I am an architectural theorist and researcher and my alliance is with architecture, however, my approach to this building is hybrid. I will first introduce it in the tradition of architectural description and analysis. I will thus start from common ground only to then draw on the method of ANT in order to trace and analyse the way space emerges in the course of action. Ethnographies of architecture as conducted into the field of architectural practice (Houdart and Minato 2009; Yaneva 2009a, 2009b) have shown previously how ANT helps to analyse the entanglement of the world of the office and architects in the making of buildings.

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14 Foster and Partners proceeded in the 1990s the office Foster Associates, that was founded in 1967 by Wendy Cheesman and Norman Foster. In the following I will only speak of Foster and Partners also addressing the work of Foster Associates, unless explicitly touching on historical circumstances.