

# 4

## The House Inhabited

“... actors inhabit the theatre space as totally as a family inhabits a home ...”

*Jane Alexander*<sup>1</sup>

In the previous chapter, having focussed in detail on the physical structures of theatre buildings – categorising and documenting ‘perceived’ space – I began to consider performers’ perceptions and experiences. This chapter continues the shift from ‘perceived’ space to ‘lived’ space. In this chapter I analyse the experience of performers within practitioner spaces, seeking to understand exactly what it is that performers do backstage and to discern the commonalities that exist across a range of performers’ experiences. An analysis of how performers inhabit practitioner spaces – encountering, apprehending, and using them – offers insight into the prevailing conditions within which performers must work, into performers’ creative processes, and into their needs and desires as performers.

A difficulty present in the task I have outlined for this chapter is the very specificity and particularity of theatrical labour; each new production brings with it a unique

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<sup>1</sup> Jane Alexander, “An Actor’s Theater,” in *Theaters*, ed. Hardy et al., 52.

combination of built place, performance material, practitioners and time. To generalise is therefore very difficult, especially so because practitioners themselves find it hard to generalise. Instead, their talk – when they do talk – is comparative and anecdotal, explaining the specifics of one production in relation to the particulars of another.<sup>2</sup> This is further complicated by the very invisibility of inhabitation and dwelling experiences. As Peter King argues in his book *Private Dwelling*, “Dwelling, as a private subjective experience, sits outside communicative discourse.”<sup>3</sup> Attempts to explain the nature of an attachment to place or experiences in place can seem banal. King states, “there is a distinction between the manner in which we discuss dwelling ... and the way in which we actually use dwelling. The latter is habitual and implicit, and in consequence unarticulated and perhaps incapable of full articulation.”<sup>4</sup>

This chapter draws on performers’ mundane, quotidian practices, situating them within larger experiential frameworks, and working to articulate the links between the minute and the broad scale. First I discuss theories of dwelling that are particularly apt in the case of theatrical performers, before turning to consider how these are applicable to the working conditions that govern theatrical production in Australia. I then outline the broad scale spatio-temporal journeys undertaken by performers in the practitioner space of theatres, articulating the way in which strong routines and rhythms develop. Having established these larger frameworks I then focus on the more personal practices of inhabitation. These include the various ways in which actors prepare for performance, the ways in which they monitor the progress of performances, and the ways in which they negotiate backstage social interactions.

In this chapter I draw on a variety of sources, complementing my own observations, conversations and interviews with material drawn from practitioners’ published accounts and memoirs.<sup>5</sup> Throughout this chapter, the observations on which I draw most heavily come from fieldwork conducted with practitioners involved in the 2003/2004 Sydney production of *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*,

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<sup>2</sup> Actor Robert Meldrum’s response in one interview typified the implicit response of many performers. Meldrum stated, “I can’t help but talk comparatively.” Robert Meldrum, interview with author, Sydney, New South Wales, 18 March 2003.

<sup>3</sup> King, *Private Dwelling: Contemplating the Use of Housing*, 67.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 67-68.

<sup>5</sup> For explanations of the citation and transcription conventions I have adopted, see chap. 3, n. 23 and n. 60.

complemented by occasional references to fieldwork carried out with the 2004 Company B Belvoir production *Run Rabbit Run. The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* was a stage adaptation of the C.S. Lewis children's book of the same name. The large-scale touring musical involved a diverse cast of twenty-one performers, including actors, dancers, acrobats and puppeteers. The production opened in the city of Melbourne on 28<sup>th</sup> December 2002 and subsequently toured to Perth, Adelaide and Canberra, closing on 13<sup>th</sup> April 2003. After a number of musical revisions, it re-opened in Brisbane on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2003, closing on 13<sup>th</sup> December, whereupon it transferred to Sydney's Lyric Theatre, opening on 19<sup>th</sup> December and running for fifty-five performances until 1<sup>st</sup> February 2004. For both seasons the cast remained substantially the same; the only change was the addition of Katrina Retallick as a replacement cover performer.<sup>6</sup> *Run Rabbit Run* was a verbatim theatre production based on the story of a locally well-known Sydney rugby league team that had been excluded from the National Rugby League competition and had subsequently mounted a successful campaign for reinstatement. Ten actors were involved in the season at the Belvoir Street Theatre, which rehearsed from late November 2003 and opened on 7<sup>th</sup> January 2004. The production ran until 15<sup>th</sup> February. As an observer of both these productions, I found that the significant overlap between them invited comparison.

### *Modes of Dwelling*

At the outset, it is necessary to consider the basic conditions under which the inhabitation of any place, let alone a theatre, might be possible. Already I have proposed the metaphor of a theatre as a house, thereby opening up the connotations of housing, inhabitation, dwelling and home. Edward Casey has argued that, "a dwelling place is not one kind of thing; nor does dwelling occur in only one way."<sup>7</sup> Instead, Casey identifies that dwelling is twofold, including elements of both the 'hestial' and the 'hermetic.' The former term is derived from the Greek goddess of the hearth,

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<sup>6</sup> The term 'cover' denotes performers who understudy specific major roles in order to perform them in the event of sickness or injury. Similar to the term 'cover', a 'swing' performer is one who learns a variety of general roles and is therefore able to cover them in the event of sickness or injury.

<sup>7</sup> Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, 115.

Hestia, and seeks to describe a state that is “at once centred and self-absorbed.”<sup>8</sup> The latter is derived from Hermes, the messenger of the gods, a god “of motion, communication, guidance and barter.”<sup>9</sup> Hermetic dwelling is associated with restlessness and impermanence.<sup>10</sup> Casey explains these two ways to dwell in terms of their opposition, but rounds out his explanation by carefully noting their confluence: “[T]hey are finally two-in-one, the binarism of opposition yielding to the internally differentiated unity of dwelling twice over in the same place.”<sup>11</sup>

To dwell, or to inhabit a particular place therefore encompasses both settledness and restlessness. Similarly to Casey, David Seamon identifies ‘movement’ and ‘rest’ as two foundational experiences of place; he does, however, add a third term, ‘encounter.’ In his opinion, these three themes form “the essential core of people’s behavioural and experiential involvement with their everyday geographical world.”<sup>12</sup> ‘Movement’ and ‘rest’ relate closely to Casey’s respective understandings of ‘hermetic’ and ‘hestial’ dwelling, with the concept of ‘encounter’ opening up additional possibilities. For Seamon, ‘encounter’ refers to “any situation of attentive contact between the person and the world at hand.”<sup>13</sup> Such attentive contact, whilst at one level always already present, exists on a continuum from relative obliviousness to heightened contact between person and environment. This is strikingly similar to Edward Relph’s understanding of the various levels of ‘insiderness’ that may be experienced by an individual.<sup>14</sup> In behavioural terms it describes a continuum from a realm of habituality, to a profound awareness of an engagement with the surrounding environment.

What is important from these two approaches is the interplay between ‘movement’ and ‘rest,’ between ‘hermetic’ and ‘hestial’ dwelling. In Seamon’s opinion, an imbalance of either ‘movement’ or ‘rest’ leads to distress and sickness.<sup>15</sup> Both Casey and Seamon recognise that, in Bernd Jager’s words, “neither can maintain its

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<sup>8</sup> Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, 133.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>12</sup> Seamon, *A Geography of the Lifeworld: Movement, Rest and Encounter*, 17.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>14</sup> See chap. 2, n. 45.

<sup>15</sup> Seamon, *A Geography of the Lifeworld: Movement, Rest and Encounter*, 135.

structural integrity without the other.”<sup>16</sup> The interplay between these modes of human existence, an interplay within the compass of which person-to-person and person-to-environment encounters occur, is useful in understanding performers’ experiences in the practitioner spaces of theatres. The prevailing conditions in which performers work are profoundly hermetic, and the discernible desire amongst performers for a more hestial mode of inhabitation is indicative of the degree to which the hestial is absent. In the next section I articulate the dominance of the hermetic mode in performers’ experiences, beginning with a brief discussion of the broad socio-economic context for performers’ work in Australia.

### *Conditions of Work*

As a profession, acting and performing entails a profoundly hermetic lifestyle. In Australia, theatre is “an ‘on again off again’ kind of industry.”<sup>17</sup> Actors are “structurally placed as employees rather than producers,” and given that full-time acting ensembles remain largely an ideal, work is often piecemeal, requiring a constant search for employment.<sup>18</sup> A 2003 study of professional artists commissioned by the Australia Council for the Arts found that in the five years from 1996 to 2001, fifty-six per cent of the actors surveyed reported being unemployed at some period; the mean total period of unemployment among actors during this time was fifteen months.<sup>19</sup> Only twenty-nine per cent of the actors surveyed reported being able to survive solely on the income they earned from acting; the majority required additional employment or relied on a partner’s income.<sup>20</sup> Not only are performers subject to uncertain employment prospects within the field of theatrical performance, often having to move from job to job and from place to place, but most also need to supplement their income with ‘day jobs’ outside the field.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>17</sup> Heath McIvor, interview with author, Sydney, New South Wales, 9 January 2004.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Moore, "Longing to Belong: Trained Actors' Attempts to Enter the Profession" (PhD Thesis, University of Sydney, 2004), 187. South Australia’s Lighthouse Company and Sydney’s Company B have, in the past, briefly maintained permanent acting ensembles. The nationally touring Bell Shakespeare Company has, in the past, also marketed the ensemble basis of its work. Bell Shakespeare now maintains a group of seven ‘associate artists.’ Most recently, the Sydney Theatre Company has launched a new permanent ensemble of twelve performers, *The Actors Company*, with funding to produce work over the next five years.

<sup>19</sup> Throsby and Hollister, "Don't Give up Your Day Job: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia," 44.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 50.

In his 1996 *Rex Cramphorn Memorial Lecture* director Jim Sharman likened actors to “a lost tribe.”<sup>21</sup> Indeed, amongst professional performers there is a strong sense that to be an actor or performer is to belong to ‘a different tribe,’ outside or beyond the borders of ‘normal’ life.<sup>22</sup> Some performers dispute such a description; when interviewed, actor Meaghan Davies stated strongly, “I don’t [...] subscribe to the belief that actors are a different species of people.”<sup>23</sup> However, as the interview continued, she explicitly compared her occupation to what she described as “normal” jobs, clearly placing herself in a position that is, in one respect, outside the norm. Such comparisons are common; during interviews performers often compared or contrasted their work to the quotidian regularity of office employment.

Performers are aware of the transient, hermetic nature of their employment and their perceptions of this cover a wide spectrum, encompassing both negative and positive viewpoints. Acting is described as “a path that is very creative but insecure.”<sup>24</sup> In large part, this is due to the amount of “knock backs” suffered.<sup>25</sup> Actor June Salter writes that acting is “damned hard work, and after you’ve finished one job, you don’t know when or from where your next pay cheque will come.”<sup>26</sup> This can, according to actor Nicholas Papademetriou, lead to “a real fractured lifestyle and a fractured way of thinking.”<sup>27</sup> A difference can be if “you are an actor who does get constant work, and then you have more a sense that you belong in a regular, routine kind of world.”<sup>28</sup> In musical theatre, the term ‘gypsy’ is commonly used to refer to members of the chorus, a term that denotes transience as well as connotating disreputableness.<sup>29</sup> ‘Gypsy’ can, however, also be invoked as a term of pride. Company Manager of *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Laura Hamilton, when asked where she called

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<sup>21</sup> Sharman, "In the Realm of the Imagination: An Individual View of Theatre," 20.

<sup>22</sup> During rehearsals for Siren Theatre Co.’s 2003 production of *Frozen*, one of the actors, Andy Rodereda, complained light-heartedly about rehearsals starting at 9am, to which director Kate Gaul jokingly responded, “Don’t you feel like you are part of a different tribe?”

<sup>23</sup> Davies, interview.

<sup>24</sup> Andy Rodereda, interview with author, Sydney, New South Wales, 10 June 2003.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. Andy articulated, “... if you consider a casting a job interview – which is what it is – if you can secure one in every twenty to thirty jobs you are on a good strike rate. That’s a good strike rate.”

<sup>26</sup> June Salter, *A Pinch of Salt* (Sydney: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995), 120.

<sup>27</sup> Papademetriou, interview.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> The term ‘gypsy’ originated on Broadway in the late 1940s and refers to “a hard-working anonymous member of the chorus line in a big Broadway musical.” *Cassell Companion to Theatre*, (London: Cassell, 1997).

home, responded positively “we’re gypsies.” Such a term implies freedom and the ability to survive without settled inhabitation. Actor Katrina Retallick also emphasised the positive aspects of a hermetic lifestyle: “There’s always a sense of moving on from one thing to another ... and I quite like that.”<sup>30</sup> For expatriate Australian actor Zoe Caldwell, a transient and irregular working life offers the promise of escape: “Each time my life seems to have come to a dead end, I am saved by work. Work in a new place and with new people.”<sup>31</sup>

The conditions encountered by performers while working on touring productions encourage the most transient, hermetic mode of dwelling. Actor and dancer Yolande Brown described how, on tour with Australia’s Bangarra Dance Company, performances were held in a rapid succession of venues:

We do one or two shows in each theatre and then we move on. So you never get to know exactly what the theatre is like. And it becomes a blur, like a dream after a while, because they’re all different, and you don’t know where you are. You’re like ‘Okay, I’m in another dark space. Where is everything?’<sup>32</sup>

For many performers the experience of touring can feel distinctly ‘unreal’; the frequent movement from place to place, the intensity of the workload and the situation of working and living with the one small group of people can result in quite intensely charged atmospheres. During one performance of *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* I witnessed performers in the wings discussing which season (Melbourne, Brisbane or Sydney) felt more ‘real’ than the others. The more familiar the performers were with the city in which they were performing, especially if they regarded that city as ‘home,’ then the more ‘real’ the season.<sup>33</sup>

Conversely, productions can encounter long runs, either in a commercial theatre, or in one operated by a resident production company. Such experiences can lead to an emphasis on a more hestial mode of dwelling. American performer Marlene

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<sup>30</sup> Katrina Retallick, interview with author, Sydney, New South Wales, 1 February 2004.

<sup>31</sup> Zoe Caldwell, *I Will Be Cleopatra* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2001), 8.

<sup>32</sup> Yolande Brown, interview with author, Sydney, New South Wales, 15 January 2004.

<sup>33</sup> In the discussion I witnessed, the yardstick for determining the level of ‘reality’ appeared to be to what extent each performer could escape the heightened social environment of the touring company and re-connect to a more grounded, everyday lifestyle.

Danielle's experience provides an extreme example of such a hestial mode of inhabitation. Danielle, a 'gypsy' by trade, performed in the New York season of Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Cats* for over nine years, a total of 3,500 performances. Danielle's reason for staying so long on the one show was, "When you're in this business as a Gypsy, you never plan. You just live day to day. But then I began to realize, Hey, since this show is going to be here, maybe I can make some plans."<sup>34</sup> Her uniquely long period of stable employment allowed Danielle to purchase property and establish a home for herself and her son in a way that many performers are simply unable to.

Performers' use of the term 'home' to describe the places in which they perform demonstrates both the dominance of the hermetic mode of dwelling and a desire for more settledness. Many performers regard theatres as in some sense being 'home.' British actor Simon Callow refers to the theatre he is performing in as a "home from home."<sup>35</sup> Many other performers regard them merely as places of work, engendering little of the emotional attachment and identification that the term 'home' suggests: "I spend a lot of time in here [...] It's not a second home, it's a workplace."<sup>36</sup> However, whilst working on a production, performers do commonly spend large amounts of time in theatres, to the extent that the theatre in which they are performing can become a dominant place in their life. Of this time spent by performers in theatre buildings, most is spent backstage.<sup>37</sup> Performer Amanda Muggleton, working on *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, stated that for her a dressing room is "an actor's office," but that, "I treat it like a home, which is why I'm so pissed off when the dressing room isn't big enough to cope with all that."<sup>38</sup> During *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* performer Nyree Camden stated that a theatre is "like a second home." Her rationale was that, while on tour, "we spend more time here than in our apartments." For this reason, she elaborated, "backstage *needs* to be almost like a home." There is an underlying tension in performers' use of the term 'home' in

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<sup>34</sup> Marty Bell, *Backstage on Broadway: Musicals and Their Makers* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1993), 253.

<sup>35</sup> Callow, *Being an Actor*, 183.

<sup>36</sup> Joseph Connell, interview with author, Sydney, New South Wales, 23 January 2004.

<sup>37</sup> Actor Jane Alexander, former chair of the United States' National Endowment for the Arts, has written, "An actor spends most of his time in a theatre not onstage, but backstage." Alexander, "An Actor's Theater," in *Theaters*, ed. Hardy et al., 53.

<sup>38</sup> Amanda Muggleton, interview with author, Sydney, New South Wales, 24 January 2004.

relation to theatres; they spend so much time in theatres that they *should* feel like home, even though most don't.

Amongst performers there is a desire for a certain type of culture within any theatre building, a culture that allows for inclusion and belonging. Theatre venues with resident production companies and a distinct house style can frequently engender strong feelings of inclusion and hestial inhabitation through the experience of continuity that is afforded the performers who work there.<sup>39</sup> Actor Meaghan Davies, comparing the Belvoir Street Theatre with the Lyric Theatre in which she was currently working at the time, noted, "I could walk into that space [Belvoir Street] and feel very at home, whereas I wouldn't come back here in even two months' time and feel at home."<sup>40</sup> This feeling of being 'at home' is closely associated with a hestial mode of dwelling; it includes a rooted familiarity, a sense of belonging, and an identification with a place.<sup>41</sup> At Belvoir, Meaghan explained that she feels "integral."<sup>42</sup> Her work history in that place and her sense that she is part of the community centred on that particular building all strengthen her sense of belonging. The profoundly hermetic circumstances in which performers work constantly undermine any sense of continuity and belonging, leaving performers vulnerable to feeling isolated and devalued.

Performers' desire for a sense of continuity also finds expression in a preference for older theatres and for those constructed out of materials that, like brick and wood, reflect a more human scale. In one sense, this is reflective of a wider cultural aesthetic that values historical buildings that predate large-scale prefabricated concrete development. However, theatrical performers express a particular concern with texture and tradition. Many of the performers working on *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* compared the Lyric Theatre unfavourably with others they had worked in. Puppeteer Nicola Fearn expressed a preference for "old brick and stone and iron

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<sup>39</sup> When speaking of a 'resident production company' I am only referring to administrative and production staff.

<sup>40</sup> Davies, interview.

<sup>41</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan views the conditions "necessary for an elemental sense of place" as "a pause in movement" and "permanence." Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, 138. Such a situation leads to the 'empathetic insideness' that Edward Relph outlines. To be empathetically inside a place "is to understand that place as rich in meaning, and hence to identify with it." Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 55.

<sup>42</sup> Davies, interview.

balustrades ... and wood.”<sup>43</sup> Puppeteer Heath McIvor elaborated on what he felt was missing from newer theatres such as the Lyric:

There’s something that you can’t create in these newer theatres. I mean, yeah, sure, its just a big square block with wings and stuff, and its all black anyway, but definitely the architecture and just the feel you get in the older theatres ... there’s more ghosts and spooky stories and old rooms for the mechs to get pissed in that these new theatres don’t really have.<sup>44</sup>

Cover performer Brian Parker commented, “This is a modern theatre and I don’t particularly like modern theatres that much.”<sup>45</sup> Parker elaborated with a series of questions: “Where’s the grandeur? Where’s the wood? Where’s the beautiful textured things?” Texture is important; smooth surfaces, lacking a definite texture, seemingly allow experiences to evaporate; history is not retained. By way of contrast, rough textures and surfaces that are scarred and marked are experienced as accumulating, acquiring, and retaining; for performers, textured theatres retain a tangible history of work and labour.<sup>46</sup>

The hermetic conditions of work that are endured by performers are particularly discernible in the way in which theatre buildings are experienced. Theatres are themselves subject to quite extreme states of usage, alternating between darkness and dormancy, when no production is in residence, and states of fully inhabited vibrancy whilst a performance is in progress.<sup>47</sup> A given space within a theatre might, therefore, afford rest and relaxation during certain time periods, only to be transformed into a place of hurriedness at others. Performers are aware of this and may take it upon themselves to effect this transformation so as to prepare the building for the activity of performance. Julia Zemiro spoke of performing at the Stables where she felt it

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<sup>43</sup> Fearn, interview.

<sup>44</sup> McIvor, interview. The term ‘mech’ is an abbreviation of ‘mechanist.’ A ‘mechanist’ is a stagehand whose job involves the loading and unloading, construction, operation and repair of stage scenery and components.

<sup>45</sup> Parker, interview.

<sup>46</sup> Julia Zemiro joked that in The Stables the walls are so “grubby” that famous performers like Geoffrey Rush, Cate Blanchett, and Mel Gibson “really are in those walls.” Zemiro, interview.

<sup>47</sup> This is especially the case with commercial theatres that usually employ a skeleton staff to maintain the venue whilst it is not in use. In theatres where a resident production company utilises the building year round, many staff may be present. However, while a theatre is dark, the spaces around it remain, in a sense, unfulfilled.

necessary during one production to each evening “wake” the theatre and “warm up the space” by “switching lights on [and] moving the dust around.”<sup>48</sup> The shifting, hermetic conditions experienced by performers both at a broader socio-economic scale and at the scale of personal practice create a situation where constant movement is necessary and rest is ultimately untenable: “You have to run to keep still. You have to change all the time to stay where you were.”<sup>49</sup> While working performers are, therefore, always engaged in journeys of one sort or another, and it is to describing the particular nature of performers’ journeys around and within the practitioner spaces of theatres that I now turn.

### *Spatio-temporal Journeys*

In Chapter Two I cited Simon Callow’s observation that theatres are centripetal; the stage or performance space within a theatre acts as the focal point for the building’s functions.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, while I also cited Iain Mackintosh’s description of the function of a theatre being “the channelling of energy from actor to audience and back again,” the primary flow of energy within a theatre building is almost always inwards, directed towards the performance space itself.<sup>51</sup> In the experience of practitioners such an inward focus is further intensified once a production has opened, even if a performance is not running at the time. This is because phenomenologically, “stage space and the stage event are one and the same thing; they are reciprocal entities, impossible to keep separate for very long.”<sup>52</sup> Performers’ perceptions are that “your focus is always on the show,”<sup>53</sup> and “your concentration is on the stage, not on the backstage.”<sup>54</sup> Even while backstage, performers are still intimately involved in the performance occurring onstage. While secondary activities may be engaged in – chatting, reading, resting, exercising – performers still have “one ear on the show”<sup>55</sup>;

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<sup>48</sup> Zemiro, interview.

<sup>49</sup> David Hare, *Acting Up* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), 218. In actors’ slang to be ‘resting’ is to be unemployed or to be otherwise engaged in non-artistic employment.

<sup>50</sup> See chap. 3, p. 58.

<sup>51</sup> Mackintosh, “Who Decides The Sort of Theatres We Get?” in *Making Space for Theatre: British Architecture and Theatre since 1958*, 24. See also, chap. 3, p. 61.

<sup>52</sup> Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater* (London: University of California Press, 1985), 50.

<sup>53</sup> Walker, interview.

<sup>54</sup> Kennedy, interview.

<sup>55</sup> Muggleton, interview.

“you can sit down, but you are constantly aware that you can’t get too comfortable.”<sup>56</sup> Laura Hamilton, a musical theatre performer, described this in terms of her experience as a parent: “you are always aware of where your children are and what they are doing.”<sup>57</sup> The focus on the performance space, and the resulting subordination of backstage space, contributes to an attitude amongst performers that, “as long as you believe in the project, or believe in what you are doing then [...] you’ll put up with just about anything [backstage].”<sup>58</sup>

Spatially, performers undertake journeys from the locations of their daily life – their places of residence or daytime work – to the stage or performance space, and then back again once the performance has concluded. Such journeys involve inscribing certain pathways through the landscape that surrounds each theatre, entering the building itself and subsequently inscribing pathways through the building. Although not the focus of this research, the external journey to and from the place of performance cannot be overlooked. The journey to a theatre can take a number of forms – walking, cycling, driving, using public transport – that often feed into or, indeed, form part of, performers’ pre-performance preparations. Vocal preparations might be undertaken whilst driving, or driving might be avoided as mental adjustments are made; actor Barry Otto mentioned that he often avoids driving to performances because of the “ferment in my head.”<sup>59</sup>

Performers’ spatial journeys to their places of work form an important part of the process whereby performers make meaning of the performance work they undertake. Theatres occupy certain positions in the landscape that carry with them connotations of status and ideology. Marvin Carlson writes, “the historical tension between the theatre as art form and the theatre as commercial enterprise has naturally been reflected in theatre structures and theatre locations.”<sup>60</sup> Some, like the Old Fitzroy, subtly indicate their presence in the urban landscape; the Old Fitzroy is quite literally ‘tucked away’ in a quiet inner-city street, occupying a ‘fringe’ geographical situation

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<sup>56</sup> Zemi, interview.

<sup>57</sup> Laura Hamilton, interview with author, Sydney, New South Wales, 24 January 2004.

<sup>58</sup> Cutting, interview.

<sup>59</sup> Barry Otto, interview with author, Sydney, New South Wales, 29 October 2001. Deborah Kennedy reported doing vocal preparations whilst driving. Kennedy, interview.

<sup>60</sup> Carlson, *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture*, 98.

in concert with its positioning of itself as a venue for small scale independent theatre. The Sydney Theatre presents itself to the street as a traditional boulevard theatre, strategically located in what is now a definite cultural precinct. Immediately adjacent to the harbour, the Sydney Theatre benefits from the newly gentrified affluence surrounding it. The Sydney Opera House's "steady magnificence"<sup>61</sup> coupled with its uniquely prominent position on Bennelong Point are indicators of the prestige it commands. Any performance that occurs there – from school concerts to solo musical acts – is likewise endowed with prestige. Of the Opera House, actor Kate Fitzpatrick has written, "Whenever I visit I always experience a great sense of excitement, as if I am embarking on a voyage."<sup>62</sup> The discourse of practitioners themselves also affects their own understandings of the places in which they work. In rehearsals for a production of Brendan Cowell's *Rabbit* at the Stables in 2003, the stage manager, Alison Hepburn-Brown, addressed the cast, describing the area in which the theatre is located in terms of the difficulty of car parking and the presence of 'some undesirables' in the streets. From the journeys performers undertake, as well as such seemingly innocuous remarks about the geographic situation of theatres, performers come to understand the position of their practice within the field of theatrical performance, as well as the position of that field in relation to larger fields of 'power' and 'class relations.' In broader terms, performers form an understanding of their place in society at large.

The manner in which performers obtain entry to the practitioner spaces of theatres is also of vital importance to their own understandings of their position and status as performers. A stage door, in whatever physical manifestation it takes, is often the first point of contact with a theatre building for most practitioners.<sup>63</sup> Being the point of arrival at the actual place of performance, a stage door marks an important threshold in the journey of a performer to the stage. Gay McAuley has noted, citing Gaston Bachelard, that a stage door is "a door of hesitation."<sup>64</sup> It is a point that demarcates between those who may enter – due to their possession of professional competence, cultural capital and insurance coverage – and those who may not. It marks the

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<sup>61</sup> Ruth Cracknell, *A Biased Memoir* (Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1997), 241.

<sup>62</sup> Kate Fitzpatrick, "The Opera House - Two Decades Back," *The Sydney Papers* 6, no. 2 (1994): 109.

<sup>63</sup> All the theatres documented in chap. 3 possess separate practitioner entry points (some more formalised than others) suggesting that such separation is valued.

<sup>64</sup> McAuley, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre*, 67.

boundary between everyday social reality and theatre practitioners' "kingdom."<sup>65</sup> While Casey states that "in many cases the distinction between inside and outside is a comparatively complex matter,"<sup>66</sup> McAuley observes that a stage door "is a particularly potent force in that the separation that it marks is so absolute."<sup>67</sup> Any spectator entering through the stage door immediately attracts an air of transgression. Likewise, the practitioner who is witnessed venturing out of the stage door before or during a performance (especially in costume) also transgresses. The physical reality of stage doors is also important in understanding the force they exert. McAuley has insightfully described the reality of many stage doors as,

[R]ather bleak: unmarked doors, suggestive of warehouse or factory rather than theatre, basement entrances in anonymous courtyards, armoured doors in backstreets, doors opened only to those possessing the security code, doors guarded by uniformed doorkeepers.<sup>68</sup>

These, she notes, differ markedly from the "images in our collective imaginary, sedulously cultivated by Hollywood."<sup>69</sup> Indeed, in Sydney, stage doors are generally anonymous, sometimes doubling as fire exits and often accessed from out of the way areas. Performers are therefore set apart, but their experience, as McAuley observes, is "fundamentally utilitarian."<sup>70</sup>

The entry protocols that govern performers' access to practitioner space further serve as a means by which performers understand their own position and status. Actor Camilla Ah Kin compared two Sydney theatres directly; at the Sydney Opera House,

The stage door is very clearly the stage door and you've got to go through security and all that sort of stuff, but walking in with you are musicians with their big cello cases and ballerinas. It's kind of like all the tradesmen coming in to their place of work.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Callow, *Being an Actor*, 182.

<sup>66</sup> Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, 123.

<sup>67</sup> McAuley, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre*, 67.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. A photograph of Al Pacino leaving the Booth Theatre during the 1982 run of *American Buffalo* demonstrates this romantic image of the star actor emerging from the theatre. Barricades were erected to hold back adoring fans and allow Pacino to access a waiting vehicle. See Harriet Whelchel, ed., *The Shuberts Present: 100 Years of American Theater* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 104.

<sup>70</sup> McAuley, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre*, 69.

<sup>71</sup> Ah Kin, interview.

Ah Kin contrasted the formality of this entrance, coupled with its heavy traffic of practitioners, to the Belvoir Street Theatre where “it’s more like – it’s a little bit the same – but it’s a bit more like going into your little house ... and all your family are waiting in there because everyone knows each other and there’s not the same protocol attached to it.”<sup>72</sup> Each theatre develops an atmosphere that stems in part from the different entry protocols that govern access.

The journeys performers undertake within a theatre building, either to reach their dressing rooms or to reach the performance space itself, are another important means by which practitioners make meaning from their surrounds. Generally, the spatial journey from the stage door incorporates a parallel movement from the communal to the personal; entering a theatre before a performance involves initial social rituals of greeting and passing through spaces that are the workplace of other theatre staff and practitioners. Within theatres performers establish a base for their activities – usually their dressing room – and it is to this more personal space that they will first travel upon entering the building. Such an initial interior journey can highlight the degree to which an actor identifies with the history and community associated with the particular theatre in which they are performing. One actor, who started working professionally in England before immigrating to Australia, mentioned the effect that memorabilia on the walls of some theatres had on him:

With the Wharf, you have to walk along that bloody corridor, unless you go up the back stairs. And what is along that corridor but names and photographs and posters of actors, of past glories, most of which you haven’t been involved in. And all of the actors you hate because they’ve obviously had more work than you’ve ever had. I get some pretty strong mixed emotions when I walk into the Wharf actually ... and when I go up the stairs at Belvoir Street, because they’re not theatres I’ve worked at a lot and [...] I often feel quite vulnerable and excluded from those places.

The spatial journeying I have described above is intimately bound up with particular experiences of temporality. Here, following Henri Bergson, I approach time not from the perspective of homogeneous clock time, but from “the experience of temporal

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<sup>72</sup> Ah Kin, interview.

flow,”<sup>73</sup> or to use Bergson’s term, *durée* (‘duration’ or ‘experienced duration’).<sup>74</sup> Rather than approaching time in quantitative terms, Bergson advocates approaching it in terms of the consciousness of *flow*, “that which consciousness reaches immediately.”<sup>75</sup> This consciousness of flow involves an awareness of duration as “an organic evolution, which is yet not an increasing quantity.”<sup>76</sup> In this way, as F. C. T. Moore argues, “our awareness of temporal unfolding is in terms of its various rhythms.”<sup>77</sup>

In performers’ experiences there is a disjunction between the temporal patterns of everyday social reality and those encountered whilst working on a performance. Performers’ experiences encompass fluctuations in the pacing of temporal flows as well as the development of distinct rhythms and the circularity of repetition. During rehearsals and performance seasons the awareness of approaching dates and deadlines impinges on performers’ temporal experiences; actor Patrick Dickson referred to the “tightening up” of time that occurs in the face of an imminent performance.<sup>78</sup> To articulate performers’ experiences of temporality I describe two different temporal axes, both of which are foremost in performers’ lived experiences. The first is that of an entire season and the second is that of a single performance.

### 1. An Entire Season

Over the course of their two-month Sydney season, performers working on *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* reported experiencing distinct periods during which certain temporal flows were predominant. These periods were physically tangible and were underlined by the statements of the performers who, while unable to articulate the shifts between each period, were conscious of the contrasts between them. The

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<sup>73</sup> F. C. T. Moore, *Bergson: Thinking Backwards, Modern European Philosophy*. (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 55.

<sup>74</sup> F. C. T. Moore argues that this term might be better translated as ‘durance,’ reflecting Bergson’s emphasis, in using ‘*durée*,’ on “*the fact or property of going through time.*” *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>75</sup> Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. F.L. Pogson (London: Allen & Unwin, 1950), 127.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>77</sup> Moore, *Bergson: Thinking Backwards*, 64.

<sup>78</sup> Dickson, interview.

first period encompassed the hectic ‘bump-in’<sup>79</sup> and initial weeks of performances; following this was a period of increasing routine and regularity; a final period, characterised by increasing tiredness accompanied by more frequent instances of illness and injury, was encountered at the end of the season.

Tight transfer schedules, numerous two-performance days, the pressure of performing in Sydney (home for many of the performers) and the proximity of opening night to Christmas and New Year holidays resulted in a hectic bump-in and initial weeks of performances. Throughout this period, the imminent and inevitable approach of deadlines was apparent and time was a scarce resource, flowing at incredible speed. The pressure of the tight schedule was exacerbated through significant delays in transporting the set from Brisbane on the first day, Monday 15<sup>th</sup> December. The first truck arrived four hours late, while office equipment for both stage management and company management did not arrive until much later; Laura, the company manager, commented that they were ‘hamstrung’ until it did. The delays and subsequent effort to catch up led to multiple tasks being performed at once; on the following day, the sound-check for both orchestra and cast was carried out whilst rigging work continued overhead. Talk throughout the crew was of how “far behind” they were. The technical rehearsal – described by one performer as “the longest day”<sup>80</sup> – proceeded according to a stop-start rhythm. In the midst of the hurried preparations this undercut any sense of momentum and paradoxically led to the frustrating impression of a long, slow expanse of time in which seemingly little was achieved.

Performers commented that there was “tremendous pressure”<sup>81</sup> associated with the opening in Sydney, with one performer describing it as the “crazy shitless panic part of the run.” In the week following the opening night, one of the dancers, Amelia McQueen, commented that she kept forgetting what day it was: “I feel like I’m on a time loop,” she mentioned, “... it’s still moving around.” Her thought was that, “from next week” things would start to settle down, “I’ll start to remember what time the shows are.” Added to the speed at which the initial week passed was a sense of increasingly ruthless circularity. Meaghan Davies reflected later that during this

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<sup>79</sup> The term ‘bump-in’ refers to the process of moving a production into a theatre in readiness for final rehearsals and the commencement of a season.

<sup>80</sup> Retallick, interview.

<sup>81</sup> Muggleton, interview.

period, “It felt like all I was doing was working and going to bed.”<sup>82</sup> Amongst performers there was also an awareness of the degree to which the temporal landscape was subject to an organised schedule. Shortly before one Thursday performance, Amanda Muggleton complained, “I’m tired. From now until our day off it’s two on Saturday, then two on Sunday, then a day off, then two on Tuesday. It’s never ending.” At the end of the first week of public performances, the relief of the practitioners involved in *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* was evidenced in the posters that appeared in the Lyric’s stairwells advertising ‘T.T.L.I.S.’ (‘Thank The Lord It’s Sunday’), a social gathering in Kings Cross intended to “shake off the shackles of a mother trucker of a week.”

Following New Year, a regular weekly pattern of performance times fed the development of another distinct rhythm. Being a production aimed at a young audience, matinee performances were scheduled for every day except Mondays, with additional evening performances on Fridays and Saturdays. Performer Terry Ryan remarked that, with the new regular rhythm, “There is some repetition that does work well for you. It’s almost like a muscle memory.” A collective muscle memory developed, an intersubjective understanding of the temporal rhythms associated with each day’s performances. The regularity and the common rhythm of each individual performance resulted in an increasing awareness of repetition as well as the expanse of time available; performers experienced time as expanding, opening up as they became more acclimatised to the season’s routines. They joked about their experience of performing approaching that of Bill Murray’s character in the Hollywood movie *Groundhog Day* and increasingly they engaged in pastimes; games, crosswords and reading became apparent during performances.

Towards the conclusion of the Sydney season a tangible sense that things were winding down was evident, accompanied by the threat of complacency and more play amongst the cast. One puppeteer, Joanne Foley observed that each day felt shorter: “the whole show feels like it’s going a lot quicker, and I think it’s because we’re getting towards the end. But I also think it’s because we’re doing less two-show days.

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<sup>82</sup> Davies, interview.

And that makes a really big difference.”<sup>83</sup> Brian Parker identified a shift in attention that occurred at this time: “Now it’s like ... we’ve just got three more weeks to go and people are concentrating on what they are going to do after this show rather than what they are doing during the show.”<sup>84</sup> This, he added, was a particularly dangerous situation: “when people know it’s the end of the tour they relax a bit, and that’s when injuries tend to happen.”<sup>85</sup> Parker’s comments were borne out by the number of minor injuries and illness towards the end of the season that forced adjustments in the ‘plots’<sup>86</sup> of many of the cast. The threat of unemployment also started to become apparent, with Meaghan Davies commenting, “because that job security that you’ve had for so long is gone you are spending time off emailing people and job hunting again.”<sup>87</sup> Socially, there was also a growing awareness that, “when it finishes we won’t see each other.”<sup>88</sup> There was also a genuine tiredness due to the need to continue performing. Joanne Foley explained her physical state towards the end of the season:

I feel it physically now. My body’s tired ... and because I’m doing Mrs Beaver – she’s the kind of puppet I have to squat down with – I’ve got my left calf muscle, there’s certain times when I squat down there when I just ... it’s just tired. And my right arm, because I manipulate her mostly with my right arm; she’s got a really fat spring in her, connecting her neck to her head, and she’s a very heavy puppet. And I’m feeling my right arm, my upper arm muscles and my wrist ... and I’ve got cracks in it, cracks in my elbow. It’s repetitive strain basically. It’s just you’re doing the same thing over and over again without a break. So, physically, I’m feeling tired now.<sup>89</sup>

British playwright David Hare, writing of his experience performing in the solo performance *Via Dolorosa*, described his tired state towards the end of his lengthy New York season:

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<sup>83</sup> Joanne Foley, interview with author, Sydney, New South Wales, 17 January 2004.

<sup>84</sup> Parker, interview.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> The term ‘plot’ refers to the schedule of activities and duties each practitioner (both performers and crew) is required to carry out.

<sup>87</sup> Davies, interview.

<sup>88</sup> Amelia McQueen, interview with author, Sydney, New South Wales, 11 January 2004.

<sup>89</sup> Foley, interview.

I am in the tunnel and I must get through. Life is pared down to lying in bed and doing the show. Thus, yesterday, Saturday: bed, matinee, bed, evening performance, bed. All impression of the play's effect gone. Only the fact of doing it. Then doing it again.<sup>90</sup>

The practice of explicitly counting down the performances remaining in a season is evidence of performers' experience of the linear temporal extension of a production's season and their awareness of its segmentation into distinct units that need to be dealt with one at a time. Passing me in the wings towards the end of one performance, one of the dancers working on *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Paul O'Keefe, jokingly stated "only 39 shows to go." When I later questioned whether he was accurate in his counting he replied that he and some of the other dancers had in fact been counting down the total number of performances remaining since the Brisbane season. On the production *Run Rabbit Run*, a schedule pinned to the fridge door in the greenroom listed each performance. At the conclusion of each performance, the stage manager, Kylie Mascord, would strike its listing out with a thick black pen. "It's very cathartic to cross the last one off," she remarked. In the *Run Rabbit Run* dressing room, performers discussed the remaining shows. One actor, Wayne Blair, remarked, that there were "four more [shows] to go" in the week, and then ran through a list of the shows the following week, "Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Thursday, Friday ...". As he finished, another of the actors, Georgina chimed in, listing the shows remaining until the end of the season, "Saturday, Saturday, Sunday." Performers are acutely aware of their position within larger timescales.

The practice of counting down the remaining performances, coupled with performers' statements about performing, point to an awareness that being in a production somehow places a performer outside the bounds of a 'normal' life and outside the temporal rhythms of everyday social reality. Actor Joseph Connell, touring on *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, explained, "We all say, 'this is not reality' [...] Don't make any decisions on tour, because this is not reality."<sup>91</sup> Connell expressed the sentiment that once the season finished he would return "back to normal life," while Katrina Retallick mentioned on the last day of the season, "I feel like I'm going to get

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<sup>90</sup> Hare, *Acting Up*, 245. Hare's account of his work on *Via Dolorosa* provides numerous insights into acting. His very unfamiliarity with the work required when acting aids this.

<sup>91</sup> Connell, interview.

my life back tomorrow.”<sup>92</sup> Such feelings were also present amongst performers during *Run Rabbit Run*. Shortly before entering for one evening performance, actors Jody Kennedy and Julie Hamilton discussed the impending end of the season. Kennedy stated, “I can’t wait to get back into a normal routine,” to which Hamilton replied, “I don’t know when to eat anymore.” Common to these remarks is an understanding that performing is an extra-daily activity in which the everyday routines of activity, particularly eating and sleeping, are disrupted or set aside.

## 2. A Single Performance

Across the axis of one performance, the disjunction between the temporal patterns of everyday social reality and those of performing are evident, as is the segmentation of time and the fluctuations in temporal flow. Even before performers reach the theatre they are often preparing for performance by withdrawing themselves from the regular routines of life. David Hare, again writing of *Via Dolorosa*, explained, “Throughout the day, it’s impossible to think of anything else.”<sup>93</sup> John Bell has expressed similar sentiments, stating, “I think you are at work all day, you are saving something, working yourself up towards the night.”<sup>94</sup> The ‘saving of something’ that Bell speaks of becomes explicit when performers separate themselves from their daily routines and begin to consciously prepare themselves for the approaching performance. American actor Anna Deavere Smith writes, “[I]f I am in a run, by 3pm in the afternoon my non-play-related activities have more or less ceased and I try not to take phone calls after that time.”<sup>95</sup> For Patrick Dickson, “Performance tends to come on about 5pm.” Shortly after this he leaves home “so I can clear my mind.”<sup>96</sup> Dickson also mentioned that he doesn’t eat after five o’clock when performing in the evening. The consideration of when to cease eating is something often discussed by performers and varies according to the physical and emotional intensity of the performance required.

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<sup>92</sup> Retallick, interview.

<sup>93</sup> Hare, *Acting Up*, 81.

<sup>94</sup> Dickson, interview.

<sup>95</sup> Mary Luckhurst and Chloe Veltman, eds., *On Acting: Interviews with Actors* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), 134.

<sup>96</sup> Dickson, interview.

Once within the theatre, the calls made by the stage manager profoundly affect performers' awareness of temporal flow and are the primary means by which they structure their backstage activities. Performers are largely unaware of the standard chronological measurement of time once in the theatre and, instead, are only aware of the rapid approach of the performance and the time remaining before it commences. Amelia McQueen reported: "Once I'm in the theatre I take off my watch and I don't know what time it is and I do everything by the calls."<sup>97</sup> In general, performers and actors working in Australia are required to be in the theatre by the 'half,' a term that denotes half an hour before the call to 'beginners.' 'Beginners' refers to a point five minutes before the show starts. While this was the standard on all the productions I observed, with *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, an hour call had been negotiated. This led to a system of calls and organised warm-ups. Each call delimited a temporal period within which certain behaviours became habitual. Inevitably, the calls of stage management ensure that the dominant temporal sense, pre-performance, is, itself, centripetal, drawing performers in to the beginning of the performance.

Following the commencement of a performance, the plot each practitioner must execute largely affects his or her temporal experience of that performance. Given the large scale and technical nature of *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, each performance was broken down into specific cues that dictated the action to be taken by any individual. In this way, each individual practitioner was responsible for his or her own plot, a personal patch of performative territory. On *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Yolande Brown described her plot as "quite segmented," with the result that she felt like she was "jumping in and out of character."<sup>98</sup> Other performers expressed similar notions, feeling that they operated "cue to cue."<sup>99</sup> Within performances, certain informal markers gained importance as indicators of the progression of time, specifically by indicating the time left until the *end* of the performance. During *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* the radio microphone operator, Hayley Ford, remarked that the second last song sung by actor Joseph Connell was her favourite, "because it means we're on the way home." To this she added, "When he starts his last we go nuts because that's the end of the show."

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<sup>97</sup> McQueen, interview.

<sup>98</sup> Brown, interview.

<sup>99</sup> McQueen, interview.

The presence of one or more intervals within a performance is a common way in which performers understand the temporality of each individual performance. Gay McAuley, in discussing performance segmentation, has defined intervals as examples of “macro segmentation.”<sup>100</sup> McAuley has demonstrated that such segmentation is important for spectators in terms of the structuring of performance narrative. For performers, too, intervals are an important way in which performances are segmented. It is only whilst a performance is not actually in progress that performers are able to shift their concentration elsewhere. Intervals, therefore, invite reflection and the comparison of the various ‘macro units’ that make up a complete performance.<sup>101</sup> When questioning performers on their experience of time during performances, many compared the length of different acts. For Meaghan Davies on *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the second act felt much longer than the first. For Georgina Naidu on *Run Rabbit Run*, the first act felt slow compared with a second act that only seemed “twenty five minutes long.” Notable in both these accounts is the disjunction between lived time and chronological time; Davies knew that the second act was chronologically shorter than the first, while Naidu also knew that the second act was on average only seven minutes shorter than the first.

After a performance has finished there is little to hold performers backstage. Following the removal of their costumes and makeup, performers commonly exited quickly, either to the public areas of the theatre, or out of the building entirely. With *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* the only reason performers remained backstage was if a second performance was scheduled for later in the day or if they were taking friends on a backstage tour. When leaving the theatre building post-performance, performers often experience a sense of temporal dislocation. The scarcity of windows, combined with the centripetal temporal environment, exacerbates the lack of contact with the world outside the theatre. Performer Leighton Young commented, “It’s a really weird time warp thing. Because you come into the place ... you can come into the place and it’s daylight, and you can go out and it’s dark.”<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> McAuley, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre*, 158.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Leighton Young, interview with author, Sydney, New South Wales, 10 January 2004.

*Routine and Rhythm*

Across the temporal axis of an entire season of performances, the circular rhythm of repetition – derived from performers executing the same actions multiple times over a period of weeks, months or even years – encourages the development of strong routines. Combined, these routines create distinctly rhythmical backstage choreographies. They not only consist of a set of actions that must be carried out in a certain order but actions that must be carried out within a timeframe determined by the performance on stage. David Seamon's concept of 'place ballets' suitably represents the effect of a myriad of routine personal practices. A 'place ballet' "brings people together physically" and creates a "visible collective entity."<sup>103</sup> For performers, the backstage choreography that develops is, in effect, an intersubjective embodied understanding of what it is to successfully and efficiently execute the performance.

From the beginning of the bump-in into the Lyric Theatre, the practitioners involved in *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* defined and categorised space within the building, preparing the ground upon which strong routines could become established and then be maintained throughout the season. Because the production had already performed over a number of weeks in Brisbane, an existing and highly developed set of routines and working methods needed to be negotiated into the new housing of the Lyric. During the first two days of the bump-in the stage manager, Katy Pitney, together with her assistant stage manager, Jessica Burns, facilitated this process by allocating spaces to the various departments and individuals involved in the production. Initially they, and the other practitioners as they arrived, drew comparisons with their former venue in Brisbane. Jessica was optimistic: "we're going to be able to set it out pretty much like Brissy." Katy tempered her optimism by pointing out the lack of space available in the opposite prompt wing; a level of adaptation would be required. Areas within the theatre were given shorthand names, "this is band land." Rooms were allocated an official function: "Mechs [mechanists] and elects [stage electricians] in here." Performers' dressing rooms were allocated on the basis of their status and personal preferences; higher status performers received individual rooms closest to the stage.

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<sup>103</sup> Seamon, *A Geography of the Lifeworld: Movement, Rest and Encounter*, 64.

During the weeks following the opening of *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, performers developed robust routines. For many, these routines became so habitualised that they remained an unnoticed and effectively invisible component of their work. Puppeteer Terry Ryan's activities in the time leading up to the show's single interval are an example of one small instance in a larger series of daily actions. Having finished his act one performance, Terry would walk from the stage to the lift, where he would call the lift and, before it arrived, return to his dressing room. Here he picked up a mug and a tea bag as well as the biscuits he daily brought to the theatre in a Tupperware container. He would then walk to a back-up singers' booth located in the prompt wing where he would provide back-up vocals for the final song of act one. At the conclusion of the song he would immediately walk to where the lift was now waiting for him and take it up to the greenroom. Though trivial, indeed mundane, this daily pattern enabled Terry to maximise the time available to him during the interval; the Lyric's sole lift was notoriously slow, and through the development of this set routine, Terry established and then maintained a highly efficient mode of practice.

In an interview, principal Joseph Connell expressed his awareness that his backstage activities had become organised into a set routine. Connell commented, "it's so mechanical now that I don't even think of it. Like, it doesn't bore me or anything, it's just something I do." Elaborating on this he continued:

I think it's got to the point [that], after doing the show for ten months, I've got a total pattern. It's a total routine. And I don't really change that at all. It's funny, like I ... by the time I get into my room and by the time I finish shaving I know within a minute, without looking at my watch, that I'll be hearing the fifteen minute call and then I go and I'm totally on cue. And at the same time I rock up to warm up and at the same time it finishes. And then I get to the pit at the same time – and usually the four kids get there in the same order every day – it's almost exactly the same. You know who you are going to pass and I think everyone – you have your same positions offstage in scenes that you're not in and you chat to the same person. It's like ... I find I just meet that person up the back and we have a daily chat ...<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Connell, interview.

Routines operated at a number of levels and involved all the practitioners on *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Technical practitioners, too, engaged in routine activity that preceded the commencement of each performance and continued after its close. So-called ‘preset’ routines ensured that every element of the production was reset and in the correct position; practitioners cleaned, re-placed and checked equipment and items used in the performance. One mechanist commented that after a while the show becomes “irrelevant ... it just happens.”

The repetition inherent in the development of offstage routines echoes the repetitive basis of much rehearsal practice, and a comparison of rehearsal dynamics and the dynamics of backstage behaviour suggests a commonality of function between the two. While rehearsal involves the creation of performance material, the subsequent repetition of this material is a conservative behaviour, designed to reinforce and retain that which has been created. It is such repetition that lies at the etymological root of the word ‘rehearsal.’ Similar to rehearsal, the establishment of backstage routines through the repetition of certain activities involves a conservative tendency in the behaviours of performers; routines are cultivated (or, at the very least, allowed to emerge) as a way of ensuring that the performative tasks required can be efficiently achieved. The comments of Joseph Connell are revealing here. Following his previously cited comments, Connell added,

I kind of like it because I feel a bit organised ... like I’m not too strict, I don’t get to that position on that very line or anything like that. I think it’s good to have as well because then you are prepared and you know you are going to do the same show, the same show that you did the day before, which I suppose is the goal.<sup>105</sup>

Connell’s statement points to a paradox of modern commodified theatrical performance; each performance in a season must be the same as previous performances, yet at the same time each performance must also remain lively and engaging. Performers enact a string of performances, all parts of an ongoing creative process. Most spectators attend only one performance, which is encountered as a product without the context of process. American actor Julie Harris has commented on the strange nexus between spontaneity and fixity that performers must

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<sup>105</sup> Connell, interview.

accommodate. Speaking of an instance where an accident in rehearsal led to a breakthrough, Harris stated, “This is what acting is – to find the reality of this moment that I found by accident and to be able to reproduce it eight times a week.”<sup>106</sup> Actor Wayne Blair expressed a similar sentiment: “The job of an actor,” he stated, is to “do the show as if you’ve done it for the first time.”<sup>107</sup>

Practitioners’ understandings of what it is to be a professional stem from their personal experiences of this paradoxical situation. Routine is necessary in artistic practice if it is to be sustainable. Geoff Todd, Technical Manager at the Penrith Q Theatre expressed a distain for the “culture of the grotty in [amateur] theatre.”<sup>108</sup> For Todd, amateur theatrical productions accommodate unsustainable practices because, “they don’t have to do it tomorrow.”<sup>109</sup> Even if not clean, professional theatre venues are kept organised, reflecting a need for sustainability, and even if a venue’s design impedes sustainable work practices, practitioners will attempt to alter their activities to bring into being such a working environment.

As a researcher conducting fieldwork in practitioner spaces, I encountered the strength of practitioners’ routines as a tangible energy impacting upon my own embodiment, creating a sense of dislocation and placelessness. With both the production of *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* and with Opera Australia’s 2003 Summer Season I frequently experienced a sense of personal placelessness, a lack of suitable fit with my surroundings. This was something I had partially expected, given my position as a researcher unfamiliar with the social and physical environments I had been allowed entry into. However, it was exacerbated by my observation that the practitioners around me always had both a place to be and a time in which to be there. Unlike my rather loose routines and my ability to alter my activities at will, the practitioners around me operated according to a firm understanding of their place at any given moment. They operated according to the distinct rhythms of well established ‘time-space routines.’ Taken together, I experienced these routines as

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<sup>106</sup> Julie Harris quoted in Jackson R. Bryer and Richard A. Davison, eds., *The Actor's Art: Conversations with Contemporary American Stage Performers* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 92.

<sup>107</sup> Wayne Blair, interview with author, Sydney, New South Wales, 20 January 2004.

<sup>108</sup> Geoff Todd, interview with author, Sydney, New South Wales, 16 September 2003.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

forceful ‘place ballets’ that, in the case of *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, I was soon assimilated into. I had to be careful to avoid obstructing those around me, and so my activities were curbed into obedience of the prevailing situation. On occasions when the established ‘place ballet’ for *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* was disrupted in some way, I, and the practitioners around me, became immediately aware of the changes. After observing over twenty performances I found myself highly sensitised to missed or altered lines: I also noted that small changes like this were almost always remarked upon by those backstage. Likewise, the appearance of understudies in performances, particularly during one instance when a principal role was covered, resulted in a cluster of performers gathering in the wings to watch the progress of difficult scenes. However, even during this particular performance, the performers quickly re-established their routines and rhythm and the performance ran according to its usual pattern.

*The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* was a large-scale technical production that, by necessity, required the formulation of quite strict backstage routines.<sup>110</sup> For practitioners, the fact that the production was technical and designed to tour meant that they were readily inclined to assimilate any potential differences (and difficulties) that may have arisen between individual performances. However, even on smaller scale productions, routines are still present and still perform an important function. Specifically, they enable the needs of practitioners to be efficiently met. Performers find themselves inclined to shave at the same time before every performance, or to meet for a cigarette in the same place, or to appear in the wings in the same (or similar) order every evening. Whilst the performance shifts and is uncertain, the backstage can be controlled, and indeed, *must* be controlled. Practitioners’ routines, and the rhythms that are an inevitable part of them, enable the backstage spaces of theatres to be made into certain kinds of places, places that are regularised, controlled and knowable. Routines enable agency and control in the face of the uncertainty, difficulty, and danger of live performance. They enable actions to be remembered and to be efficiently carried out. As in the experience of David Hare, such routines allow the creation of “a kind of deep groove from which I can depart, but which is always

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<sup>110</sup> By ‘technical’ I mean that the performance followed a set musical score and involved quite tightly choreographed movements and set changes.

there underneath me to return to.”<sup>111</sup> To have a routine is to have an existing path that guides future travel. To have established a rhythm for such routine allows performers to understand bodily and intersubjectively that events are progressing satisfactorily.

### *The Practices of Inhabitation*

I have now outlined the larger frameworks of inhabitation that performers create and experience while working within the practitioner spaces of theatres. In so doing, I have described the broad scale spatio-temporal journeys undertaken by performers in the practitioner space of theatres as well as the way these combine and develop to form particular ‘place ballets.’ Having established the context of these larger frameworks I now focus on the more personal practices of inhabitation, the moment-by-moment actions of performers. These practices are the minutiae of their experience, what appear to be the insignificant habits, actions, and exercises that precede, accompany, and follow any given performance. To explain these practices I have grouped them into three categories, preparation for performance, monitoring during performance, and social negotiation.

It is rarely the case that any one activity undertaken by a performer fits just one of these categories. I am, therefore, using such categories merely as heuristic devices. Preparing and monitoring always occur within a social context, even if this takes the form of a reaction *against* a social situation. Specific preparations will develop from the insights gained whilst monitoring a performance, and the monitoring of a performance is always influenced by the specific preparations that have been undertaken. Here I present a strongly categorised account. In Chapter Six I provide an account of how these categories interpenetrate by describing the inhabitation and use of the Belvoir Street Theatre.

#### **1. Preparation**

The major activity that occurs in the practitioner space of theatres is preparation for performance. It is perhaps obvious that the backstage areas function as a

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<sup>111</sup> Hare, *Acting Up*, 119.

“decompression chamber [...] an antechamber [...] just a preparation area,”<sup>112</sup> but what the actual preparation of performers involves is not nearly as transparent. Preparation for performance is both multidimensional and profoundly subjective; its particular features are dependent upon what each individual performer perceives to be her needs at a given time for a given performance. According to John Harrop, preparation is ultimately any activity undertaken by a performer that aids him in “being able to fulfil the total demands of the role.”<sup>113</sup> Using Tim Fitzpatrick’s definition of performance (based on Richard Bauman’s) this includes a performer’s ability to effectively ‘deploy’ her “personal resources through a role in a particular context of situation for the achievement of specific goals.”<sup>114</sup> Psychologist David Roland has identified four distinct dimensions to effective pre-performance preparation. He categorises them as “artistic, psychological, physical and organisational.”<sup>115</sup> For Roland, all preparation is “a way of ensuring that your inner control is reliably maintained no matter what the outside conditions.”<sup>116</sup> ‘Artistic preparation’ therefore involves the maintenance of the techniques and skills needed for continuing effectiveness as a performer, while ‘psychological preparation’ involves developing mental readiness for the challenges of performance. ‘Physical preparation’ refers to the care of performers’ bodies, while ‘organisational preparation’ refers to the development of time management skills that ‘support’ performance. This section will focus mainly on Roland’s categories of ‘physical’ and ‘psychological’ preparation, as it is with these that performers primarily occupy themselves while in the practitioner spaces of theatres. The unpredictability of live performance and the necessity for each performance to appear as if it is occurring for the first time means that, as an actor, “you do everything you can, both physically and mentally to be ready for something else to happen.”<sup>117</sup> Pre-performance preparation may therefore be most helpfully viewed as “preparation for the spontaneous.”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Carroll, interview.

<sup>113</sup> John Harrop, *Acting* (London: Routledge, 1992), 42.

<sup>114</sup> Tim Fitzpatrick, *The Relationship of Oral and Literate Performance Processes in the Commedia Dell’arte: Beyond the Improvisation/Memorialisation Divide* (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995), 53.

<sup>115</sup> David Roland, *The Confident Performer* (Sydney: Currency Press, 1997), 64.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Brian Bates, *The Way of the Actor: A New Path to Personal Knowledge and Power* (London: Century, 1986), 161.

<sup>118</sup> This is a paraphrasing by Brian Bates of comments made by actor Glenda Jackson in Ibid.

In theatrical performance, “the actor’s body is the fundamental sign.”<sup>119</sup> Speaking in semiotic terms, John Harrop observes that the “skill with which an actor creates that sign will have a significant effect upon the audience’s experience of the theatrical event.”<sup>120</sup> Unlike visual artists or musicians, the body of a theatre performer is both the means and the ends of her artistic practice. Yolande Brown described her pre-performance preparation in these terms. In preparing, she focussed on “*my instrument; my voice and my body.*”<sup>121</sup> A great deal of importance rests upon a performer’s physical ability and readiness. Lack of readiness and preparation can result in a poorly executed performance, and the levels of strain placed on both a performer’s body and voice in the act of performing can lead to injury if she hasn’t adequately prepared, resulting in temporary or permanent incapacitation. Loss of income and livelihood is therefore a threat. Physical preparation for performance involves readying the body and the voice for the demands that will be placed upon it.

The actual exercises performers undertake in order to physically prepare for performances bear close similarities to the preparations sportspeople undertake before sporting events. One commonality is the activity of physically stretching, focussing on ‘waking’ the body and ‘warming’ muscles. A second is the personal, idiosyncratic manifestations of such ‘warm-ups.’ Actor Garrett Keogh, writing in *Theatre Ireland* noted the way athletes:

... scratch, roll the shoulders, touch the toes; shake the head, the arms, the hands, the legs; they stretch, breathe, blow, kick, rub, and jog; they drop the head and walk around, or stand still and stare; private steps in a private dance with a beat no-one else can hear.<sup>122</sup>

An athlete’s focus roams through her body, searching out areas of stiffness or concern. So too, a performer’s history of injury may lead to her attention being directed to troublesome areas of her own physique. Physically, performers’ stretches may be based in one technique, but frequently comprise an eclectic mix, co-opted from Yoga, Pilates or Feldenkrais, or from watching other performers. Vocally, performers will work on controlling their breathing, ensuring that they have adequate

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<sup>119</sup> Harrop, *Acting*, 19.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>121</sup> [Italics added] Brown, interview.

<sup>122</sup> Garrett Keogh, "The Blue Tracksuit Syndrome," *Theatre Ireland*, no. 17 (1988): 4.

breath support, as well as diction and articulation, readying the mouth and lips for enunciating text or vocalising.

Psychological preparation for performance is equally as important as physical preparation; indeed, the two are inseparable, something Konstantin Stanislavsky stressed while formulating his System: “In every physical action there is something psychological, and in the psychological, something physical.”<sup>123</sup> It is essential for a performer to be able to step into the view of spectators and execute whatever the requirements of the performance are, and this may involve the negotiation of significant obstacles; lack of motivation, boredom, and unhelpful emotional states may interfere, whilst fear of failure or stage fright may prevent performance from taking place at all. For all performers “there is a thinking process that has to take place” before their performance can commence.<sup>124</sup> Depending on the genre of performance, this may involve a significant transformation into character, or the mental preparedness to produce on cue the emotions or extra-daily movements that a role demands.

In addition to the particular individual needs of performers, the demands of theatrical productions significantly affect the nature and content of preparation. The contrast between *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *Run Rabbit Run* serves as a useful illustration of this point. *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, as described earlier, involved a high degree of physical strain, both on the bodies and the voices of performers. Pre-performance preparation was therefore extensive. An hour call saw most of the performers gather as a group in the Lyric’s main rehearsal room to begin physically warming up. Performers conducted their physical warm-ups in small groupings; the content of the warm-up was both intersubjectively and intercorporeally negotiated. This physical preparation continued during a cast vocal warm-up consisting of scales led by musical director Stephen Gray on piano. This vocal warm-up began forty-five minutes before the call to beginners. Added to this, performers’ physical preparations continued in the wings throughout the performance itself. As a contrast, *Run Rabbit Run* was a largely presentational performance without any extra-

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<sup>123</sup> Sharon M. Carnicke, "Stanislavsky's System: Pathways for the Actor," in *Twentieth Century Actor Training*, ed. Alison Hodge (London: Routledge, 2000), 17.

<sup>124</sup> Gore, interview.

daily movements required of the actors. Although ten actors were utilised, the script called for little overt interaction between these actors, with much of the play consisting of monologues that progressed the narrative. The actors therefore engaged in almost no overt physical preparation; the only two that did, Jody Kennedy and Georgina Naidu, did so because it entailed a general preparation they carried out before most performances regardless of the production at hand. For the majority of the cast, nightly preparation focussed around vocal readiness, with actors walking about the stage, prior to the performance, enunciating sections of text.

In modern western theatre practice, stage managers delineate, and therefore markedly affect, performers' use of space for preparation within practitioner spaces. This delineation involves the marking of certain spaces, or areas within a larger space, as each performer's base for preparation. Usually this is focussed on spaces referred to as dressing rooms. As I have already mentioned in the previous section, in professional theatre practice the allocation of dressing rooms is determined according to a strict hierarchy based on a performer's professional standing and specific needs for the performance at hand. The more important a performer's position within a production, the larger their dressing room, the less likely it will be that they have to share it, and the closer it will be to the stage. Performers with large amounts of cultural capital are therefore able to more readily secure "prime real estate."<sup>125</sup> For stage management to fail in their allocation of dressing rooms can cause major disruption; performers are acutely aware of their entitlements, which may be specified in their employment contracts. In cases where there are no separate dressing rooms, stage management will still commonly allocate particular areas of the shared dressing rooms to particular performers. This is done through printed labels being placed around a room prior to performers arriving. Almost inevitably, performers arrive in a theatre to find that they have been allocated a space.

In taking possession of their allocated space, performers carry out adjustments and re-arrangements of that space to suit their perceived needs. In one respect this is done according to the principle of function; performers set up their allocated space so that it functions as effectively as possible. Performance necessities, including make-up,

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<sup>125</sup> Terry Ryan, interview with author, Sydney, New South Wales, 10 January 2004.

costumes, and towels, are arranged in a convenient fashion. For each production, Amanda Muggleton arranges her makeup across her desk in the order in which she applies it:

I have everything laid out [...] the contour makeup is always up in the top left-hand corner, then the foundation, then the powder, then the eyeliner, then the eye shadow, then the blusher, then the mascara and the lipstick last.<sup>126</sup>

Beyond the rearrangement of dressing room space according to a functional principle, performers also rearrange their dressing rooms in ways that are more personally and symbolically significant. Simon Callow emphasises the implicit sense of ownership and possession when he observes the way “you lay out your make-up in front of the mirror, you hang your towel up [...] in these little ways, it begins to be *your* dressing room.”<sup>127</sup> The phenomenon of performers purposely decorating their dressing rooms is widespread (although not universal) and involves the accumulation of cards, flowers, photographs, and small objects [See *Images 5.12 and 5.13*]. In some cases this can extend to furniture and framed pictures being hung on dressing room walls. Actor Barry Otto reported that during a lengthy season of the musical *Showboat* at the Lyric he brought in his own furniture and hung paintings on the walls of his dressing room.<sup>128</sup> Simon Callow has written of the way such decorations tend to increase during the season of a production, to the extent that, “by the end of the run, you’ll need a pantechnicon van to haul away the accumulated interior decorations.”<sup>129</sup>

Performers may also carry personally significant items for long periods, placing them in each new dressing room they occupy. Nicholas Papademetriou has carried a small pill box with the faces of Tragedy and Comedy on the lid, as well as an object that reminds him of a production he worked on with British director Mike Leigh, and a “clown face that a student/colleague/contemporary at WAAPA gave me for one of our

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<sup>126</sup> Muggleton, interview.

<sup>127</sup> Callow, *Being an Actor*, 183.

<sup>128</sup> Otto, interview.

<sup>129</sup> Callow, *Being an Actor*, 183.

shows because the clown reminded her of the character I was playing.”<sup>130</sup> Similarly, Sandy Gore spoke of how she decorates her dressing rooms:

The only thing that I’ve consistently done has been to put up cards – I always take flowers home – but any cards you get from opening night, and that’s the tradition [...] They’re all warm wishes. [...] My first boyfriend, my first real boyfriend, when I went to the Melbourne Theatre Company, whittled out of balsa wood three little soldiers for me. Actually there were four and I lost one. But I still have three, and they are with me every single play I’ve done – I must have done over fifty plays – and they are absolutely there as good luck charms ... and a photo of my daughter. But always these little men, wherever I’ve been, have always come with me.

Asked why she carries the figurines with her, Gore elaborated:

He was an artist and so good with his hands, and it took him a few hours just to whittle away, just waiting, and I just thought they were such treasures that I’ve kept them ever since. Once you’re there and you think ‘oh, something’s missing’... so you get to the theatre and you put out your towel, the towel over the back of your chair, and a towel to put your makeup on, and clean the mirror, and of course it’s bare then because you’ve still got a week to go before opening night when you get your cards. And you think, ‘oh what’s missing? I’ve got a photograph of my daughter ... I know, my little men’. So then they’ll come in the next night or the next afternoon and go up against the Kleenex – they’re always put alongside the Kleenex box. Lined up. And everyone says, ‘oh, they’re interesting, what are they?’ And I can’t imagine a time when I won’t have them with me.

The decoration of dressing rooms with personally significant items provides a reminder of personal and professional history, and a prompt for sharing stories with other performers.

A gender difference is evident in the way performers mark and individualise the dressing room spaces in which they work. In my observations I have noted that male performers are less likely to decorate their dressing room space than female performers. Instead, male performers’ dressing rooms are often more likely to be where they place their bag when they enter, and where a script, props, and costume items will be located. By contrast, female performers are often required (presumably

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<sup>130</sup> Papademetriou, interview. WAAPA is the Western Australian Academy of the Performing Arts at which Papademetriou trained.

because of societal and industry expectations) to invest more in the state of their onstage appearance, thereby requiring them to use their dressing rooms more thoroughly. Female performers are more likely to engage in explicit decoration as well as cleaning their area of the dressing room prior to settling in. Sandy Gore and Camilla Ah Kin reported bringing cleaning products with them to clean their dressing rooms, Julia Zemiro described vacuuming a particularly dirty space, and Amelia Farrugia commented that, “I don’t decorate my dressing room, but I do remove things.”<sup>131</sup> At one level this behaviour is a straightforward (albeit gendered) response to the levels of dirt and the lack of cleanliness in dressing rooms, as well as a reaction against the sheer sterility of many dressing room environments. Leighton Young and Heath McIvor, sharing a dressing room on *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, hung a string of fairy lights across their dressing room mirrors and kept the fluorescent overhead lights switched off. “We’ve made our own space that we enjoy,” commented McIvor.<sup>132</sup> Camilla Ah Kin emphasised the necessary nature of her alterations to dressing rooms: “You can’t, in my opinion, just run in off the street and throw on an outfit and go out and be.”<sup>133</sup>

Performers’ alteration and decoration of their dressing rooms aids in their psychological preparation for performance by providing them with an environment tailored to their needs. In describing how he usually places cards and photographs of his family on the walls and around the mirror of his dressing room, actor John Bell used the metaphor of ‘feeding’ to describe how the presence of such items helped him prepare:

It’s comfort, reassurance. A blank wall, a blank mirror, it kind of doesn’t feed anything. But if you can see good wishes and well wishes and flowers all around, you know that people care about you. It makes you feel good. It’s something you can feed off.<sup>134</sup>

Camilla Ah Kin elaborated on this idea of a dressing room space ‘feeding’ something. For her, a dressing room is “home, I do everything except hang curtains.” It is,

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<sup>131</sup> Amelia Farrugia, interview with author, Sydney, New South Wales, 12 February 2003.

<sup>132</sup> McIvor, interview.

<sup>133</sup> Ah Kin, interview.

<sup>134</sup> John Bell, interview with author, Sydney, New South Wales, 9 October 2001.

however, “The home for *that* story. The home for *that* character.”<sup>135</sup> It is, “the space *you create* for that thing to exist, to live.”<sup>136</sup> Her inhabitation is specifically geared towards the production she is working on and involves the creation of a space in which aspects of her performance can dwell. The decorations Meaghan Davies exhibited in her dressing room whilst performing on *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* were explicitly connected to the character she was playing. These consisted, amongst other things, of photographs of her when she was the same age as her character Lucy, along with a photo of herself and Yolande, the actor who played her sister Susan in the production. Davies also spoke of consciously decorating “in a really particular way *for* my character.”<sup>137</sup> Amelia McQueen expressed that performers have a need for what she described as an appropriate “sort of information” from the environment: “I really think your environment should be chosen for the show and should connect with the ideas you have for the show.”<sup>138</sup> Given that this is a rarely experienced ideal, performers must effect changes themselves. By ordering the external environment around them performers are able to help articulate the ordering of their own thoughts and emotions prior to the act of performing. Amelia Farrugia explained that “feeling that everything is neat and in order gives me a sense that everything will be okay.”<sup>139</sup> Sandy Gore thought that her ordering of her dressing room “was like some order in my mind as well.”<sup>140</sup> Her summation was that, “all of those little things in the dressing room go to making, to warming up and perfecting and honing and preparing you for the moment when you go from the dark to the light.”<sup>141</sup>

The presence of mirrors in a dressing room is of paramount importance in the psychological preparation of performers, especially if their performance requires the creation and portrayal of a character. Simon Callow has written of the importance of the dressing room and its mirrors when describing his wearing of a given costume for the first time. For Callow, “the moment of first trying the costume on in front of the mirror in the dressing room is powerful and important.”<sup>142</sup> This is because, “The

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<sup>135</sup> [Italics added] Ah Kin, interview.

<sup>136</sup> [Italics added] Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> [Italics added] Davies, interview.

<sup>138</sup> McQueen, interview.

<sup>139</sup> Farrugia, interview.

<sup>140</sup> Gore, interview.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Callow, *Being an Actor*, 183.

moment you see yourself, your brain starts to work differently.”<sup>143</sup> Actors utilise a variety of techniques to develop characterisation. Some actors apply make-up as a disguise; others attempt to alter their embodiment or the energy they produce. However, for Callow, “as you stand in front of the mirror, SOMEONE ELSE LOOKS BACK. This is voodoo.”<sup>144</sup> Visually registering a change in appearance provides an important bolster to the process of creating and embodying a character and aids the understanding and retention of any physical alterations that a performer may have effected. Camilla Ah Kin reported that, “I know as soon as I sit down at that desk I begin to rearrange myself from this person into that person.”<sup>145</sup> This transformation does not take place exclusively in the dressing room itself (nor do all actors undergo such a radical transformation of self), but a dressing room, with its decoration and mirrors, provides a performer with a space in which to base their transformative processes.

This discussion of performers’ use of the dressing rooms provided to them demonstrates the importance of these particular areas within the wider practitioner space of theatres. Dressing rooms are a primary node in which performers enjoy a more hestial mode of dwelling. Using Peter King’s terminology, derived from his recent exploration of ‘private dwelling,’ a performer’s dressing room is an important “stopping place” as well as a place of “filling up.”<sup>146</sup> The adjustments and decorations that performers effect allow them to create spaces that are “properly supportive” of their needs.<sup>147</sup> Without a dressing room of some sort, the backstage inhabitation of performers becomes significantly more precarious. Not all performers have the same requirements; for some, simply having a place to leave a bag is enough, while for others, a greater space is required in which possessions and objects are arranged. However, a dressing room, or equivalent, forms the basis for almost all performers’ preparations, with the space and territory established there forming the focal point of any hestial inhabitation. For this reason, performers experience a primary tension between the dressing room and the performance space, and it is between these two nodes that actors and performers shuttle when in a theatre.

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>145</sup> Ah Kin, interview.

<sup>146</sup> King, *Private Dwelling: Contemplating the Use of Housing*, 178.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 66.

Other nodes within practitioner space are also significant in performers' pre-performance preparations. Performers often seek other spaces in which they can prepare either because their dressing rooms are unsuitable, or because the conditions of performance prevent them from accessing their dressing room. The small size of many dressing rooms makes them generally unsuitable for physical warm-ups; physical preparations need space. For such warm-ups, performers commonly utilise the stage itself, or the side stage; any area with a large available floor-space is suitable. Occasionally theatres possess rooms specifically designated for physical warm-ups; in most cases performers make do with corridors or walkways within the auditorium. The spatial dimensions afforded actors backstage can affect the performance that is given onstage. In practice, it is easier for a performance to be compressed, to be taken from a larger space into a smaller one, than it is for a performance to be expanded from a smaller space into a larger one. John Bell referred to this when he stated,

Ideally, a big dressing room is a fantastic feeling. You can stretch and prepare yourself. It is very difficult to go from a little dressing room onto a big stage and be king-size. You feel more respected with a big space. You are endowed with something you can take onstage with you.<sup>148</sup>

What occurs backstage is fundamentally important in terms of what it gives to the actor or performer, what it makes available to them and feeds into their performance.

Quick-changes<sup>149</sup> and other rooms close to the performance space become useful when performers cannot make it back to their dressing rooms. Given that these areas are encountered under tight temporal conditions, items are arranged very carefully. During *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Amelia McQueen, a physical performer, had a hectic plot, involving nine costume changes and numerous entrances and exits. The constant level of activity required precluded any return to her dressing room, other than during the interval, as it was located on the first floor, above the stage level. Her use of the two quick-change areas, one located prompt and another opposite prompt,

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<sup>148</sup> Bell, interview.

<sup>149</sup> A 'quick-change' is commonly a room or temporary booth that lies in close proximity to the stage and can be utilised for costume changes that must be executed in a short period of time.

was strictly organised for maximum efficiency. This involved sitting items of make-up “in the same order along the shelf,” and always putting “my coat hangers in between the same peoples’ costumes on the rack. So I know that it’s next to Dennis’ cardigan and Jy’s robe.”<sup>150</sup> Performers’ pre-performance preparations involve the demarcation of certain spaces, however small, to be quickly and efficiently used for individual purposes.

Of the many types of spaces commonly found backstage, toilets play a crucial two-fold role in performers’ preparations. Firstly, the provision of toilets in convenient locations is essential given that nervousness experienced in the lead up to a performance can result in the need to urinate. If a theatre venue lacks toilets, or possesses them in inconvenient positions, then this becomes prominent in performers’ experience of that venue. Dancer Julie-Anne Long has spoken of the difficulties experienced at the Performance Space, a Sydney venue that presents hybrid and mixed media performance art. Speaking of the backstage there, Long stated,

All you need to know is that there are no toilets back stage. If the performer remembers to race to the toilet before the audience comes in – then you’re fine. But if you’ve made a fatal miscalculation – the audience is seated and you don’t fancy filling any of the emergency vessels at hand in the dressing room – you realise that you have to perform those ‘amazing feats of virtuosity,’ that dancers are known for, with a full bladder. On a number of occasions the discomfort of the full bladder has defined dance at Performance Space.<sup>151</sup>

Secondly, toilets also allow for solitude. Given the prevalence of communal dressing rooms in Sydney, toilets allow performers to withdraw from a social environment in a way that is socially acceptable. Nicholas Papademetriou has written that, “One can be labelled as pretentious if one asks not to be disturbed ‘because I am preparing’ – even amongst serious acting casts.”<sup>152</sup> Rather than appear pretentious or unfriendly, a withdrawal to a toilet cubicle allows an actor to easily enter a more personal space.

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<sup>150</sup> McQueen, interview.

<sup>151</sup> Julie-Anne Long, "Defining Moments" (paper presented at the Performance Space: Politics and Culture Symposium, Museum of Sydney, November, 2004).

<sup>152</sup> Nicholas Papademetriou, "Re: Thank You," Personal email, 15 August 2003.

Preparations continue even once a performance begins, with performers often choosing particular spots within a show to prepare for other demanding sections. At one level this involves the conservation of performers' energy. Often performers will leave the stage to seek places of rest, utilising chairs and items of scenery or props that allow them to relax for a short period. If time allows, a return to the dressing room will be sought; during performances of *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* Joseph Connell returned to his dressing room after most scenes. "This, I suppose, is my little retreat," he explained, "and I can just shut the door."<sup>153</sup> If particularly demanding physical or vocal sections are approaching, exercises may be undertaken to ensure readiness. Again, before large and physically strenuous scenes in *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, performers would utilise offstage items of set – specifically a 'rock' platform and a flight of 'stone' stairs – as aids for physical exercises and stretching.

Performers also prepare for performances through sleeping in the practitioner space of theatres. In most seasons, performers are required to perform more than once per day, a situation that means they must stay in or near the theatre in the intervening period. Sleeping prepares performers for the rigors of multiple performances. During *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* the first-floor dressing rooms of the Lyric Theatre were largely uncomfortable for sleeping in given their linoleum flooring.<sup>154</sup> Likewise, the small size of the principal performers' rooms prevented some cast members from resting in them. Many performers chose to rest for periods in the greenroom on the top floor. This presented other difficulties, as the presence of light and the sound of other practitioners talking and watching television mitigated against the possibility of sleep. In one case, I observed a member of *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* cast sleeping under one of the greenroom's two pool tables. She had removed cushions from some of the nearby couches and made a small bed on the floor. This allowed her to sleep in the semi-dark. Such behaviour bears out the statement of one performer that, "You just adapt. You're flexible and you adapt."<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Connell, interview.

<sup>154</sup> Despite this, one performer created a makeshift bed out of clothing and a towel that allowed her to rest a little more comfortably on the linoleum flooring.

<sup>155</sup> Parker, interview.

During the time spent working on one production, performers may also, in effect, be preparing for future work. The exercise routines performers developed during *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* presented an interesting example. The production utilised a high degree of physical performance, involving puppeteers, dancers and acrobats and as part of the production, an aerial rig was erected that spanned the stage, allowing performers to be flown across the stage and descend onto it from above. The production's two riggers, Helen and Alison, were required to be present throughout the performance, but for most of this were merely required to stand by. During the run, patterns emerged where Alison and Helen would practise handstands with members of the cast in the prompt wing. Other exercises, like chin-ups were also common. In addition to this, more formal and officially scheduled acrobatics classes were run outside of performance times, utilising the presence of the rig. Amelia McQueen, reflecting on the exercise she was doing, remarked that this,

... could end up changing what sort of jobs I get next, depending on how I look for whatever audition came up. I'm going to look upper body strong after this job because the rock tower was there and I was doing chin-ups on it.<sup>156</sup>

## 2. Monitoring

Once a performance has commenced, and is running, practitioner spaces become a place from which the performance can be monitored and evaluated. In this respect there is a difference between the awareness of practitioners and spectators whilst a performance is in progress. Both practitioner and audience spaces hinge centripetally on the performance space, but practitioners are much more aware of what is occurring in the audience space than the reverse. McAuley notes that in the act of performing, "actors are energized by the presence of the spectators."<sup>157</sup> Backstage, practitioners' interactions and conversations during a performance are often focussed upon the success of the performance as gauged by the reactions of the audience. The degree to which practitioners monitor spectators' reactions has much to do with the potentially disruptive influence of the audience. The success of any performance can be determined by the degree to which it elicits the desired response from spectators. In

<sup>156</sup> McQueen, interview.

<sup>157</sup> McAuley, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre*, 246.

addition, spectators also profoundly influence the dynamics of a performance. *En masse* spectators possess a certain degree of power, and their presence is potentially disruptive. From the perspective of performers, an audience often appears as a dimly lit mass in which individuals may be hard to discern. Performers often refer to audiences in terms of their large size (relative to the individual performer) and the undifferentiated nature of their presence. Performers have referred to audiences both as “the wall of death”<sup>158</sup> and “the black monster.”<sup>159</sup>

Discussion of the audience is a constant theme in conversations between performers, before, during, and after shows. Actor Sacha Horler, speaking at a post-show forum after a Sydney Theatre Company performance of Caryl Churchill’s *Far Away*, described the cast as engaged in an ‘ongoing backstage discussion’ about audience reactions. I found the amount of reflection on the performance and audience reactions that occurred during the 2003 production of *Frozen* in the Downstairs Belvoir Street Theatre surprising. In one instance, Nicholas Papademetriou, playing the character of Gordon, and Eliza Logan, playing Gordon’s lover Ellen, entered the small communal dressing room. Papademetriou was excited, exclaiming, “they’re loving it, they’re loving it,” while Logan was apologetic: “Sorry, I kept burling over the top of them when they are laughing.” They then discussed whether any members of the audience were wearing red, so they could incorporate them into a scene where Gordon sees a woman in a red coat through his window. More generally, if a mistake was made in a scene then a post-mortem discussion would result in a quick rehearsal being held in the dressing room. Such a post-mortem would usually start with an effort to locate exactly what went wrong, usually by regressing back through the scene. As such, the performance sequence was unravelled, the problem found and a solution determined. Discussion of the audience was usually on the level of audience reactions as a whole, but the cast would also pick on anything that defined individuals within the crowd. These included audience members’ physical appearance, their style of dress, their comments, yawns, fidgeting, and mobile phone ring tones.

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<sup>158</sup> Architect Vivian Fraser has written of the steep audience seating bank in the Wharf One Theatre, “I believe from the stage end it has been called the ‘wall of death’.” Vivian Fraser, “Designing Theatres For ‘Found’ Spaces,” in *Walking on Water: Sydney Theatre Company at the Wharf*, Kim Spinks and Sharon Baird (Sydney: Currency Press, 1995), 68.

<sup>159</sup> Ah Kin, interview.

The monitoring of performance often relates directly to the possibility of adjustments and changes, resulting, as I have mentioned, in ad hoc rehearsals. On *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, many of the performers quite consciously adjusted their performances and discussed the results afterwards. Puppeteer Leighton Young reported that he and Heath McIvor often “tend to try and come up with ideas of what we can do onstage to try and make it a bit funnier, or try some other angle, which also helps you if you’re feeling a bit stale.”<sup>160</sup> Heath McIvor often tried to ‘throw’ fellow performer Amanda Muggleton by varying his performance, and the two would laugh about the results afterwards. Young added, “We’re debriefing all the time [...] you just have to keep moving.”<sup>161</sup> In this fashion, performers are nightly engaged in “a never-ending test of watchfulness and flexibility.”<sup>162</sup> Productions always subtly shift from performance to performance, and actors are acutely aware of the differences that result. So, too, are directors who, during a season, will often request performers to make alterations or slight changes to their performances.

### 3. Negotiating the Social

All theatrical performance occurs within a social context and so the negotiation of backstage social environments is, therefore, perhaps the broadest category into which performers’ activities in the practitioner spaces of theatres may be placed. Both the acts of preparing and monitoring involve social interaction and negotiation, even in the case of solo performances. Amongst performers, the shared experience of “preparation, production and performance induces a kind of ritual closeness.”<sup>163</sup> This is not to suggest that the social environments that develop are unproblematic – indeed, the opposite is often the case – but rather that they are intense. This intensity can lead to relations that are very good – gatherings of actors and performers frequently involve the discovery of shared industry friends and the trading of anecdotes and gossip – but also to relationships dominated by tension and friction; in both instances the social environment backstage requires careful negotiation on the part of performers.

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<sup>160</sup> Young, interview.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Gielgud in McAuley, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre*, 246.

<sup>163</sup> Bates, *The Way of the Actor: A New Path to Personal Knowledge and Power*, 182.

Poor cast relations can radically affect performers' backstage experiences, contributing both to a more destabilised, hermetic inhabitation, and to a sense of entrapment and dread. While I did not witness particularly problematic social environments whilst conducting fieldwork, two actors I interviewed spoke of the effect of poor cast relations. One actor spoke of the way a poor relationship between himself and a female cast member coloured his experience of the space. The single corridor they both had to pass through *en route* to the stage became a fraught space, "sterile, bleak, arid." Another actor spoke of how the relationship between herself and another cast member deteriorated to such an extent that she was advised that she should not be alone backstage with that actor. Consequently, "I just had to be conscious all the time about where [this actor] was." She was, therefore, "strategising constantly [...], navigating where I was going to be to be out of this person's line of fire." This drew her focus away from the performance, and eventually, "I started affecting my routines to not be where [this actor] was, until it got to the point where I actually had to sit backstage of the wings, where people were coming on and off, the whole way through the show." While other cast members reportedly sought not to engage with the problem, instead trying to minimise any extra confrontation until the end of the season, the actor I interviewed felt that "the amount of space I was able to occupy became smaller and smaller," to the extent that she felt she was "being held to ransom."

Performers are aware that the quality of the social environment backstage affects their performances onstage, and this knowledge impacts on their actions prior to, and during, performances. Matazo Nakamura, writing of Japanese Kabuki, comments, "Behind the world of the kabuki stage is the social world of the backstage areas, which nourishes and breathes life into every performance."<sup>164</sup> Nakamura's expression is apt for describing western theatre forms as well; in the interviews I carried out with a wide variety of theatre practitioners I was constantly told how important good social relations were backstage. Performers' stressing of this importance derives from their awareness that backstage social environments affect their onstage work. Camilla Ah Kin, describing her pre-performance preparation, noted that what she does is grounded in social interaction: "It begins with the socialising, you know, who's had a

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<sup>164</sup> Nakamura, *Kabuki: Backstage, Onstage*, 71.

good day, who's had a bad day, because all of those things affect performance."<sup>165</sup>

Mentioning that she often arrives before she is required, Camilla explained,

A lot of it is because, when [I] get there, I need to leave time to say hello to everybody, have a cup of tea, exchange the gossip, probably organise somebody a ticket who's wanted one, who's going to pick one up that night. All sorts of other little things.<sup>166</sup>

While stressing the impact of the social, performers also found it hard to specify exactly what effect that had on the performances they were giving. What they could specify was that performers' energy backstage is almost inevitably taken out onto the stage, adding or subtracting a qualitative layer of intensity and energy to the performance. Brian Parker suggested that "if the social world's happening backstage and everyone's excited at the time, people will actually bring their energy onto stage with them." But, this is not a simple matter of cause and effect; in the case of the performer I described in the previous paragraph, who had her use of the backstage severely curtailed, performing was actually a "mental and emotional respite" from the tension backstage because, "I knew what to expect onstage." She was adamant that her performance was not affected detrimentally; "I didn't allow it because you can't [...] you've just got to find another way."<sup>167</sup> Leighton Young suggested that, as a performer, "You basically aim, no matter what's happening with you in your life outside the job, [that] it shouldn't affect what you do onstage – but you can't help it. There are elements of it that slip through."<sup>168</sup> Bearing this in mind, Young explained his tactic: "If you're working with particular people all the time, it's good to play around with them because then you take that playfulness, what you are bouncing off, onto stage as well."<sup>169</sup> The explicit tactic of many performers is to attempt to use the social environment as a way of stimulating their performance practice.

Playfulness and participation in games and ongoing jokes is a major way in which performers stimulate their performance practice. Most of these are geographically

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<sup>165</sup> Ah Kin, interview.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> This case in fact suggests the complexity of the interaction between backstage and onstage. Indeed, this actor suggested that, in rehearsal, performers practise being able to set aside distractions and instead focus solely on the effective delivery of the performance.

<sup>168</sup> Young, interview.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

located in the wings and so I discuss them further in the following chapter. In general terms, however, playfulness combats the deadening effect of repetition and enables performers to maintain a creative agency within the confines of their set performance scores. Jeffrey Denman, a member of the ensemble in the 2001 Broadway season of Mel Brooks' *The Producers*, has documented many of what he titles "backstage rituals."<sup>170</sup> These are the regular jokes and games that, he explains, "keep the show from becoming monotonous."<sup>171</sup> What is interesting is that his description of such 'rituals' reveals an interplay between routine and innovation. He writes that games and jokes "start innocently, something you do on a whim that brings a laugh or a smile."<sup>172</sup> During subsequent performances, the attempt to repeat the action, and thereby gain a similar reaction, results in the paradoxical cementing of that action into the landscape of the production. Denman describes one such regular occurrence he calls 'Peter's Dream Ballet':

During [the song] "When You Got It, Flaunt It" the ensemble are downstairs changing into Old Lady gear. Peter Marinos takes this opportunity to put on his own cabaret show for us. He uses the long hall as a runway and swishes and sways, mouthing the song's lyrics while deftly getting into his dress and wig.<sup>173</sup>

As Denman notes, "these are not world-changing events. But they are part of the fabric of the theatre and are as individual as the people who create them."<sup>174</sup> The opportunity for practitioners to celebrate their individuality within the confines of a season of repeated performances is important; regular, subtle shifts in play and games allow for fresh material to be injected into the routine of the show thereby keeping the performers, and their performances, fresh.

Building design and dressing room layout are important factors in cast social relations. As seen in the previous chapter, Sydney theatres possess both private dressing rooms, where each performer (at least principal performers) is offered their own room, and open dressing rooms, where performers either share one open room, or

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<sup>170</sup> Jeffrey Denman, *A Year with the Producers* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 152.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

a room that is in some way partitioned. Given the importance of dressing rooms to performers' inhabitation of theatres in general, the difference in layout can allow for quite different experiences; performers may find themselves segregated, or brought together. Amongst performers there appears to be a preference for a more open dressing room arrangement that maximises the potential for interaction. Actor Paul Goddard is one whose views have changed, from preferring more private accommodation to preferring more communal quarters. He has written:

When I first performed at The Wharf in the 1998 season of *Three Neglected Classics*, I thought the lack of privacy to be a drawback. However, over the years, this communal set up has proven to be a fertile ground for play where the cast, who might not have seen very much of each other during rehearsal, can really come together. At times the banter and the goings on in the dressing room have been more entertaining and dramatic than what was being presented on the stage.<sup>175</sup>

Such a communal set up is also important in the development of younger actors, as this is where history and tradition are passed on. Speaking of the Belvoir Street dressing room, Meaghan Davies mentioned that within such a shared space "you instantly have to work within certain professional boundaries."<sup>176</sup> She is certain that such a situation matured her as an actor, allowing her to observe more experienced actors preparing and forcing her "to be really aware of other people."<sup>177</sup>

Actor and director John Bell's opinions demonstrate the way actors may prefer different dressing room arrangements for different onstage roles. Given his history as one of the founders of both the Stables and Belvoir Street theatres it is unsurprising that he finds the communal dressing rooms of those venues "infinitely preferable to compartmentalised cubicles."<sup>178</sup> However, when performing large and demanding roles, he prefers the privacy of having a particular room to himself:

If I'm playing a really major role, I like my own space - there's so much responsibility attached to it - or at least share with one other person I'm totally sympathetic with who I

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<sup>175</sup> Paul Goddard quoted in Spinks and Baird, *Walking on Water: Sydney Theatre Company at the Wharf*, 86.

<sup>176</sup> Davies, interview.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Bell, interview.

know won't talk their head off while I'm trying to get ready. If I'm playing a smaller role then I like to be in with the crowd, in with four or five other people and you can muck around and joke. If it's something really difficult, like a King Lear or a Richard III, then you really need that space to yourself, because you don't want to share too much.<sup>179</sup>

Different dressing room arrangements therefore suit different roles, and the provision of a separate, private space allows a performer to conserve themselves for the performance at hand. While most performers appear to require a degree of solitude or separation before performing, this increases as the role becomes more demanding. Katrina Retallick explained how this separation even relates to the provision of windows in backstage areas. Having windows means that a performer is "more connected to the day," a situation that is, in general, preferable. But some roles require attention and "distance," where a performer might need "all the focus I could get."<sup>180</sup>

The need for privacy and separation at some point before a performance is a common desire amongst performers who will frequently utilise corridors, toilets and storerooms to be alone. Zoe Caldwell has written of the consolation of low lighting states: "darkness and a few electric lights are comforting for finding a character."<sup>181</sup> Meaghan Davies appreciates some "quiet time to actually think about what you are going to do."<sup>182</sup> In exploring the various meanings of the term 'privacy,' Peter King has observed that the common thread of meaning between each different sense of the word is that of separation, having something "kept apart" from other things.<sup>183</sup> He also observes "an important quality of privacy: we seek it for a purpose. It is privacy for something."<sup>184</sup> For performers, privacy allows for the development of what King describes as "one of the cardinal virtues of dwelling: *the necessary encouragement of complacency*."<sup>185</sup> Through seeking privacy, performers are able to effectively disregard less important concerns, particularly the negotiation of backstage social environments, and instead focus more intently on their impending performance. Some performers separate themselves from a social setting when needing to reflect, others

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Retallick, interview.

<sup>181</sup> Caldwell, *I Will Be Cleopatra*, 150.

<sup>182</sup> Davies, interview.

<sup>183</sup> For his discussion of privacy, see King, *Private Dwelling: Contemplating the Use of Housing*, 40-50.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 66.

desire not to be seen undressed. Opera singer Natalie Jones emphasised the importance of acoustic privacy; when warming up her voice she valued the freedom of engaging in a non-performative action; for her it is “important not to be heard.”<sup>186</sup> Overall, the sociality most required by performers is a mix of intimacy *and* separation. Performers gain comfort from a situation of being “together-yet-apart.”<sup>187</sup>

Having an open dressing room avoids a situation like that described by Jim Hiley at the National Theatre in London where once a production opens “odd individuals might only ever meet on stage in future, so easy [is] it to disappear in the corridors backstage.”<sup>188</sup> However, enforced separation can produce distinct qualitative differences in performance that are valuable for a production. Nicholas Papademetriou spoke of *Greek Tragedy*, a group-devised Company B production he worked on with the British director Mike Leigh. In this production Papademetriou played a character called Perry, “a bit of an outsider in the play.”<sup>189</sup> When the play opened at the Belvoir Street Theatre, Leigh provided Papademetriou with a separate dressing room from the rest of the cast. In addition to this, he instructed Papademetriou not to have contact with the other actors before the show: “It was very much a situation where, coming into the play was coming in as the character and seeing them for the first time that night as characters.”<sup>190</sup> This added an edge to the “fidgety” and “really shy” character of Perry.<sup>191</sup> Leigh sought to emphasise the difference between Perry and the other characters in the performance by creating a distance, physical and social, between the respective actors.

Socially, the allocation and subsequent re-arrangement of dressing room spaces, combined with differing desires for privacy, frequently leads to the creation of highly territorial environments. Robert Sack defines territoriality as “the attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence, or control people, phenomena, and

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<sup>186</sup> Natalie Jones, interview with author, Sydney, New South Wales, 22 February 2003.

<sup>187</sup> King, *Private Dwelling: Contemplating the Use of Housing*, 46.

<sup>188</sup> Jim Hiley, *Theatre at Work: The Story of the National Theatre's Production of Brecht's Galileo* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 204.

<sup>189</sup> Papademetriou, interview.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

relationships, by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area.”<sup>192</sup> The creation and maintenance of territorial spaces within the practitioner areas of theatres is significant precisely because of the control and agency it allows actors. Kim Dovey observes that such concern with boundaries “is fundamentally linked to the construction of identity.”<sup>193</sup> Performers do not necessarily mark territories out against other practitioners but, rather, their territoriality involves an attempt to establish their own sense of control and agency within particularly fluid surrounds. This territorialisation can have negative effects, however, if performers strongly demarcate their territory, vigorously setting themselves apart and effectively defending their own ‘patch’ against other practitioners. This can occur both when practitioners are housed in individual dressing rooms or in communal quarters. One tactic performers use to separate themselves from others is to wear headphones within a communal dressing room, effectively denying others any social interaction; this tactic, while helpful for the individual, can entrench unhelpful divisions. The unspoken assumption that practitioners respect the spaces created by each other usually mitigates potential conflicts, although continued inappropriate behaviour can quickly escalate. Sandy Gore expressed the potential for conflict when she stated, “I swear – any actor would feel this – if I found you sitting at my place, or borrowing something of mine without my permission, taking my script, there would be hell to pay. Because it is very territorial.”<sup>194</sup>

As has already been mentioned, hierarchy can be an important factor in the shaping of cast relations. British actor Alec Guinness, noting the breakdown of many of the formal instances of hierarchy in the theatre has written, “Now, of course, it’s the fiction of all pals together (and quite right too) and the achievements and applause of a lifetime are democratically ignored.”<sup>195</sup> However, hierarchy is still very much present in the use of space and the way more experienced performers, and those playing larger roles, will always receive dressing rooms that are closer to the stage or

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<sup>192</sup> Robert Sack, *Human Territoriality: Its Theory and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 19.

<sup>193</sup> Kim Dovey, “Theorising Power in Built Form,” in *Environment-Behaviour Research on the Pacific Rim: Proceedings of PaPER98, The 11th International Conference on People and Physical Environment Research*, ed. Moore et al. (Sydney, Faculty of Architecture, University of Sydney 1998), 30.

<sup>194</sup> Gore, interview.

<sup>195</sup> Alec Guinness, *Blessings in Disguise* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1985), 155.

performance space, and more comfortably appointed. With *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, while the principals' dressing rooms were not of any great size, the presence of couches and carpet was a point of discussion amongst the cast on their first day in the theatre. Katrina Retallick, the understudy for the part of Susan, noticed the difference in facilities: "When I was playing Susan, to use her dressing room, it just felt like a luxury to have it so close to the stage, and that comes with having a lead role. So that's part of the hierarchy."<sup>196</sup> Performance experience is very much recognised, and this shapes the social environment within a show.

The provision of a greenroom or social space within the confines of a theatre is an often undervalued, but important feature, of any practitioner space. Greenrooms and social spaces allow for socially cohesive gatherings that bring practitioners together, especially important when large groups are working in situations where there is little crossover between different groups. During the season of *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, practitioners' birthdays were frequently celebrated with a cake during the single twenty-minute interval. Furthermore, performers would gather in the greenroom "because you know other people will be there."<sup>197</sup> When a greenroom is not provided, performers will create a space in which socialising can occur. Sandy Gore recalled that during a production in Melbourne, one actor would turn over his dressing room as a space in which the whole cast would gather to share a drink and reflect on the performance.

Post-performance, socialising involves the crossing of boundaries between audience and practitioner space. At such times the transgression of practitioners into areas like the foyer or audience members into the backstage becomes acceptable. However, an important imbalance is maintained; any member of the public venturing backstage does so by invitation only, and in the company of a practitioner. Following the conclusion of a performance a foyer bar is an important space within a theatre building. Given the amount of energy performers generate in the act of performing, it always takes a while to 'cool down' after a performance, especially before sleep is possible. Once a performance has finished there is little to hold practitioners backstage, but a theatre's bar and foyer is a space of tarrying before leaving for home.

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<sup>196</sup> Retallick, interview.

<sup>197</sup> Davies, interview.

This allows for social encounters with friends and spectators, for the trading of performance experiences and reflections, and for interaction amongst performers outside of the more work-focussed practitioner spaces. As a place for the establishment and maintenance of professional networks amongst theatre practitioners, foyers are also invaluable. Julie-Anne Long, writing of independent dance practice in Sydney, has stated, "I propose that we are dependent on the post show drink in the Performance Space foyer for the health of our practice."<sup>198</sup>

### *Concluding Remarks*

At the very beginning of this chapter I introduced Edward Casey's identification of two modes of dwelling – the hermetic and the hestial – as a frame for describing and examining performers' experiences in the practitioner spaces of theatres. Subsequently, over the course of this chapter, I have argued that performers' experiences are profoundly hermetic; performers endure transient and uncertain employment conditions and their inhabitation of theatres is always within the context of a series of spatio-temporal journeys, reflecting the centripetal nature of theatres themselves. However, in performers' inhabitation of backstage spaces, I have also observed a tension between more hermetic and more hestial modes of dwelling. The repetition involved in production seasons encourages the development of strong 'time-space routines' amongst performers. Likewise, performers' pre-performance preparations are centred on the creation of a suitable 'stopping place' – frequently a dressing room – and a need to separate themselves both from everyday social reality and, to different extents, from each other. This behaviour is distinctly habitual and conservative; through it performers seek to control their immediate situation in the face of transient working conditions and the uncertainties of live performance.

Performers are aware of the connections that exist between the social world of the backstage and the fictional world of the stage and that what occurs backstage indeed 'feeds' and 'nourishes' their performances. Although performers' individual needs and preparations vary widely, the preparations they undertake, in whatever form they do take, are necessary, and performers actively *make* space within theatres to suit their

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<sup>198</sup> Long, "Defining Moments."

needs. This making entails re-arranging, marking, and decorating the often bleak, dour and dirty environments they are provided with, as well as attempting to mitigate the potentially deadening effects of repeated performances through social interaction and games. The tension between more hermetic and more hestial modes of dwelling permeates all these backstage practices and is perhaps most evident in performers' desire to be 'together-yet-apart,' to experience both social interaction and solitude.

The various practices performers engage in backstage exhibit a desire for continuity and sustainability, for a sense of connection to a living tradition, and for inclusion and belonging. In addition, performers also exhibit a desire for a degree of control in the face of the uncertainties of live performance. In the next chapter I examine those spaces in theatres where performers experience most keenly the extremes of uncertainty, necessity, and transition, and where the gap between everyday social reality and performance is experienced as a physical phenomenon: in the next chapter I examine performers' experiences in 'the wings.'