

# 2

## Theoretical Framework & Research Design

There is no knowing or sensing a place  
except by being in that place, and to be in  
a place is to be in a position to perceive it.

*Edward Casey*<sup>1</sup>

In my introduction I outlined how, in this thesis, I would systematically investigate the backstage spaces of Sydney theatres with the aim of formulating a more thorough understanding of the ‘place’ of performers. Drawing upon the observations of Gay McAuley and Richard Schechner, I suggested that any research into backstage spaces would need to combine the documentation of material spaces with ethnographic accounts of performers’ practices.

In this chapter I explain the theoretical framework I have utilised in pursuing this aim and outline the design of the research itself. Given the breadth of material I must account for, this framework is interdisciplinary, drawing on paradigms from anthropology, architecture, environmental psychology, geography, performance

---

<sup>1</sup>Edward S. Casey, "How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time," in *Senses of Place*, ed. Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso (Santa Fe: School of American Research, 1996), 18.

studies, and sociology. In the initial section of this chapter I address the concept of 'place,' a concept foundational to this thesis. I then discuss the features of built places, defining what buildings are and discussing the dimensions of the relationship between humans and the built environment. I follow this with an explanation of the framework I have used to understand how people make meaning from their experiences of the built environment. After outlining the design of my research, a design that involves the documentation of theatre buildings and the observation and interviewing of performers, I conclude with a discussion of the practical difficulties encountered during this research and the implications of ethnographic theory.

### *Place*

The concept of 'place' has been the subject of an explosion of interest and debate in recent decades, with the result that it has been both adopted and contested by scholars in many fields. Traditionally the concern of geographers, place has proved increasingly useful in understandings of subjectivity, politics, history, sexuality and gender.<sup>2</sup> In everyday terms place is regarded as mere physical location, a definition that has often unhelpfully obscured more in-depth understandings. In this thesis the understanding I have of place is primarily guided by the writings of Edward Casey, who takes a firmly phenomenological perspective. Such a perspective, similar to that of Jeffrey Malpas, is different from that of many theorists who emphasise the socially constructed nature of place. While many aspects and experiences of place are contingent on social processes – a point I will expand on in the next section – I begin with Casey, who views place, as a concept, more broadly, describing it as “a material condition of possibility,”<sup>3</sup> an “undelimited, detotalized expansiveness, resonating regionally throughout the unknown as well as the known universe.”<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> For a useful survey of the various ways in which place has been used in research, see Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 81-123. See also, Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994); Paul Rodaway, *Sensuous Geographies: Body, Sense and Place* (London: Routledge, 1994); and Robyn Longhurst, "(Dis)Embodied Geographies," *Progress in Human Geography* 21, no. 4 (1997): 486-501.

<sup>3</sup> Edward S. Casey, "J.E. Malpas's *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography* (Cambridge University Press, 1999) Converging and Diverging in/on Place," *Philosophy & Geography* 4, no. 2 (2001): 226.

<sup>4</sup> Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 336.

Casey's project in both *Getting Back into Place* and *The Fate of Place* involves a strong advocacy of place against what he sees as the dominance of space and time in post Enlightenment Western thought. Casey views this dominance, an understanding of space and time as the *a priori* bases for existence, as problematic, contributing to widespread feelings of displacement, along with "homesickness, disorientation, depression, desolation."<sup>5</sup> Space is "mute and blank,"<sup>6</sup> being mere geometric extension, a void. Likewise time, whilst holding "a predominant position in physics and philosophy," offers "no solace whatsoever" for humans, being predominantly negative in its judgement.<sup>7</sup> Taken together, Casey sees time and space as forming a "gigantomachia" of our own making, a force in the modern world that displaces us from any sense of belonging.<sup>8</sup> By way of contrast, Casey argues for the primacy of place. Place, in his view, is "the bedrock of our being-in-the-world,"<sup>9</sup> an "abiding framework for all that we experience in space and time."<sup>10</sup> Casey observes that at a base level of experience humans do not find themselves in a space of "free-floating sensory data,"<sup>11</sup> but rather in a world with definite 'depths' and 'horizons,' "configured in odd protuberances, in runs, rills and flats."<sup>12</sup> From this understanding Casey argues that the concept of space is secondary to that of place, abstracted from our position as always already 'implaced.'<sup>13</sup> Place and human being are inextricably linked, to the degree that "to be is to be in place – bodily."<sup>14</sup>

Casey's advocacy of place contrasts strongly with the negative view he casts on space. Such negativity is perhaps a little extreme; the conception of space as endless geometric extension can be disturbing, but the seeming blankness of space also offers

---

<sup>5</sup> Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), x.

<sup>6</sup> Casey, "How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time," 15.

<sup>7</sup> Casey also cites examples like: "It's too late now," "Closing time," and "It's time!" To this list could be added common phrases like "time's up," "I'm running out of time," "time is passing," and "there's no time to lose." The flavour of each is distinctly negative. *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, 7.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii.

<sup>10</sup> Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*, 337.

<sup>11</sup> Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, 17.

<sup>12</sup> Casey, "How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time," 15.

<sup>13</sup> Casey uses the term 'implacement' to refer to one's immediate placement. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, xiii. He explains, "The *im-* of *implacement* stresses the action of getting in or into, and it carries connotations of *immanence* that are appropriate to the inhabitation of places." *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, 315.

<sup>14</sup> Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*, 340.

possibilities for creativity, especially in the context of theatre.<sup>15</sup> J. E. Malpas offers a more tempered account of the relationship between place and space in *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*. In Malpas's view, "the investigation of place cannot be pursued but in conjunction with an investigation of the notion of space."<sup>16</sup> Adopting a topographical methodology in conducting his ontological investigations of place and experience, Malpas understands place only through the interrelations and interconnections between it and other "distinct, irreducible, but interrelated components,"<sup>17</sup> namely, space, time, subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and objectivity. While Casey and Malpas adopt different approaches in their respective studies of place, both agree substantially on the primacy and centrality of place in human experience.<sup>18</sup>

Casey's phenomenology and Malpas's ontological perspective complement earlier approaches of scholars working within the discipline of human geography, particularly those of Edward Relph, Yi-Fu Tuan, and David Seamon.<sup>19</sup> Edward Relph's *Place and Placelessness* and Yi-Fu Tuan's *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* have been influential responses to the more quantitative approaches to geographic understanding that have traditionally dominated the discipline.<sup>20</sup> Both Relph and Tuan have sought to emphasise the experiential aspects of place, arguing that it is through the human experience of place that an understanding of its importance can be formed. Relph, too, has used a phenomenological approach on the basis that "place and sense of place do not lend themselves to scientific analysis for they are inextricably bound up with all the hopes, frustrations and confusions of

---

<sup>15</sup> Space, particularly in performance, can offer the grounds for transformation, whereby a more emptied-out space is made into a particular sort of place. Likewise, 'sites,' which Casey defines in a negative sense as merely "manipulable positions in empty space" (Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, xiii.) can, more positively, be viewed as "pregnant with [...] possibility." Gay McAuley, "Site-Specific Performance: Place, Memory and the Creative Agency of the Spectator," *Arts: The Journal of the Sydney University Arts Association* 27 (2005): 35.

<sup>16</sup> J. E. Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 26.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>18</sup> See also Casey, "J.E. Malpas's *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography* (Cambridge University Press, 1999) Converging and Diverging in/on Place," and J. E. Malpas, "Comparing Topographies: Across Paths/around Place: A Reply to Casey," *Philosophy & Geography* 4, no. 2 (2001).

<sup>19</sup> This is not to suggest that these three are the only geographers whose work is complemented by Casey's. Rather, the work of these three is the most systematic in approach.

<sup>20</sup> Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976); Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977).

life.”<sup>21</sup> Tuan, aiming to systematise humanistic insights into the experience of place, wished to get beyond the sort of experience which “we can easily show and tell,”<sup>22</sup> and thereby “increase the burden of awareness.”<sup>23</sup> Both Relph and Tuan’s insistence on the lived experience of place is grounded in Martin Heidegger’s understanding of being-in-the-world. In his meditations, Heidegger identified two facets of relationship between human being (*dasein*) and world, ‘presence-at-hand’ and ‘readiness-to-hand.’<sup>24</sup> The former is a more distanced relationship based on conceptual understanding. Relph understands it as a “self-conscious, perhaps disinterested reflection, or any attitude in which there occurs a feeling of separation from matters.”<sup>25</sup> The latter is a pre-reflective use that appreciates “the practical value of things”; their immediate use in a given context.<sup>26</sup> What Relph and Tuan identified as a particular concern in the 1970s was the way in which “abstract technical thinking has begun to submerge geographical experience either by making the latter seem relatively trivial or simply by obscuring it with generalizations.”<sup>27</sup> Both sought a renewed focus on lived geographical experience, on the way in which the world is first and foremost unremarkably ‘ready-to-hand.’

David Seamon’s work has continued the project of Tuan and Relph, with Seamon also advocating the use of phenomenology in the study of human environmental experience because of its descriptive basis and holistic approach to the question of human being.<sup>28</sup> This stands in contrast to the positivist basis of much environmental psychology that Seamon has critiqued as not seeking to explore phenomena, but in a more mechanistic fashion merely seeking to explain “the root causes and sources of environmental behaviour and experience.”<sup>29</sup> In his formative work *A Geography of*

---

<sup>21</sup> Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, i.

<sup>22</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, 201.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>24</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), 102-07.

<sup>25</sup> Edward Relph, "Geographical Experiences and Being-in-the-World: The Phenomenological Origins of Geography," in *Dwelling, Place and Environment: Towards a Phenomenology of Person and World*, ed. David Seamon and Robert Mugerauer (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1985), 18.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>28</sup> Seamon has written: “The broad philosophical discussions of Relph continue to be a significant conceptual guide for empirical phenomenologies of place.” David Seamon, "A Way of Seeing People and Place," in *Theoretical Perspectives in Environment-Behaviour Research*, ed. Seymour Wapner, et al. (New York: Kluwer/Plenum Publishers, 2000), 162.

<sup>29</sup> David Seamon, "The Phenomenological Contribution to Environmental Psychology," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 2 (1982): 121.

*the Lifeworld* Seamon utilised environmental experience groups to investigate lived geographical experience.<sup>30</sup> Identifying three major themes of ‘movement’, ‘rest’ and ‘encounter’, Seamon mapped out the spectrum of behaviour that is apparent in the everyday experience of place. Central to Seamon’s findings was that the human body exhibits intentionality and that our habitual time-space routines have a bodily basis. Seamon’s findings add weight to Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s notion of ‘body-subject,’ an understanding of humans not simply as cognitive beings, but as *embodied* cognitive beings. For Seamon, this offers a way of bridging the gap between cognitive and behaviourist theories of movement; the human body itself possesses an intelligence that is “manifested through action.”<sup>31</sup>

Phenomenological approaches to the experience of place are important for my research because of their insistence on the value of description and the way in which phenomenology extends the understanding of meaning to include “bodily, visceral, intuitive, emotional and transpersonal dimensions.”<sup>32</sup> In seeking to understand the lived experiences of performers in the backstage areas of theatre buildings I must take into account performers’ particular *lifeworlds*, the way in which, for each performer, the world is “lived, that is, experienced and acted upon.”<sup>33</sup> The assumption of phenomenology that is of particular value for my research is that person and world “are intrinsically connected, literally, interdependent.”<sup>34</sup> In this research I adopt what Tim Ingold has referred to as the ‘dwelling perspective.’ In contrast to the ‘building perspective,’ “whose point of departure is that of a mind detached from the world,” the ‘dwelling perspective’ views humans as “immersed from the start, like other creatures, in an active, practical and perceptual engagement with constituents of the dwelt-in world.”<sup>35</sup> Taking up a view *in* the world, rather than *of* the world, is the basis of our engagement *with* the world. Place is therefore “not just a thing in the world”

---

<sup>30</sup> David Seamon, *A Geography of the Lifeworld: Movement, Rest and Encounter* (London: Croom Helm, 1979).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>32</sup> Seamon, "A Way of Seeing People and Place," 160.

<sup>33</sup> Carl F. Graumann, "The Phenomenological Approach to People-Environment Studies," in *Handbook of Environmental Psychology*, ed. Robert B. Bechtel and Arza Churchman (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2002), 98.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>35</sup> Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London: Routledge, 2000), 42.

but also “a way of understanding the world.”<sup>36</sup> Such an understanding encompasses three important considerations:

### 1. Place and Bodies

Firstly, as has been suggested, places are experienced via bodies. Bodies and places share “a fateful complicity”<sup>37</sup> and “knowledge of place begins with the bodily experience of being-in-place.”<sup>38</sup> This is due to the particular orientation and differentiation of human bodies, factors that enable the differentiation of action and effect.<sup>39</sup> Tuan regards the upright posture of the body as pivotal, providing humans with the ability to organise the world into the directions of ‘up’ and ‘down,’ ‘front’ and ‘back,’ and ‘right’ and ‘left’<sup>40</sup>; Casey outlines other fundamental dyads of ‘here’ and ‘there,’ and ‘near’ and ‘far’<sup>41</sup>; these, he states, “are held together in depth by the body.”<sup>42</sup> Such an understanding of the connection between place and body involves accounting for both the ‘given’ aspects of embodiment (solidity, differentiation) and those that are ‘learned’ (specific actions and movements).<sup>43</sup> Our ability to orient ourselves in relation to the world is possible through our active existence as embodied, physically differentiated beings.

### 2. Place as Container

It is precisely because of our embodied implacement that place acts as a container, “the very ground and frame” for our agency, a pervasive framework for understanding.<sup>44</sup> Relph’s classification of the range of possible ways in which one

<sup>36</sup> Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction*, 11.

<sup>37</sup> Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*, 242.

<sup>38</sup> Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, 46.

<sup>39</sup> Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*, 132.

<sup>40</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, 35. Tuan and Casey recognise Immanuel Kant’s observation of this phenomena: “our geographical knowledge, and even our commonest knowledge of the position of places, would be of no aid to us if we could not, by reference to the sides of our bodies, assign to regions the things so ordered and the whole system of mutually relative positions.” Immanuel Kant, “On the First Ground of the Distinction of Regions in Space,” in *Kant's Inaugural Dissertation and Early Writings on Space*, trans. John Handyside. (Chicago: Open Court, 1929), quoted in Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, 36.

<sup>41</sup> Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, 43-70.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>43</sup> Seamon, “The Phenomenological Contribution to Environmental Psychology,” 125-28.

<sup>44</sup> Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*, 173.

might be ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ a place outlines the dimensions of this.<sup>45</sup> Places are experienced as bounded, but while place can be described as a container, “the dualism of inside and outside is not as clear as it appears at first sight.”<sup>46</sup> Places are bounded, but remain open.<sup>47</sup> They may be experienced as folding in on themselves, or opening out, but places are often understood through their connection to other places; Casey states: “A place is more like a room with windows than an airless antechamber.”<sup>48</sup> Importantly, places contain more than our physical bodies and actions, places contain emotions, thoughts and memories as well; place and memory are intertwined.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, places contain cultures: “just as every place is encultured, so every culture is emplaced.”<sup>50</sup> In Casey’s view, places contain and even *gather* our lives; the power of place “consists in gathering these lives and things, each with its own space and time, into one arena of common engagement.”<sup>51</sup>

### 3. Place and Identity

Place is therefore the basis of any form of dwelling, of remaining in and inhabiting a place, and dwelling places commonly elicit strong feelings of identification. “Our identities are,” writes Malpas, “intricately and essentially place-bound.”<sup>52</sup> It is in place that we learn to dwell and, according to Casey, the mode of dwelling and the specifics of the places in which we do it “has everything to do with what and who we are.”<sup>53</sup> To stress this point, Malpas has written of his own work in explicit terms, stating that if there is one central insight within his book *Place and Experience*,

[I]t is the idea that what we are as living, thinking, experiencing beings is inseparable from the places in which we live – our lives are saturated by the places, and by the things

---

<sup>45</sup> Relph describes the different levels of ‘insideness’ and ‘outsideness’; these lie on a continuum from ‘behavioural insideness,’ to ‘empathetic insideness,’ ‘existential insideness,’ ‘vicarious insideness,’ ‘incidental insideness,’ then ‘objective outsideness,’ and finally ‘existential outsideness.’ Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 50.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>47</sup> Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*, 170.

<sup>48</sup> Casey, “J.E. Malpas’s *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography* (Cambridge University Press, 1999) Converging and Diverging in/on Place,” 230.

<sup>49</sup> Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction*, 85.

<sup>50</sup> Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, 31.

<sup>51</sup> Casey, “How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time,” 26.

<sup>52</sup> Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*, 177.

<sup>53</sup> Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, xiii.

and other persons intertwined with those places, through which we move, in which our actions are located, and with respect to which we orient and locate ourselves.<sup>54</sup>

From this brief discussion, the importance of place in this research, specifically a phenomenological approach to place, is clear. An exploration of performers' experiences in the backstage spaces of theatres does more than simply shed light on hitherto little-known behaviours; by exploring the physical locations in which performers work, and the ways in which they interact with and perceive these locations, a more thorough understanding of performers and their place in the world can be achieved. It is in this sense that a study of backstage space can aid in understanding the 'place' of performers.

### *Built Places*

The particular characteristic of all the places of performance that I investigate in this thesis is that, while not all are purpose-built to house performance, they are all built places. To approach them via the concept of place in general is therefore useful, but requires further specificity; the act of building entails the making of place, but buildings are very particular kinds of places. Built places are social objects, the direct result of social forces, intimately connected with human social structure, cultural priorities, power, imagination, emotions and memory.<sup>55</sup> Like our experience of place, with any building we have a tendency to "live in it first and look at it second,"<sup>56</sup> and much of what is of high importance to us is both private and subjective, often sitting outside of communicative discourse.<sup>57</sup> Buildings are often experienced as extensions of our embodied selves and the relationship between self and building is complex: "A dwelling where we reside comes to exist in our image, but *we*, the residents, also take on certain of *its* properties."<sup>58</sup> In this section I address the question of what a 'building' is and discuss the numerous levels on which human inhabitation and interaction with such entities occurs.

---

<sup>54</sup> Malpas, "Comparing Topographies: Across Paths/around Place: A Reply to Casey," 231.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas A. Markus and Deborah Cameron, *The Words between the Spaces: Buildings and Language* (London: Routledge, 2002), 3.

<sup>56</sup> Kim Dovey, "The Silent Complicity of Architecture," in *Habitus: A Sense of Place*, ed. Jean Hillier and Emma Rooksby (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2002), 267.

<sup>57</sup> Peter King, *Private Dwelling: Contemplating the Use of Housing* (London: Routledge, 2004), 67.

<sup>58</sup> Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, 120.

The design and study of built places has long been the realm of architecture, a discipline historically dominated by an aesthetic and visual understanding and appreciation of buildings. Such visual approaches have been coupled with a devaluation of the human body in architectural discourse; the body has often been conceived of as mere physical matter, at best a source from which to derive building dimensions, at worst a threat to the purity of architectural form.<sup>59</sup> Kent Bloomer and Charles Moore have observed that architects place a “reliance on two-dimensional diagrams that lay more stress on the quantifiable features of building organisation than on the polychromatic and three-dimensional qualities of the whole architectural experience.”<sup>60</sup> The result of this is that “the human body, which is our most fundamental three-dimensional possession, has not itself been a central concern in the understanding of architectural form.”<sup>61</sup> In an essay on the work of Japanese architect Tadao Ando, Kenneth Frampton notes that meaning in architecture has commonly been “reduced to a matter of the visual registration of coded messages – a function of the eye which might well rely on the printed page and dispense with the physical presence of architecture altogether.”<sup>62</sup> In Frampton’s opinion this visual approach is derived from a broader “philosophical alienation of the body from the mind,” which has “resulted in the absence of embodied experience from almost all contemporary theories of meaning in architecture.”<sup>63</sup> Architectural discourse has often distanced bodies and buildings from each other, ignoring the “deep reciprocity”<sup>64</sup> that human bodies share with the world around them, and the mutually constitutive relationship between body and built place. In so doing, architectural discourse continues to privilege visual and aesthetic, rather than embodied and social, forms of knowledge.

---

<sup>59</sup> See Rob Imrie, "Architects' Conceptions of the Human Body," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 21 (2003): 47-65.

<sup>60</sup> Kent C. Bloomer and Charles W. Moore, *Body, Memory and Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), ix.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Kenneth Frampton, "Corporeal Experience in the Architecture of Tadao Ando," in *Body and Building: Essays on the Changing Relation of Body and Architecture*, ed. George Dodds and Robert Tavernor (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002), 304.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Dalibor Vesely, "The Architectonics of Embodiment," in *Body and Building: Essays on the Changing Relation of Body and Architecture*, ed. George Dodds and Robert Tavernor (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002), 32.

The visual appreciation of building form is no doubt important, but our experience of any building is primarily based on embodied encounter; a building “is approached, confronted, related to one’s body, moved through, utilised as a condition for other things.”<sup>65</sup> Vision itself occurs within the context of such physical functions. Buildings are most often “experienced inattentively,”<sup>66</sup> but bodily engagement with buildings produces a wealth of sensuous haptic involvement; moving through a building involves encountering an array of surfaces, especially those underfoot, and changes in temperature; acoustic environments literally impact upon the body – sounds, silences and echoes; olfactory geographies – odours, scents and smells – are discernible. The diversity of such experiences, within even the one particular building, also presents a clue as to the little noticed physical diversity within built structures themselves. Buildings appear solid and unchanging, they “loom over us and persist beyond us,”<sup>67</sup> but in actuality they, like us, are constantly in flux, changing with the passage of time. Francis Duffy, a theorist on change rates in buildings, has even suggested: “there isn’t such a thing as a building.”<sup>68</sup> Instead, a building’s physical unity is comprised of a conglomeration of separate layers, all of which are altered at different timescales according to wider social, cultural and technological changes. Stewart Brand identifies six layers in modern buildings: ‘site’ (location), ‘structure’ (the supporting fabric), ‘skin’ (surface materials), ‘services’ (electrical, water, communications), ‘space plan’ (the purposeful arrangement of internal spaces) and ‘stuff’ (items of furniture, personal objects).<sup>69</sup> Through embodied interaction with these layers we experience a seemingly unified material entity.

As physical entities experienced by and through the lived body, buildings articulate space, ordering our experience of the world and making sense of our place within it. Casey has identified that “within the ambience of a building, a landscape becomes articulate and begins to speak in emblematic ways.”<sup>70</sup> The very density of buildings

---

<sup>65</sup> Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (London: Academy Editions, 1996), 44.

<sup>66</sup> Umberto Eco, "Function and Sign: The Semiotics of Architecture," in *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, ed. Neil Leach (London: Routledge, 1997), 196.

<sup>67</sup> Stewart Brand, *How Buildings Learn: What Happens after They're Built* (New York: Viking, 1994), 2.

<sup>68</sup> Francis Duffy, "Measuring Building Performance," *Facilities* 8, no. 5 (1990): 17, quoted in Brand, *How Buildings Learn: What Happens after They're Built*, 12.

<sup>69</sup> Brand, *How Buildings Learn: What Happens after They're Built*, 13.

<sup>70</sup> Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, 32.

makes them “a *locus locorum*, a place for places.”<sup>71</sup> Built structures are a way in which humans give voice to their understanding of their place in the world; a building establishes an order that is experienced through action, guiding the physicality of our lives. In the articulation of space realised in a building’s form “there is an inherent suggestion of action [...] or a promise of use and purpose.”<sup>72</sup> Describing the ways in which any building’s fabric “frames, articulates, structures, gives significance, relates, separates and unites, facilitates and prohibits,” Juhani Pallasmaa has suggested that “basic architectural experiences have a *verb* form rather than being *nouns*.”<sup>73</sup>

In purposefully articulating space, buildings exist to serve certain functions, making available places in which certain activities may occur with greater ease; factories are designed to facilitate the production of goods, hospitals are designed to facilitate healing, and churches are designed to facilitate worship gatherings. From the advent of the industrial revolution the west has witnessed a proliferation of specific building types that can often be identified on the basis of their formal characteristics and spatial layouts. Still, there is a certain ambiguity surrounding the connection between form and function. As Andrew Ballantyne explains, “the relationship between the building and the life within is not a relation of cause and effect. The building is a tool, for which a variety of uses might be found.”<sup>74</sup> Bernard Tschumi’s formulation is stronger; “Space and its usage are two opposed notions that exclude one another, generating an endless array of uncertainties.”<sup>75</sup> Both Ballantyne and Tschumi place great emphasis on the practices and actions of building users and the events they create; it is the everyday inhabitants of buildings who ‘use’ them, and who do so in ways that may vary widely from the intentions of those responsible for creating them. Built form therefore “cannot determine anything,”<sup>76</sup> but it is important to recognise that the form of a building ‘makes possible’ the spatial practices of users.<sup>77</sup> Kim Dovey suggests that the inhabitants of buildings are both subjects *and* agents,

---

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, 44.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>74</sup> Andrew Ballantyne, ed., *What Is Architecture?* (London: Routledge, 2002), 16.

<sup>75</sup> Bernard Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997), 21.

<sup>76</sup> Kim Dovey, "Redistributing Danger: Enclosure and Encounter in Urban Design," *Australian Planner* 37, no. 1 (2000): 10.

<sup>77</sup> Ballantyne, ed., *What Is Architecture?*, 23.

empowered *and* disempowered by the buildings in which they live and work.<sup>78</sup> As subjects, users' practices can be restricted via the implications of design; Michel Foucault's discussion of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon details the effects of presumed surveillance.<sup>79</sup> The innovative potential of users' practices can also be seen as potentially subversive, in particular a "threat to the architect because the user's actions may undermine the architect's claim to be the sole author of architecture."<sup>80</sup> Ultimately, as Brand notes, the agency of users is a creative force; as users' actions change over time, they literally re-form the structure itself: "Function reforms form, perpetually."<sup>81</sup>

The relationship between built form and spatial practice is contingent on socially mediated understandings and conventions. Architects and designers commonly use their familiarity with such conventions to guide their designs, whether those designs seek to cater to or disrupt expectations. James Holston's anthropological critique of Brasilia, the Brazilian capital designed according to modernist planning principles, illustrates how architectural form can be radically reinterpreted when it conflicts with established socio-cultural conventions. "Although Brasilia was conceived to create one kind of society, it was necessarily built and inhabited by another," writes Holston, with the result that Brasilia's residents reasserted their own social processes and cultural values, effectively denying the architects' social program.<sup>82</sup> Radical reinterpretations of built form are possible, making the questions Thomas Markus poses in *Buildings and Power* pertinent. Citing the example of a monastery converted to a courthouse in the wake of the 1789 French Revolution, Markus links physical form, function, discourse, and power by asking, "Who defined the first function? Who, and by what authority, transformed it? What physical changes were needed? Who named the functions? And what does it mean if a building designed for the first function was capable of being used for the second?"<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>78</sup> Kim Dovey, *Framing Places: Mediating Power in Built Form* (London: Routledge, 1999), 20.

<sup>79</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 195-228.

<sup>80</sup> Jonathan Hill, *Actions of Architecture: Architects and Creative Users* (London: Routledge, 2003), 3.

<sup>81</sup> Brand, *How Buildings Learn: What Happens after They're Built*, 3.

<sup>82</sup> James Holston, *The Modernist City: An Anthropological Critique of Brasilia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 308-10.

<sup>83</sup> Thomas A. Markus, *Buildings & Power: Freedom and Control in the Origin of Modern Building Types* (London: Routledge, 1993), 12.

Markus's questions highlight the complex web of social, political and cultural concerns that surround the design, construction and inhabitation of built places. Questions of power inevitably arise when considering who decides the design and function of buildings and what meanings are subsequently attributed to the features of that design. Kim Dovey views the design and construction of buildings – in essence, 'placemaking' – as "an inherently elite practice."<sup>84</sup> The ability to re-form the built environment in a major fashion is only available to select social groupings that possess knowledge, capital, and power; most of us live out our lives in environments conceived of and built by others. Dovey's investigation into the mediation of power through built form describes how buildings, through their articulation of space, "are inherently coercive in that they enforce limits to action."<sup>85</sup> Thomas Markus and Deborah Cameron emphasise the way in which "a building's design reproduces particular kinds of social and power relations among its various categories of users."<sup>86</sup> Markus and Cameron also note that while "buildings are not linguistic objects [...] the meaning we accord to them is heavily dependent on texts about them, texts whose medium is written or spoken language."<sup>87</sup> This is because "buildings, it seems, do not explain themselves" and so the explaining is often done through textual means. Buildings are social objects that are in part constructed by discourse.<sup>88</sup>

Built places are also perceived through the mediating influence of imagination, emotion and memory. They are experienced affectively; we can become attached to buildings or repelled by them, and their affective power can impact significantly upon our subsequent perception and inhabitation of them.<sup>89</sup> In *The Poetics of Space* Gaston Bachelard has explored the various ways in which "imagination augments the values of reality."<sup>90</sup> Taking the notion of home and house as a symbol for all inhabited space, Bachelard explores the dreams and memories that render any purely geometric understanding of spatiality insufficient. Built places shelter and protect; they allow for the integration of our thoughts, memories and dreams. Peter King has investigated the subjective use of housing, with a focus on the experience of private dwelling. King

---

<sup>84</sup> Dovey, *Framing Places: Mediating Power in Built Form*, 1.

<sup>85</sup> Dovey, "The Silent Complicity of Architecture," 275.

<sup>86</sup> Markus and Cameron, *The Words between the Spaces: Buildings and Language*, 3.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>89</sup> See Irwin Altman and Setha M. Low, *Place Attachment* (New York: Plenum Press, 1992).

<sup>90</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 3.

explores both the joys of certain built places, in which we feel we can linger in privacy and complacency, as well as the way built places can be sites of intense desire, fear, anxiety and loss.<sup>91</sup> Precisely those elements that protect and encompass can allow dwelling places to become virtual prisons of abuse and neglect. Pierre Nora has discussed the importance of memory in the experience of built places, using the phrase *lieux de memoire* or ‘memory places’ to describe those sites “in which a residual sense of continuity exists.”<sup>92</sup> In Nora’s view, memory fastens upon the materiality of sites, creating hybrids that are both temporal and eternal.<sup>93</sup> A conglomeration of imagination, emotion and memory colours the understanding and appreciation of any place, especially those that are designed and constructed. I have already mentioned how people commonly grow up in dwellings conceived of and built by others. Ingold notes that, as children and the young do so, “they come literally to carry the forms of their dwelling in their bodies – in specific skills, sensibilities and dispositions.”<sup>94</sup> For people of any age, formative experiences in particular built places will permanently affect their perceptions and future experiences of those places and others.

### *Making Meaning from Architectural Experience*

From the previous section it is clear that the experience of built places is multi-layered, encompassing embodied encounter and socially mediated understandings. Experiences also shift in tenor; the passage of time and increasingly habitual involvement with a given place make it more difficult to verbalise and account for the meaning of that place, even though it may be deeply meaningful. In this section I explain the framework I have used to understand how people make meaning from their experiences of the built environment. Building on Malpas’s suggestion that place can only be understood through interconnections with other “components,”<sup>95</sup> I begin by discussing Edward Soja’s trialectical understanding of spatiality. I then turn to a consideration of Kim Dovey’s pluralistic methodology and his use of three different

---

<sup>91</sup> King, *Private Dwelling: Contemplating the Use of Housing*.

<sup>92</sup> Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 1.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-18.

<sup>94</sup> Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, 186.

<sup>95</sup> Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*, 18.

paradigms to investigate the mediation of power in built form. Following this I broadly outline each of these paradigms and explain my use of them, before returning to Malpas's work, drawing upon his metaphor of 'topographical surveying' as a way of conceptualising the partial integration of these paradigms.

Based on the seminal work of Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja has advanced the understanding that spatiality is trialectical. Inherent in Soja's work has been a call for a new understanding of spatiality as a vital addition to the two traditional areas of humanistic emphasis, historicity and sociality. Soja has stated: "We are first and always historical-social-spatial beings, actively participating individually and collectively in the construction/production – the 'becoming' – of histories, geographies, societies."<sup>96</sup> As an inseparable triad, Soja views historicity, sociality and spatiality as making up a 'trialectics of being.' Within the category of 'spatiality,' Soja describes his epistemology of space as a further trialectic based on Lefebvre's categories of 'Perceived' (*perçu*), 'Conceived' (*conçu*), and 'Lived' (*vécu*) space; Soja dubs these 'Firstspace,' 'Secondspace,' and 'Thirdspace.' Soja describes the terms 'Perceived' or 'Firstspace' as referring "to the directly experienced world of empirically measurable and mappable phenomena."<sup>97</sup> This is the space of material phenomena that can be quantified and schematised, the traditional objects of study for physical geographers. 'Conceived' or 'Secondspace' is "more subjective and 'imagined,' more concerned with images and representations of spatiality."<sup>98</sup> This is the space of scientists, engineers, and planners, those who decipher spatial practices, produce spatial knowledge, and create mental images, idealisations and conceptions.<sup>99</sup> In Lefebvre's view – summarised in his statement, "(Social) space is a (social) product"<sup>100</sup> – 'Conceived' space has "a substantial role and a specific influence in the production of space."<sup>101</sup> Finally, Soja posits 'Lived' or 'Thirdspace' as the locus of a radical openness, transgression and innovation; quite literally it is space *as it is lived*. An understanding of such lived space requires a focus on events, actions, and

---

<sup>96</sup> Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1996), 73.

<sup>97</sup> Soja, "Thirdspace: Expanding the Scope of the Geographical Imagination," 265.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 266.

<sup>99</sup> Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, 67.

<sup>100</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 26.

<sup>101</sup> Lefebvre also refers to 'conceived space' as 'representations of space.' *Ibid.*, 42.

practices. It is “essentially qualitative, fluid and dynamic.”<sup>102</sup> Importantly all three realms are interconnected; they cannot be studied in isolation. Soja therefore argues that an account of human spatial experience must take into consideration the more objective existence of empirically observable phenomena, more subjective understandings of conceptions and imaginings, and the multiplicitous and innovatory practices of everyday existence.

Kim Dovey’s investigation of the nexus between place and practices of power offers a guide for how research might be carried out that takes into account the interconnections between ‘perceived,’ ‘conceived,’ and ‘lived’ space. In *Framing Places: Mediating Power in Built Form* Dovey crosses disciplinary boundaries and academic paradigms with the justification that “practices of power as mediated in built form are multi-dimensional, they cannot be simply addressed as forms of representation, lifeworld experiences or spatial structure.”<sup>103</sup> In light of the different layers of architectural experience I have described in the previous section, as well as Soja’s trialectical epistemology of spatiality, this approach is judicious. According to Dovey, the study of place “entails a bridging of interest across different academic paradigms,”<sup>104</sup> two of the most significant being “the fields and sub-fields of cultural studies (based in post-structuralist critique) and human-environment studies (with a humanist and empirical base).”<sup>105</sup> Within these, the three intellectual paradigms Dovey specifically utilises are spatial syntax analysis, discourse analysis, and phenomenology.<sup>106</sup> Dovey’s study is focussed on questions of power, but his overall approach has important ramifications for my research; in his opinion, “places are constructed, experienced and understood within the tension *between* these paradigms.”<sup>107</sup> Our relationship with the built environment – our architectural experience – involves a constant tension between the articulation of space present in built structures, the representations and conceptual knowledge that form the mental apparatus we bring to bear on our surrounds, and the expansiveness of our embodied spatial practice. Dovey’s use of spatial syntax analysis, discourse analysis and

---

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Dovey, *Framing Places: Mediating Power in Built Form*, 3.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

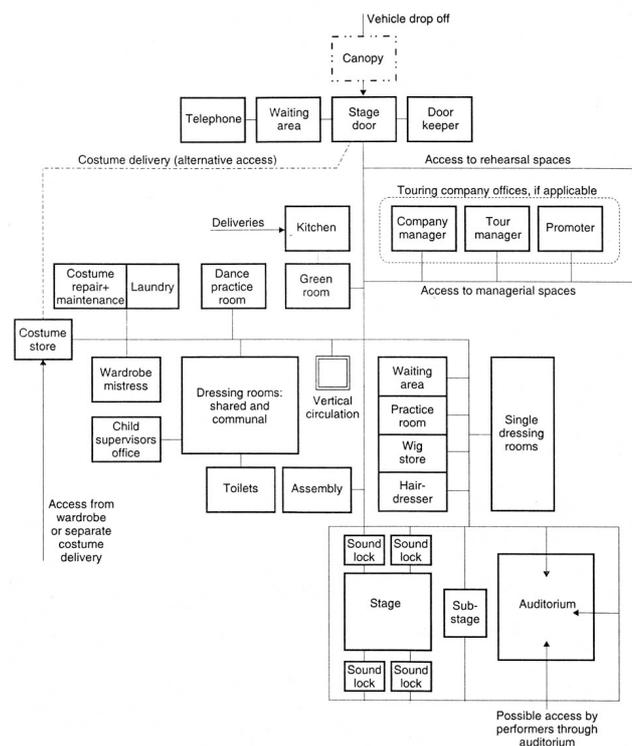
<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> [Italics added] Ibid., 3.

phenomenology provides methods of investigation into these three key areas of architectural experience: spatial program, discourse and embodied practice.

## 1. Perceived Space & Spatial Program

Accounting for how the built environment articulates space, quite literally framing the places in which we live our lives, requires a consideration of the spatial program inherent in building design. Spatial or architectural programming is “the research and decision-making process that defines the problems to be solved by design.”<sup>108</sup> This program is one of the first steps in the design process and will commonly outline the needs of a client, providing a list of the functions a design needs to accommodate, the area each function requires, and how functions should be arranged in relation to each



**Figure 2.1: A diagram setting out the spatial relationship between different functions in a theatre venue.**

<sup>108</sup> Edith Cherry, *Programming for Design: From Theory to Practice* (New York: John Wiley, 1999), 3.

other.<sup>109</sup> A spatial program therefore involves the creation of a structuring logic that guides design choices, and is subsequently expressed in the configuration of spaces found within buildings. A ‘Bubble diagram,’ such as that taken from Ian Appleton’s *Buildings for the Performing Arts* and included above as Figure 2.1, provides information about the different spaces required in a large theatre building as well as the necessary relationships and adjacency requirements for those different spaces; such diagrams are commonly part of the way in which the information contained in a spatial program is conveyed.<sup>110</sup> Spatial programs underpinning building designs are experienced largely unconsciously, but impact upon – indeed, structure – our actions within them. Spatial programs frame and pattern our inhabitation, reproducing certain types of social and hierarchical relationships.

Dovey appropriates the technique of spatial syntax analysis as a method for understanding the social implications of the various articulations of space inherent in built structures. From the mid 1970s, the work of Bill Hillier has progressed upon the understanding that the “most far-reaching practical effects” of architecture “are not at the level of appearance at all, but at the level of space.”<sup>111</sup> This is because “the space of inhabitation is configured” by virtue of buildings commonly being designed as connected sets of discreet spatial units.<sup>112</sup> Reacting against the dominance of discussions of form in architectural discourse Hillier has developed spatial syntax analysis as a group of techniques that together provide a way of making clear the syntactical arrangement of spaces that are present in any built structure. For Dovey, “the great achievement of spatial syntax analysis has been the interrogation of the plan through which buildings reveal a social ideology embedded in structural

---

<sup>109</sup> Janet Mackey Brown, "Programming, Architectural," in *Encyclopedia of Architecture: Design, Engineering & Construction*, ed. Joseph A. Wilkes and Robert T. Packard (New York: Wiley, 1988), 101.

<sup>110</sup> Appleton, *Buildings for the Performing Arts: A Design and Development Guide*, 179.

<sup>111</sup> Bill Hillier and Julienne Hanson, *The Social Logic of Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), ix. See also Sonit Bafna, "Space Syntax: A Brief Introduction to Its Logic and Analytical Techniques," *Environment and Behaviour* 35, no. 1 (2003); Bill Hillier, "A Note on the Intuiting of Form: Three Issues in the Theory of Design," *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design* Anniversary Issue (1998); Bill Hillier, *Space Is the Machine: A Configurational Theory of Architecture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and Bill Hillier, "Specifically Architectural Theory: A Partial Account of the Ascent from Building as Cultural Transmission to Architecture as Theoretical Concretion," *Harvard Architectural Review* 9 (1993).

<sup>112</sup> Bafna, "Space Syntax: A Brief Introduction to Its Logic and Analytical Techniques," 17.

genotypes.”<sup>113</sup> Spatial syntax analysis brings configuration into the realm of discourse.<sup>114</sup>

Dovey’s use of spatial syntax analysis involves a few reservations, the major one being that he eschews Hillier’s more complex mathematical formulations in favour of his diagrammatic techniques. Why and how Dovey uses these can be explained with reference to Figure 2.2 below, taken from *Framing Places*.<sup>115</sup> Spatial syntax analysis takes configured space as its object of study; in Figure 2.2, the three building plans at the top of the figure look similar in appearance, although the configuration of space in each is markedly different. The difference between each plan is made more apparent if the relationship between each defined space or ‘cell’ is mapped out on what Hillier refers to as a ‘justified graph.’ In Figure 2.2 these graphs are shown below each building plan. The example on the left could be described as possessing a ‘linear’ syntax, with each cell providing access to the next; the example in the centre has a ‘looped’ or ‘ringy’ syntax, with multiple connections between each cell; the example on the right possesses a ‘fanned’ or ‘branching’ syntax, with access to three of the cells possible only through the one cell.

---

<sup>113</sup> Dovey, *Framing Places: Mediating Power in Built Form*, 24. Hillier defines genotypes as “deep structures underlying spatial configurations and their relation to living patterns.” Hillier, “Specifically Architectural Theory: A Partial Account of the Ascent from Building as Cultural Transmission to Architecture as Theoretical Concretion,” 12.

<sup>114</sup> Hillier, “A Note on the Intuiting of Form: Three Issues in the Theory of Design,” 39.

<sup>115</sup> The diagram included as Figure 2.2 is taken from Dovey, *Framing Places: Mediating Power in Built Form*, 21. The description that accompanies it is based on that found in Dovey and also from Hillier, “Specifically Architectural Theory: A Partial Account of the Ascent from Building as Cultural Transmission to Architecture as Theoretical Concretion,” 11-12.

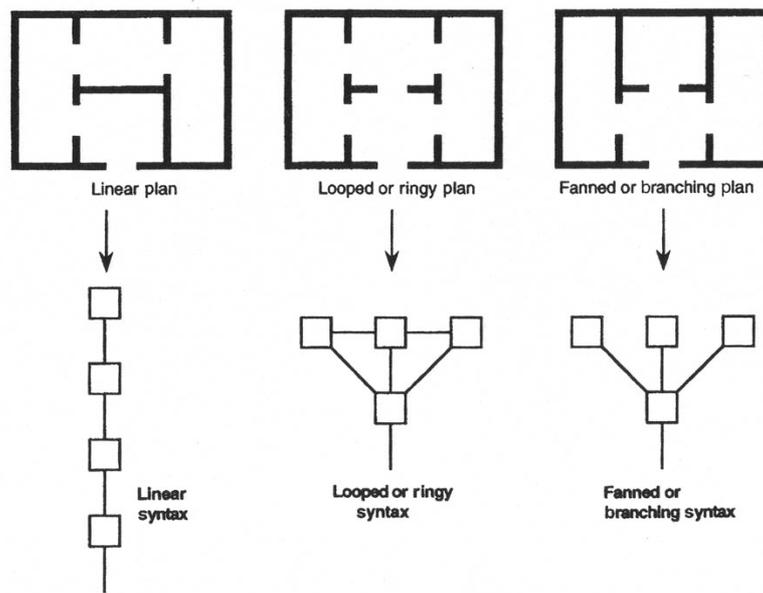


Figure 2.2: Primary syntactic relations in three different structures.

The importance of such knowledge is that each type of syntactical relation entails probable patterns of movement and encounter. Therefore, the more ‘ringy’ a structure, the greater the degree of unrestricted access afforded to inhabitants. The more ‘linear’ or ‘branching’ a structure, the greater the degree of control focussed on one particular space and, by implication, on those who control that space. In addition to noting structure and control, ‘depth’ is an important factor in appreciating the power relations that might be implicit in a spatial layout. Depth operates in two main ways: individuals may be held at a shallow depth, unable to penetrate into the building or, conversely, individuals may be able to easily penetrate the building but then find themselves trapped deep within it. An example of the former is an office arrangement with a front counter, whereas the latter could be found in a jail or place of detention. Spatial syntax analysis allows an analyst to ascertain the probable impact of a given spatial configuration on its inhabitants; the relative degree of privacy or encounter within a building can be surmised; the possibility for certain inhabitants to control, restrict or surveil others’ activities can be accounted for. Such information can help in understanding how the form of a built structure, combined with conventions of usage, can seemingly aid in the production of certain hierarchies amongst its inhabitants. For

Hillier, the implication is that “buildings can transmit social knowledge through their spatial form and [...] this can be retrieved by analysis.”<sup>116</sup>

My use of spatial syntax analysis in this thesis will be limited to the basic techniques I have just outlined; there are many others that Hillier has formulated that allow for the analysis of less clearly delineated structures, particularly in urban areas.<sup>117</sup> Much of my use of spatial syntax analysis is also largely implicit, only in Chapters Six and Seven do I make explicit use of the technique. However, in presenting my analysis of backstage spaces I have drawn upon spatial syntax analysis as a method for understanding building plans, informing my fieldwork observations, and thereby increasing my understanding of the impact of building design on the lived experiences of users. Spatial syntax analysis, while appearing deterministic, allows for important insights into the possibilities of action, and for this reason David Seamon sees much value in Hillier’s work, particularly as it provides “important insight into experiential dialects like movement/rest, inside/outside, and dwelling/journey.”<sup>118</sup> As a phenomenologist, Seamon views Hillier’s methods as complementing his own; I have taken his recommendation to combine them with “a careful description of the lifeworlds of these pathways, through participant observation and other empathetic methods.”<sup>119</sup>

## **2. Conceived Space & Discourse**

Our understandings of the built environments that surround us are mediated through the discourses that in part construct them. Indeed, according to Dovey, “The built environment, like food, fashion or film, is a primary form of discourse.”<sup>120</sup> Buildings exist to serve a function, but the design features of built structures – the forms taken by office blocks, sports stadia and suburban houses – communicate messages about the power, status, and taste of their inhabitants. However, Dovey also notes that architecture “is the least autonomous of the arts,” and that, “once reduced to text, all

---

<sup>116</sup> Hillier, "Specifically Architectural Theory: A Partial Account of the Ascent from Building as Cultural Transmission to Architecture as Theoretical Concretion," 13.

<sup>117</sup> For a further description of these, see *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> David Seamon, “The Life of the Place: A Phenomenological Commentary on Bill Hillier’s Theory of Space Syntax,” 1993, <http://www.arch.ksu.edu/seamon/hillier93.htm> (accessed 4 June 2004).

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> Dovey, *Framing Places: Mediating Power in Built Form*, 29.

architectural signifiers are available for appropriation.”<sup>121</sup> Positing text as the means through which signifiers are appropriated, Dovey’s interest lies in assessing how different forms of discourse construct the ‘reality’ of the built environment and in determining whose interests are served in this process.<sup>122</sup>

The term ‘discourse’ encompasses two common definitions. In one sense, ‘discourse’ simply refers to written or spoken language, the everyday result of social interaction.<sup>123</sup> Alternatively, in the way in which it has been used by Foucault and others social theorists, ‘discourse’ is the means by which the ideologically invested constitution of power relations and subjectivity is achieved; it is language “used in some context for some purpose.”<sup>124</sup> In defining ‘discourse analysis,’ Norman Fairclough refers to both these definitions, describing analysis as an ‘oscillation’ between these understandings. This reflects his approach “to try to transcend the division between work inspired by social theory which tends not to analyse texts, and work which focuses upon the language of texts but tends not to engage with social theoretical issues.”<sup>125</sup> Dovey’s work, and that of Markus and Cameron, follows Fairclough’s approach; each examines textual samples on the understanding that text in general is not a “neutral vehicle”, but rather “is implicated in the reproduction of beliefs, relationships, attitudes and values that exist in a given society.”<sup>126</sup> Markus and Cameron in particular argue that discourse is important in the apprehension of significance in the experience of the built environment. They note that in ideological terms, evaluative comments about the built environment convey “a message about what is (un)desirable in future buildings.”<sup>127</sup> In addition, they observe that texts influence the use of buildings; texts classify buildings as a whole, as well as the various internal spaces they contain. Labels are applied to internal spaces that suggest usage: ‘operating theatre’, ‘waiting room’ and ‘auditorium.’ Behavioural rules and norms are also established and reproduced through written and spoken text.

---

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>123</sup> Markus and Cameron, *The Words between the Spaces: Buildings and Language*, 10.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* (London: Routledge, 2003), 2-3.

<sup>126</sup> Markus and Cameron, *The Words between the Spaces: Buildings and Language*, 3.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 41.

In this research I have largely drawn on the oral text of performers, technical crew, and other theatre practitioners through conversations and interviews. Australian director Jim Sharman has described theatre practitioners as “like a lost tribe with only an oral tradition handed down erratically from person to person, usually as gossip.”<sup>128</sup> While I make reference to a number of written texts that impact upon the lives of theatre practitioners (including employment contracts, theatre rules, scripts, memoirs and guide books), arguably the most important are those that circulate in oral form. Conversations and gossip in rehearsal rooms, dressing rooms and social spaces are vitally important for conveying advice and news and for constructing performers’ conceptions of what constitutes the wider field of theatrical performance and appropriately professional behaviour within it. Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts of ‘field’ and ‘symbolic capital’ provide a means of considering how practitioners and institutions deploy discourses so as to position themselves meaningfully, and strategically, in relation to one another. In Bourdieu’s terms, a field of endeavour such as that of theatrical performance is both a “*field of forces*” and a “*field of struggles*.”<sup>129</sup> Seeking to accumulate symbolic capital, occupants of a given field will attempt to position themselves favourably in that field in relation to the particular logics at work. In this thesis I pay particular attention to the ways in which discourse is used to define and demarcate between different theatre companies and the theatre buildings they use. I also consider how the discourse deployed by those in positions of high symbolic capital have an authoritative impact upon the attitudes and practices of those who inhabit them.

### 3. Lived Space & Embodied Practice

Embodied and lived experiences of place are the means through which our various perceived and conceived notions of space and place are constructed. Life is not lived “at the service of ideas,” and, as anthropologist Michael Jackson has suggested, “the knowledge whereby one lives is not necessarily identical with the knowledge whereby

---

<sup>128</sup> Jim Sharman, "In the Realm of the Imagination: An Individual View of Theatre," *Australasian Drama Studies* 28 (1996): 20.

<sup>129</sup> [Bourdieu’s italics] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Field of Cultural Production, Or: The Economic World Reversed," in *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 30.

one explains life.”<sup>130</sup> Instead, it is from the fluid confusion of lived action that ideas become useful. Human experience necessarily takes place “in a world already made for us but also of our own making.”<sup>131</sup> It is precisely because of our status as embodied beings that we are able to actively engage in the making of the world in which we find ourselves. This world is never finished and always excessive, persistently beyond our ability to comprehensively theorise. To account for such an open ended “everyday world of lived experience,”<sup>132</sup> Dovey posits the phenomenology of place as a useful paradigm. I have already explained my own use of phenomenology in this thesis, but it is worthwhile noting Dovey’s perceptive comments. Dovey argues that while phenomenology is often perceived as prescriptive and essentialist, its importance lies in its illumination of human beings’ “shared structures,” namely “the upright stance; modes of action and perception; the importance of the visual sense.”<sup>133</sup> These, argues Dovey, are still fundamental to our various social constructions of place.<sup>134</sup> Dovey suggests that phenomenology is both ‘necessary’ and ‘limited’; it opens up understandings of how place is experienced, but can also too readily overlook the impact of social structure and ideology.<sup>135</sup>

Having stated earlier that I am adopting a ‘dwelling perspective,’ it is of paramount importance that I describe the embodied practices of theatre practitioners in the backstage areas of theatres, as from a ‘dwelling perspective’ architectural form does not convey meaning independently of the use to which it is put. Neil Leach has argued that, while architectural form must still be considered, the focus of investigations into built places should rest on the narrative and performative discourses that provide meaning to that form. In Leach’s view, architecture ultimately “derives its meaning from the activities that have taken place there.”<sup>136</sup> Nigel Thrift has advocated Judith Butler’s apprehension of performativity as particularly insightful, as well as singling

<sup>130</sup> Michael Jackson, "Introduction," in *Things as They Are: New Directions in Phenomenological Anthropology*, ed. Michael Jackson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 2.

<sup>131</sup> Greg Denning, *Mr Bligh's Bad Language: Passion Power and Theatre on the Bounty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 5.

<sup>132</sup> Dovey, *Framing Places: Mediating Power in Built Form*, 39.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>134</sup> Similarly, J. Lowell Lewis argues that “although it is true that people name, divide, understand, and imagine bodies differently in different societies [...] people are not free to construct bodies any old way they want.” “Genre and Embodiment: From Brazilian *Capoeira* to the Ethnology of Human Movement,” *Cultural Anthropology* 10, no. 2 (1995): 225.

<sup>135</sup> Dovey, *Framing Places: Mediating Power in Built Form*, 44.

<sup>136</sup> Neil Leach, "Belonging: Towards a Theory of Identification with Space," in *Habitus: A Sense of Place*, ed. Jean Hillier and Emma Rooksby (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2002), 292.

out her formulation for critique: “Butler makes very little room for space, period.”<sup>137</sup> Advocating the emergence of what he calls ‘non-representational theory,’ Thrift figures the environment as “a manifold of possibilities in time,” and perception as “a modulating trajectory which describes how the world is and simultaneously prescribes a space of adaptive responses.”<sup>138</sup> Perception is through the body, and, as Lewis argues, “Our bodies are ‘knowing,’ and have a form of ‘intelligence,’ precisely because our knowledge and intelligence are, and always were, embodied states.”<sup>139</sup> The motile nature of our bodies is of fundamental importance to perception and understanding. Paul Harrison observes that, because our bodies are “always in motion, always in action,” our embodiment can be understood as both “a *generative* and *expressive* medium.”<sup>140</sup>

Michel de Certeau’s investigation of practice, particularly what he refers to as “making do” is instructive, in that it points to the tactical impact of embodied practice.<sup>141</sup> Positing a difference between ‘strategies’ – what he dubs “the calculus of force-relationships”<sup>142</sup> – and ‘tactics’ – the practices employed by those who find themselves marginally located within an overarching strategy – de Certeau has highlighted the constitutive role of embodied practice. John Michael Vlach’s study of the architecture of southern American slave plantations offers an example of how practices of use can construct a particular sense of place. Noting that plantation landscapes “were most overtly marked by the architectural choices made by their white creators,”<sup>143</sup> Vlach suggests that “planters came to realise that their systems of architectural manipulation could be easily frustrated if one simply refused, as many slaves did, to acknowledge or take notice of it.”<sup>144</sup> Specifically “slaves used subtle behavioural means to structure alternative landscapes with different spatial

---

<sup>137</sup> Nigel Thrift and John-David Dewsbury, "Dead Geographies – and How to Make Them Live," *Environment and Behaviour D: Society and Space* 18 (2000): 414.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 415.

<sup>139</sup> Lewis, "Genre and Embodiment: From Brazilian *Capoeira* to the Ethnology of Human Movement," 232.

<sup>140</sup> [Harrison’s italics] Paul Harrison, "Making Sense: Embodiment and the Sensibilities of the Everyday," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 18 (2000): 503-04.

<sup>141</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xv.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, ix.

<sup>143</sup> John Michael Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 228.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

imperatives”<sup>145</sup> and gradually came to identify certain spaces as their own “through a routine of innumerable domestic acts.”<sup>146</sup>

In this thesis, I describe and discuss theatrical performers’ embodied practices in detail, basing these on my observations of a variety of backstage spaces. Performers engage in what David Seamon refers to as ‘body ballets,’ “*integrated gestures and movements which sustain a particular task or aim.*”<sup>147</sup> Through time, these ‘body ballets’ extend to form lengthier ‘time-space routines’ that Seamon describes as “unfolding” rather than being consciously formed.<sup>148</sup> Individuals’ ‘time-space routines’ also combine with each other’s to form fluidly evolving ‘place ballets.’<sup>149</sup> The combined density of these choreographies of practice, containing both logical patterning and idiosyncratic happenstance, create and sustain distinct and shared senses of place. As an embodied observer within backstage spaces I became implicated in these ‘place ballets’ and my awareness was drawn to the importance of recording both regularity and flux in performers’ practices. To convey this I have adopted the technique of “thick description,”<sup>150</sup> a term the anthropologist Clifford Geertz borrows from Gilbert Ryle. This sort of description conveys the “piled-up structures of inference and implication through which an ethnographer is continually trying to pick his way.”<sup>151</sup>

It is not my purpose to integrate these perspectives into a grand theory, nor is this desirable or indeed possible. Instead I use the tension generated between these paradigms as a means of triangulating the connections between performers, their practices, and backstage spaces. Triangulation itself is a common tool in the humanities, enabling multiple perspectives to be utilised to illuminate complex phenomena. In each of the chapters of this thesis I include a mixture of ‘perceived,’ ‘conceived,’ and ‘lived’ perspectives, surveying connections and illuminating the relations – and tensions – between these paradigms. My use of divergent approaches

---

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>147</sup> [Seamon’s italics] David Seamon, *A Geography of the Lifeworld: Movement, Rest and Encounter*, 54.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>149</sup> See pages 54-59 of Ibid. Seamon adopts the term ‘body ballet’ from Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1961).

<sup>150</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 6.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 7.

is drawn from Malpas's methodology in his investigation of place and space. Faced with an unfamiliar terrain, Malpas proposes the metaphor of 'topographical surveying' as helpful. The researcher, figured as a surveyor, goes about her work "in the complex process of triangulation and traverse," gradually establishing a "view of the entire region."<sup>152</sup> To achieve this view, Malpas stresses that, "no single sighting is sufficient to gain a view of the entire region; multiple sightings are required, and every sighting overlaps, to some extent, with other sightings."<sup>153</sup> In this fashion, "the concepts at issue must be understood through their interconnection rather than their reduction, through their interdependence rather than their simplification."<sup>154</sup> Importantly, Malpas warns that the conventions involved in any form of mapping and surveying are subject to change and, so to ensure that one produces a useful map, one should regard it "more [...] as a record of the activities of the surveyor in the landscape than of the landscape in some pure, eternal form."<sup>155</sup> In this thesis I present my survey of performers' experiences of backstage space, analysing how these spaces inform performers' understandings of their own identities as performers and their position in a wider social realm, as well as affecting the very performances they give.

### *Research Design*

In this final section I outline the design of my research, discussing how I have applied the methods described above in the course of fieldwork. Particularly important is the way in which these methods have affected my consideration of the scope of this research, the choice of which theatres to document, and the practicalities of that documentation. After outlining these points I discuss the pragmatics of my fieldwork placements, describing the way in which I have utilised an ethnographic model to observe practitioners in their places of work and conduct interviews.

The need to document actual theatre buildings as well as provide ethnographic accounts of performers' work practices has placed necessary limits on the scope of this research. I have limited my research to theatres within the city of Sydney, Australia. A

---

<sup>152</sup> Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*, 41.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>155</sup> Malpas, "Comparing Topographies: Across Paths/around Place: A Reply to Casey," 238.

significant amount of theatrical activity occurs here in a wide range of theatre buildings and as a long-term resident I possess a firm familiarity with the city. Within this geographic scope I have consciously chosen to document theatres that are used in the main by professional performers. The distinction between ‘professional’ and ‘amateur’ theatrical practitioners is a blurred and contested one;<sup>156</sup> such a distinction is not usually determined by the level of income an individual generates from their artistic work, but is instead based on the self-assessment of individuals and their possession of skills and dispositions that enable them to maintain particular positions in the field that can be recognised by others as ‘professional.’<sup>157</sup> Economic considerations dictate that professional theatrical productions commonly run for lengthier seasons than amateur work and professional performers therefore enjoy a more sustained contact with the buildings they perform in. The modes of inhabitation professional performers engage in are therefore very different to those of amateur performers whose contact with theatre buildings is typically imbued with a greater degree of excitement.<sup>158</sup> From the range of theatres available in Sydney I have chosen a cross-section of venues that is representative of the theatrical environments that professional performers encounter here. In the next chapter I provide a detailed topography of practitioner space in Sydney, surveying the field of theatrical performance and providing a rationale for the choices I have made.

An important corollary of my choice of certain theatre buildings is that these venues have largely determined the various categories of performer I have had contact with. The majority of performers referred to in this thesis are most accurately described as

---

<sup>156</sup> Richard Fotheringham, "Boundary Riders and Claim Jumpers: The Australian Theatre Industry," in *Our Australian Theatre in the 1990s*, ed. Veronica Kelly (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), 34.

<sup>157</sup> In a 2003 report for the Australia Council for the Arts, Australia's peak government arts funding body, David Throsby and Virginia Hollister's discussion of the criteria for establishing what constitutes professional arts practice demonstrates the difficulty of defining the term 'professional.' In choosing respondents for their survey of professional artists' economic circumstances, Throsby and Hollister used the criterion of 'seriousness'. "[S]eriousness is judged in terms of a self-assessed commitment to artistic work as a major aspect of the artist's working life, even if arts-related work is not the main source of income." To further determine 'professional' status, respondents were asked questions about their artistic output. Throsby and Hollister sought respondents who were "operating at a level and standard of work with a degree of commitment appropriate to the norms of professional practice within their artform." David Throsby and Virginia Hollister, "Don't Give up Your Day Job: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia," (Strawberry Hills: Australia Council, 2003), 13-14.

<sup>158</sup> Admittedly, the observations in the previous two sentences are also contingent on other factors. For instance, contemporary performance genres typically do not enjoy long performance seasons, as they do not attract large audiences. The mode of inhabitation experienced by performers whilst performing in a given theatre can therefore be viewed as part and parcel of the positioning of artforms within the larger field.

actors, but a number belong to one or more other categories, including dancers (both ballet and contemporary), physical performers, acrobats, puppeteers, and vocalists (both musical theatre and opera). Throughout this thesis the terms ‘performer’ and ‘actor’ are used extensively, but with respect to their semantic difference. I use the term ‘performer’ to describe anyone who, in Richard Bauman’s terms, “assumes responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative competence.”<sup>159</sup> It is the broadest possible category that encompasses all those who perform. By contrast, an actor is one who “does something to simulate, represent, impersonate, and so forth.”<sup>160</sup> Actors’ performances most commonly involve the representation of character and in so doing involve particular psychological and physical adjustments being made to facilitate a successful performance. The term ‘practitioner’ is used to refer to all those involved in the production of theatrical performances, both performers and technical crew. This thesis is based largely on the experience of actors, but also takes into account the experience of performers and technical practitioners.

Based on the trialectical nature of space that I have described earlier, the documentation of backstage areas I have included in this thesis involves a multifaceted approach, with the aim to faithfully convey aspects of the environments located there. For each theatre I have written a description grounded on my own visits, together with an historical account of the structure. Within my descriptions I include practitioners’ perceptions of both the building and their experiences of working there. These have been drawn from conversations and interviews with practitioners as well as extant written accounts. Architectural drawings are also provided as a means of communicating each building’s size and spatial configuration. Finally, photographic images of each theatre are included as a means of visually representing the complex arrangement of objects and décor found in each building, as well as allowing the reader to formulate their own feel for the structure. Documentation is not a transparent exercise, and the choices made of what and how to document can often betray as much about the preoccupations and processes of those doing the documenting as they do about the object of study. Through my choice of multiple approaches I seek to allow the reader freedom to consider different documentary modes, comparing each with the

---

<sup>159</sup> Richard Bauman, *Verbal Art as Performance* (Illinois: Waveland Press, 1984), 11.

<sup>160</sup> Michael Kirby, "On Acting and Not-Acting," in *Acting (Re)Considered*, ed. Phillip B. Zarilli (London: Routledge, 1995), 46.

others and thereby constructing a richer understanding of the various ways in which each building can be experienced, represented, and understood. To encourage this I have supplied photographic images, and a selection of corresponding building plans, on an accompanying CD-ROM as Appendix A. This disk allows for the visual documentation to be considered alongside this text, or for extended browsing. Hyperlinks between photographic images and plans allow the reader to quickly shift from an image of a given space to a respective plan of that space marked with numbered arrows that indicate my position and orientation within the building when each photograph was taken. In addition, separate copies of building plans are supplied on paper in Appendix B. The following chapter provides further explanation of how the CD-ROM can be accessed and used.

Architectural plans are most helpfully understood as reflecting the necessities of building construction. The photographic representation of architecture comprises a genre whose practitioners blur the fraught distinction between artistic and documentary photography. The dominant practice in architectural photography is the creation of artfully composed images of architectural form, images that are clean, smooth, frequently depopulated and seemingly “unable to accept the existence of dirt.”<sup>161</sup> In providing photographic images I am aware that these images do not mimic what is seen by the embodied human eye, but instead, like other forms of visual representation that rely on linear perspective, they present a “convenient geometric fiction.”<sup>162</sup> The images I have created of backstage spaces eschew the picturesque in an attempt to convey the state of backstage environments *as I found them*. They reflect my desire to record what I encountered as well as betraying something of the conditions under which the photographs were made. Writing about the documentation and analysis of performance, Gay McAuley has noted that photographs “bear witness” in a way that is different to that of written text; writing “represents a kind of closure but a photo essay forestalls such closure.”<sup>163</sup> My intention in photographing backstage areas has been to supplement the inevitable shortfalls of my textual descriptions.

---

<sup>161</sup> Jeremy Till, "Architecture in Space, Time," in *Architecture and Anthropology*, ed. Clare Melhuish (London: Academy Editions, 1996), 11.

<sup>162</sup> Peter Bosselmann, *Representation of Places: Reality and Realism in City Design* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 3.

<sup>163</sup> Gay McAuley and Tracy Schramm, "The Gravity of Dante: A Photo Essay," *About Performance: Performance Analysis* 4 (1998): 105.

Photographing backstage areas proved incredibly problematic: increased fears of terrorism have rendered photography, especially of iconic structures like the Sydney Opera House, a security concern; under industrial regulations theatre practitioners in Australia are entitled to financial reimbursement if their work is recorded in any form and this made much photography financially unfeasible; copyright issues relating to the photography of sets and costumes further restricted me; performers are also generally very suspicious of how photographic images might be used and in many cases company management discouraged me from even asking performers for permission; finally, staff in one theatre even requested I not misrepresent their building through photographing its less presentable areas. The suspicion I encountered over whether I might misrepresent or commercially exploit those I wished to photograph alerted me to the investment many practitioners have in maintaining control over their personal or corporate image. In the performing arts, image is a commodity and my request for permission to photograph practitioners, production elements, and backstage areas was therefore perceived as threatening. For this reason almost all of my photographs are devoid of performers, a regrettable but unavoidable situation. Many were also taken in circumstances where, despite having permission to photograph, I was required to be quick and unobtrusive. This, in addition to the cramped and dark nature of many backstage spaces has meant that some photographs have required digital editing to correct light balances.

The issues of photography aside, the various levels of restriction placed on my access to theatres were the greatest difficulty I faced when conducting this research. In the case of many venues, especially large commercial theatres, I found my requests for access were simply denied. Many reasons were provided, including security, existing hiring agreements, Occupational Health and Safety regulations and insurance coverage. Theatre practitioners are generally wary of those who, not personally working on a production, make their way backstage; an “aura of transgression and the breaking of normal cultural codes” accompany those who intrude.<sup>164</sup> Beyond the specific issues I have just listed, there is a wider perception that the ‘magic of theatre’ may in some way be compromised by increased public awareness of how

---

<sup>164</sup> Carlson, *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture*, 133.

performances are created. Interestingly, in smaller venues my presence was largely unrestricted.<sup>165</sup> Having arranged a suitable time to be let in between performances, I was allowed to wander unsupervised by staff. In other theatres I was directly supervised and my access was restricted.<sup>166</sup> The Sydney Theatre Company, responsible for the operation of the Wharf and Sydney theatres, became more restrictive during the course of this research. In 2001 I was allowed to wander unsupervised through the Wharf, taking notes and photographs. In 2004 the company's Education Officer supervised my visit, which despite occurring at a time when no performance was in progress, was restricted to areas that were not deemed to be 'currently in use.' Arranging fieldwork placements with productions provided a more appropriate avenue to access theatres and allow me to witness backstage areas in use during performances. Indeed, the fieldwork placements I secured provided a wealth of valuable research data and proved to be formative experiences.

Access to productions was again initially difficult to negotiate; placements were arranged via initial written requests and phone calls, and commonly involved meetings and conversations with key practitioners, often either a director or producer.<sup>167</sup> This thesis initially draws upon rehearsal observation for the Sydney Theatre Company's production of Ron Blair's *The Christian Brothers* during the period of 20<sup>th</sup> August to 20<sup>th</sup> September 2001. In addition to this I spent the period of 23<sup>rd</sup> January to 27<sup>th</sup> March 2003 observing Opera Australia's Summer Season in the Sydney Opera House; as Australia's only performing arts company to perform under repertory conditions this placement involved observation of multiple productions. Following this extended placement, a number of shorter opportunities were forthcoming: two days (4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> February 2003) were spent observing rehearsals for The Bell Shakespeare Company's 2003 production of *Hamlet*, and a school matinee performance on 18<sup>th</sup> March gave me the opportunity to witness backstage activities at the Sydney Opera House's Playhouse, albeit from a seat next to the stage manager; observation of rehearsals for the Griffin production of Brendan Cowell's *Rabbit* during the period of 27<sup>th</sup> March to 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2003 provided me with an opportunity to witness actors using the minute Stables Theatre. The director of *Rabbit*, Kate Gaul, subsequently provided me with

---

<sup>165</sup> This was the case with the Old Fitzroy, the Ensemble, and the Belvoir Street theatres.

<sup>166</sup> This was the case with The Wharf, Sydney, and Lyric theatres.

<sup>167</sup> Many written requests for access simply went unanswered. In one particular case, the artistic director of a theatre company withdrew the permission granted by a particular production's director.

invaluable access to two of her later productions during 2003. The first of these was Siren Theatre Co.'s production of Michael O'Brien's *Frozen*. I observed rehearsals of this from 2<sup>nd</sup> May and then arranged to spend some nights backstage during the two-week season from 29<sup>th</sup> May to 12<sup>th</sup> June. The second was the Company B production of Alana Valentine's *Run Rabbit Run* that rehearsed from 24<sup>th</sup> November 2003 until opening night on 7<sup>th</sup> January 2004. The season ran until 15<sup>th</sup> February. Both these productions were performed at the Belvoir Street Theatre, *Frozen* in the Downstairs Theatre and *Run Rabbit Run* in the Upstairs Theatre. Finally, overlapping with *Run Rabbit Run* was a placement with the Malcolm C. Cooke and Associates musical of *The Lion The Witch and the Wardrobe* that ran from 19<sup>th</sup> December 2003 to 1<sup>st</sup> February 2004 at the Lyric Theatre, Star City.

Throughout my fieldwork I positioned myself as a researcher; it was clear to practitioners that unlike them I had no essential role in any of the productions; I was there to observe, to learn and to write about what I experienced.<sup>168</sup> With Opera Australia my presence was announced through company bulletins, while with other companies I was introduced at meetings of cast and crew. In some instances I was given a few minutes to introduce myself and briefly explain what it was I was hoping to do; in most cases I explained what I was doing to individual practitioners as we met. My experience of backstage areas was partial; I was only able to access a select range of productions and, within these, I only encountered some of what was 'going on.' As a young male researcher, female performers' accommodations remained physically inaccessible.<sup>169</sup> During placements I allowed myself to be educated and informed by practitioners, who were both willing and generous in providing their explanations of what they were thinking and doing. In many cases the perceived novelty of my project provided assistance; many performers commented that they had never encountered anyone interested in their thoughts on backstage conditions. In observing performers at work I focussed on the relational aspects of the actions I witnessed, looking for

---

<sup>168</sup> I was however put to use by practitioners in a number of small ways. These included photographing a dress rehearsal of one production, sitting in certain positions to simulate the presence of an audience during rehearsals for another, running occasional errands and in one case typing up a press release for a performer's upcoming production. With the amount of time spent with many productions some practitioners did refer to me in ways that signified my acceptance and inclusion; these included being 'a friendly face' and 'part of the team.'

<sup>169</sup> This was a combination of female performers' understandable desire for privacy as well as my own wish to avoid being perceived as some kind of voyeur.

patterns in action, temporality and context. John Zeisel's schema for observation provided a guide for initial observations, with its question:

Who is	-	Actor
Doing what	-	Act
With whom	-	Significant Others
In what relationship	-	Aural, visual, tactile, olfactory, symbolic
In what context	-	Sociocultural
And where?	-	Physical setting <sup>170</sup>

The limitation of observation is that it “deals with behaviour, not with attitudes or beliefs.”<sup>171</sup> While brief conversations with practitioners augmented my observations, the logic of the workplaces I had entered often cut short my interactions. Understanding that ethnography involves engaging in “a dialogue with other ways of understanding the world,”<sup>172</sup> and seeking, as Clifford Geertz advocates, to engage with performers' own interpretations and understandings of what it is that they were doing backstage, I conducted longer interviews. These interviews were semi-structured, involving prepared questions as well as allowing for conversations to shift according to the particular responses provided by performers. In this way I was able to use the interviews to verify my own developing interpretations and negotiate shared understandings.<sup>173</sup> Most interviews were tape-recorded and subsequently transcribed, and all were prefaced with a verbal and written explanation of the public nature of the material I recorded and the uses to which it would be put.<sup>174</sup> The interviews were conducted in a variety of places, ranging from dressing rooms to cafes and performers' places of residence.

---

<sup>170</sup> John Zeisel, *Inquiry by Design: Tools for Environment-Behaviour Research* (Monterey: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1981), 124.

<sup>171</sup> Robert Sommer and Barbara Sommer, *A Practical Guide to Behavioral Research: Tools and Techniques*, 5th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 60.

<sup>172</sup> Steven M. Friedson, *Dancing Prophets: Musical Experience in Tumbuka Healing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 3.

<sup>173</sup> Barry P. Michrina and Cherylanne Richards, *Person to Person: Fieldwork, Dialogue and the Hermeneutic Method* (Albany: State University of New York, 1996), 21.

<sup>174</sup> In conducting interviews participants were advised that the recorded interviews would be used 1. As background research material; 2. As direct quotes in the body of the research thesis; 3. To be used in any future research related publications. In the light of these three conditions, participants did at times request that certain of their comments not be made public, or that they be attributed anonymously.

McAuley has noted that in rehearsal observation “the relationship between observer and observed involves complex and subtle issues of power and presence.”<sup>175</sup> In drawing attention to the link between rehearsal room observation and the work of field ethnographers, McAuley’s work has prompted me to consider the issues of power and authority that are implicit in any ethnographic study, particularly in the way I, having conducted fieldwork, position practitioners within my own writing. Tracing changes in anthropological theory, James Clifford and George C. Marcus have noted the increasing rejection of formerly predominant visual metaphors for anthropology, “all of which presuppose a standpoint outside – looking at, objectifying, or, somewhat closer, ‘reading’ a given reality.”<sup>176</sup> By contrast, they identify the emergence of a more dialogical understanding, in which cultural poetics is understood as “an interplay of voices, of positioned utterances.”<sup>177</sup> In her doctoral thesis, Kerrie Schaefer addresses this issue of ethnographic authority with reference to the work of Trinh T. Minh-ha, drawing especially on Trinh’s concepts of ‘speaking about’ and ‘speaking to’ subjects.<sup>178</sup> Arguing that “there is no privileged position from which to survey a culture or cultural objects,”<sup>179</sup> Schaefer adopts Trinh’s concept of ‘speaking to’ subjects, thereby foregrounding her dialogue with speaking subjects, positioning herself within her writing and allowing for other voices to be heard.

Schaefer’s approach explicitly admits the extent to which ethnographic knowledge is inherently partial, committed and incomplete.<sup>180</sup> It also underscores the ethical importance of a dialogic understanding of ethnography. In presenting my documentation of backstage spaces and describing performers’ work processes and understandings, I am engaging in a continuing dialogue with the knowledge and the experiences they possess. Indeed, in this chapter I have introduced a number of important dialogues that will continue throughout the thesis. The first is between the

---

<sup>175</sup> Gay McAuley, "Towards an Ethnography of Rehearsal," *New Theatre Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (1998): 77.

<sup>176</sup> James Clifford and George C. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 11.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>178</sup> Trinh T. Minh-ha, *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 12, quoted in Kerrie Schaefer, "The Politics of Poaching in Postmodern Performance: A Case-Study of the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* in Rehearsal and Performance" (PhD, University of Sydney, 1999), 88.

<sup>179</sup> Schaefer, "The Politics of Poaching in Postmodern Performance: A Case-Study of the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* in Rehearsal and Performance", 89.

<sup>180</sup> Clifford and Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, 7.

different paradigms and research methods that I have employed in seeking to understand human experiences of the built environment; the second is between the different modes I have used to document theatre buildings; the third is between the various performers I met during the course of this research and myself.<sup>181</sup> Together, these dialogues between different perspectives are necessary for the task at hand; a study of backstage spaces as aiding in the understanding of the place of performers must seek interconnections, interdependencies and overlaps. Using the metaphor of topographical surveying, this research has involved undertaking multiple journeys through an unfamiliar terrain, taking up perspectives and slowly building up a knowledge of the region; as Jeffrey Malpas has argued, “it is only through such journeying, sighting and resighting that place can be understood.”<sup>182</sup>

In this chapter I have moved from a phenomenological discussion of the concept of ‘place’ to a consideration of how humans engage with built places and how meaning is made from architectural experience. From this I have stressed the necessity of considering the trialectic of ‘perceived,’ ‘conceived,’ and ‘lived’ approaches to space and place. In the concluding section I have detailed the practical considerations of research design and have discussed the way in which I conducted fieldwork. In the next chapter I turn to focus in detail on theatre buildings, initially defining what the backstage is before presenting my documentation of eight Sydney theatres.

---

<sup>181</sup> With only a small amount of success I have attempted to continue a dialogue with some of the performers I met during the fieldwork placements. This has involved some feedback, in the form of face-to-face conversation and email, on my thoughts and drafts.

<sup>182</sup> Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*, 41.