

8

Concluding Remarks

Any actor worth their salt will put up with it and won't mind.

*Blair Cutting*¹

This thesis is derived from my fieldwork experiences in the practitioner spaces of various theatre buildings, from my formal and informal dialogues with practitioners, and from my critical reflections on the ways in which performers inhabit backstage environments. Through it I have developed two overarching and interconnected arguments. The first has been that theatrical performance is profoundly affected by the features of backstage support spaces and by performers' backstage practices. While practitioners and scholars rarely comment upon this explicitly, it is a situation that is, as I have shown, quite readily apparent. My second argument emerges from this situation, and is the contention that a study of backstage spaces offers a particularly apposite approach to further understanding the 'place' of theatrical performers.

¹ Cutting, interview.

In Chapter Two I defined the concept of ‘place’ with reference to the work of Edward Casey and Jeffrey Malpas. Adopting a phenomenological perspective, I noted that places, bodies, and identities are intertwined and complicit. In framing the concerns of this thesis as I have – as an investigation of backstage spaces as ‘the place’ of performers – I have purposely played on the semantic breadth of the term ‘place,’ with its strong connotations of position, order, and location. I have therefore sought, through studying the architectural places in which actors and performers work, to formulate a clearer understanding of their social location. Thus, I have argued that backstage spaces might be considered as intimately linked to ‘the place’ of performers precisely because performers spend a significant proportion of their working lives backstage and because they consciously perceive the backstage spaces they use as constituting their domain. Building on this, I have argued that backstage spaces can be viewed as ‘the place’ of performers because it is largely through their interactions with these spaces, and their inhabitation of them, that performers come to understand their own position in wider social worlds.

In these Concluding Remarks I offer an overview of my findings, responding to the aims I set out in the Introduction, and bringing my arguments to a close. I begin by outlining some theoretical reflections, before articulating some further avenues of inquiry that have become evident from this thesis. I then offer some design principles by which backstage spaces might be more suitably designed, before returning to my argument that the poor standard of backstage spaces evidences a distinct lack of consideration towards theatrical performers, an ignorance of, and ambivalence towards, performers’ needs. I conclude with a discussion of how performers’ dominant discourses of professionalism and worth are informed by their backstage experiences.

Theoretical Reflections

Throughout this thesis I have investigated the imbrication of people with place. This imbrication arises from the human capacity for bodily orientation and expressive movement, a capacity that enables the formation of a double link, a circuit by which human movement in place – movement that effectively constitutes inhabitation – is

the means by which place forms and informs lived bodies. "Just as a place is animated by the lived bodies that are in it," writes Edward Casey, "a lived place animates these same bodies as they become implaced there."² What I have examined is the way in which the identities of theatrical performers as performers can be considered, in large part, to be a 'co-production' of their own actions and the built places in which they work.³ Performers and built places co-constitute each other specifically through the very practices that I described in Chapter Four, through spatio-temporal journeys, routines, repeated actions, social negotiations, and the development of 'place-ballets.'

In adopting Malpas' metaphor of 'topographical surveying' to accommodate the tension between 'perceived,' 'conceived,' and 'lived' space, I have sought to avoid a reductionist integration of these three apprehensions of spatiality. However, in using them I have become aware of an important temporal dimension to their complex inter-relationship. The built environment that we construct around us possesses a degree of inertia and persistence that markedly contrasts with our own embodied states. The significance of spatial program and built form in human lives stems from this apparent resistance to temporality. Built form entrenches possibilities for movement and interaction; it influences and makes possible certain ways of being. Spatial program and built form are therefore the most conservative components of any place; it too is in flux, and subject to modification and decay, but at a slower pace. Discourse and conceptions of space change more rapidly, ascribing meaning, establishing parameters for evaluation and experience, and thereby mediating and fashioning our responses to built form. Lived, embodied practice is the most expansive and innovative, constantly subject to variation, never simply determined by 'perceived' or 'conceived' space, nor entirely free from their structuring influence either.

In considering built places it has become clear that one cannot attribute priority or primacy to any one aspect of place. Instead, the meaning and import of any place, especially a built place, is always complex and contested, and it is the very tension between 'perceived,' 'conceived,' and 'lived' space that constitutes the 'matrix of

² Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*, 242.

³ The term 'co-production' is used in David Turnbull, "Performance and Narrative, Bodies and Movement in the Construction of Places and Objects, Spaces and Knowledges: The Case of the Maltese Megaliths," *Theory, Culture & Society* 19, no. 5/6 (2002): 137.

sensibility' within which any place is made meaningful.⁴ Certainly, the potential creativity of embodied performative practice is a suitable point of entry into considerations of place. But to thereby neglect 'perceived' and 'conceived' apprehensions is to reduce the potential for understanding. Neither can historical and social dimensions be neglected. As my case studies of both the Belvoir Street Theatre and the Sydney Opera House demonstrate, built places are significant nodes of event and experience, they gather, contain, and hold. But, they are continually altered through changes and fluctuations in spatial program, discourse, and embodied practice. An analysis that grapples with the complex reciprocities and the interconnections inherent in understanding place – with all the attendant difficulties this entails – is ultimately the most useful.

Amidst the transient and hermetic conditions that prevail in the field of theatrical performance, institutionalised places of performance become significant in performers' lives and careers by virtue of their relative stability. Casey has observed that places possess "tenacity," they "come into us lastingly," with the result that "traces are continually laid down in the body, sedimenting themselves there."⁵ Theatrical performers' inhabitation of certain theatre buildings, and their repeated contact, familiarity, and identification with them, do not simply occur on the basis of their established predisposition toward the field – what Pierre Bourdieu has termed 'habitus' – but also affect and inform their values, expectations, and disposition towards the wider field.⁶ As Casey has argued, the activity of inhabitation involves a re-enacting of habitus, and this allows for the possibilities of change and innovation.⁷ Backstage spaces therefore matter in the lives of actors and performers. The impact of such spaces is subtle but pervasive, occurring largely below the level of conscious

⁴ See Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*, 94-120.

⁵ Edward S. Casey, "Between Geography and Philosophy: What Does It Mean to Be in the Place-World?" *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 91, no. 4 (2001): 688.

⁶ Casey himself has proposed habitus as the mediatrix of place and self, arguing that, "Without its ordering of bodily engagement, this engagement [between place and self] would be brute and contingent." Edward S. Casey, "On Habitus and Place: Responding to My Critics," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 91, no. 4 (2001): 716. I have avoided defining this research purely in terms of Bourdieu's sociological theory, and have only specifically adopted his related concepts of 'field' and 'symbolic capital.' Loïc Wacquant has, however, argued that 'field' and 'habitus' "function fully *only in relation to one another*." [Wacquant's italics] Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 19. I have, therefore, felt it necessary to make explicit the link between this research and the concept of habitus.

⁷ Casey, "Between Geography and Philosophy: What Does It Mean to Be in the Place-World?" 687.

discourse. This is why performers can both bemoan poor conditions and yet also find them so appropriate for their needs, why Michael Lewis can describe the Opera Theatre as “the worst theatre in the world,” yet also experience it as fitting him “like a glove.”⁸ What is important is that such effects are discussed and recognised, that the “‘complicitous silence’ of architecture”⁹ is acknowledged as profoundly important to our understandings of theatrical performance.

Further Avenues of Inquiry

This thesis is, of course, intimately tied to the particular circumstances of theatrical production in Sydney, Australia, and to the time I spent conducting my research activities there. Importantly, though, my consideration of backstage space, which entails further embracing the profound implacement of theatrical performance, indicates further avenues of inquiry. What spatial logics might be (or have been) at play in other locales and societies? For theatre historiography, there is possibility in the creation of ‘spatial histories’ of performance, what David Turnbull refers to as “the reconstruction of the narratives of [...] movements and ‘dwellings in,’ through which knowledge and space are brought into being.”¹⁰ These offer ways of gaining greater insight into the making and re-making of theatrical performance, and theatrical performers, in different cultural settings and historical moments. There is also potential in continuing to uncover and survey the interconnections between artistic creation and the specific circumstances (historical, social, and spatial) in which it occurs.¹¹ Furthermore, and contemporaneously, the specific work practices of technical practitioners remain substantially undocumented and untheorised; at present only one significant attempt to theorise their position within theatre making has been

⁸ Lewis, interview.

⁹ Dovey, “The Silent Complicity of Architecture,” 275. Dovey appropriates the phrase “complicitous silence” from Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 188.

¹⁰ Turnbull, “Performance and Narrative, Bodies and Movement in the Construction of Places and Objects, Spaces and Knowledges: The Case of the Maltese Megaliths,” 133.

¹¹ Two excellent works demonstrate this potential: Mark A. Radice’s *Opera in Context* addresses the very specificity of much operatic composition, whilst J. A. Sokalski has analysed the influence of stage technology on the dramaturgical structure of scripts written for production in New York’s nineteenth century Madison Square Theatre. See Mark A. Radice, ed., *Opera in Context: Essays on Historical Staging from the Renaissance to the Time of Puccini* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1998); and J.A. Sokalski, “The Madison Square Theatre: Stage Practice and Technology in Transition,” *Theatre History Studies* 21 (2001).

undertaken.¹² Pursuing a deeper understanding of the ramifications of the implacement of theatrical performance can only increase awareness of the connection between more and less performative facets of life and further stimulate the possibilities of site-specific and theatre-housed performance practice.

Towards a 'Nobler Approach'?

Responding to his experiences of inefficient and idiosyncratic backstage design while working on touring productions in the United States, actor and architect Keith Gerchak has challenged those responsible for the creation of new performance spaces to “pursue a nobler approach to back-of-house design.”¹³ The documentation of backstage spaces I presented in Chapter Three demonstrates the myriad of problems – confused boundaries, dirt, lack of physical space, lack of windows, dressing rooms serving as corridors, lack of designated social spaces – that performers working in Sydney commonly encounter. During the time I spent conducting the fieldwork on which this thesis draws, performers and technical practitioners frequently responded to my enquiries by supplying me with their suggestions for ways in which the backstage spaces they used could be improved. To keep faith with these informants, and to acknowledge their concerns for more suitable and practicable working environments, I feel it necessary to offer a list of design principles by which backstage spaces could be more suitably appointed.

To create backstage spaces that feed and enable performers, one simply needs to listen to performers themselves. For those who might wish to take up Gerchak’s challenge, the principles that might underpin a ‘nobler approach’ are evident from my research: Performers (a) desire backstage spaces that assist the efficient channeling of performers and performance energy towards the performance space, but (b) also provide stopping places which are separate from the wider circulatory system of the building, places where performers might linger and reflect prior to performing. Performers also (c) desire preparatory spaces that allow them to be apart-yet-together,

¹² Rayner, "Rude Mechanicals and the Specters of Marx."

¹³ Keith Gerchak, “Don't Look Backstage in Anger: A Performer's Perspective on Theatre Facilities,” *Auditoria Magazine*, 1 January 2004, <http://www.auditoria.tv/index.php?page=news&id=1051> (accessed 19 May 2005).

not unnecessarily separated from one another, yet allowing performers to draw away from each other when necessary. Performers (d) prefer that the workspaces immediately adjacent to a performance space be dedicated only to practitioners working on the production at hand; they do, however, enjoy designated social spaces in which cast, crew, and administration staff might mix. Performers (e) enjoy theatres with texture, buildings that seem to accumulate and hold memories, and that (f) allow performers to affect them, to create personalised spaces that can in turn feed their specific needs for the performance at hand. For larger, expansive roles, performers (g) need enough physical space to stretch into their roles prior to performing. Finally, performers (h) desire theatres in which the necessity of change is acknowledged. Theatrical performance is ephemeral; theatres themselves are expressions of their times, and a theatre “retains a living presence only as long as it submits to continual modifications.”¹⁴

The design of theatres must therefore derive from the practical working methods and aesthetic requirements of those practitioners who will use them, as well as providing an openness towards the needs of art forms that are yet to be developed. Theatres are not temples, and there is the distinct danger that any architect who seeks to create a temple will instead imprison future generations within an inflexible edifice. Nor are theatres purely utilitarian workspaces.¹⁵ Instead, theatres must provide efficient functionality along with the necessary accommodation of something *beyond* the basically functional – an inherent dynamism that invites action.¹⁶

Ignorance and Ambivalence

Rather than facilitating the flow of performers and performance energy, my research demonstrates that theatres are primarily designed to facilitate the ease, comfort, and

¹⁴ Todd and Lecat, *The Open Circle: Peter Brook's Theatre Environments*, 193.

¹⁵ See *Ibid.*, 250.

¹⁶ In an interview with David Bradby and David Williams, Japanese-born actor Yoshida Oida, characterised actors as “the blood of the stage,” without which, “the stage is a dead body.” “If you are working in an inert space,” he stated, “however much blood actors pump into it it will never dance. With a dynamic space, the actor’s task, to bring it to life, is easier.” While referring specifically to performance spaces, his metaphor can be usefully extended to apply to backstage areas as well. David Bradby and David Williams, “Communication and the Blood of the Stage’: An Interview with Yoshi Oida,” in *The Paris Jigsaw: Internationalism and the City's Stages*, ed. David Bradby and Maria Delgado (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 69.

flow of audience and capital. As Camilla Ah Kin has remarked, “It feels like wherever people have space left over that’s where they put the actors in the building.”¹⁷ The ‘hierarchy of treatment’ developed during Stage III of the Sydney Opera House’s construction provides a paradigmatic example of the priorities that underpin the adaptation and construction of theatres. Especially in the case of larger and more iconic structures, it is the wider socio-political context that takes precedence over the need to create good working conditions for performers and practitioners. This reflects the longstanding dominant economic situation of theatrical production, whereby the comfort and amenity of patrons and donors is a necessary priority. Indeed, in Australia at present, this is further compounded by an economic climate in which even major performing arts organisations are struggling to exist. Consequently, the working conditions of performers are not high on the agenda.¹⁸ However, accepting that, as Richard Schechner and Marvin Carlson have argued, the design of theatres reflects the concerns of the societies in which they are constructed, then the features and overall standard of the backstage spaces I have documented constitutes definite evidence of a widespread ambivalence towards the needs of performers, arguably coupled with an ignorance of what it is that they actually do.¹⁹ This also suggests that performers are solely valued for their ability to deliver an onstage product.

This ignorance and ambivalence, that I have suggested, exists despite an enduring western cultural fascination with actual and imagined backstage realms. This fascination is observable in dramatic sources both historic (for instance, Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* with its depictions of rehearsal antics), and more recent (the twentieth century phenomenon of ‘backstage musicals,’ most recently seen in *Fame*, *A Chorus Line*, *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Moulin*

¹⁷ Ah Kin, interview.

¹⁸ The Australian Major Performing Arts Group, a peak body representing twenty-eight of Australia’s largest, most well-known and most highly funded performing arts companies, states on its website, “Nearly every AMPAG company has restructured production/administrative areas to cut costs as much as possible [...] There is virtually nothing left to cut.” “Current Issues,” *Australian Major Performing Arts Group*, <http://www.ampag.com.au/2issues.asp> (accessed 20 October 2005).

¹⁹ Schechner has asserted that “theater places are maps of the cultures where they exist.” Schechner, *Performance Theory*, 161. Carlson has observed that the arrangement of the audience space in theatres has “almost always reflected with great accuracy the class preoccupations of their society.” Carlson, *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture*, 135. Carlson states that this is clear in the way audience space has often been “subdivided according to general spatial codes [...] according to which social status is signified by more impressive and more centrally or conveniently located space.” Carlson, *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture*, 134.

Rouge!).²⁰ Competitions frequently offer backstage or ‘behind the scenes’ access and the backstage is itself an increasingly valuable commodity. The Sydney Opera House’s successful backstage tour program enticingly suggests that, “Outside it’s spectacular. Inside it’s fascinating,” whilst the latest trend amongst theatre companies seeking to secure corporate sponsorship is the offer of exclusive backstage tours.²¹ Even Erving Goffman’s sociological delineation between ‘front’ and ‘back’ stage regions draws on the powerful distinction between that which is visible and apparent in a given social performance, and the more hidden mechanisms that are presumed to maintain that performance.²² Alice Rayner has argued that the persistent appeal of the backstage is that it offers “a sense of privileged access to the secrets of the real thing.”²³ Rayner posits that the spatial distinction between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ inherent in much illusionistic theatre practice “reproduces the structure of desire,” and “institutes a desire for further revelation.”²⁴ For spectators, the romance and allure of the backstage stems from the imagined possibility that either the fictional realm of the stage continues to exist beyond what can be seen, or that some greater reality (the ‘real’) is indeed present, but hidden from view.

It is the very nature of backstage spaces that they are hidden and invisible, spaces whose mundane reality is only appreciated by those who inhabit them. Through this research I have also demonstrated that even the performers who inhabit backstage spaces find that these spaces recede in comparison to the perceived importance of the performance space and the performance at hand (which, as I argued in Chapter Four, are phenomenologically inseparable). Added to this, the embodied nature of performers’ preparations and performance knowledge makes it difficult for performers themselves to explain what they do there. For many performers, their backstage practices are simply so everyday that they fall below the level of conscious discourse. Indeed, performers also don’t necessarily want to have to explain what they do either, because, as I have suggested, their very ability to do it, and to do it on cue,

²⁰ See also Martin Rubin, "Busby Berkeley and the Backstage Musical," in *Hollywood Musicals, the Film Reader*, ed. Steven Cohan (London: Routledge, 2002).

²¹ “Guided Tours,” *Sydney Opera House*, Sydney Opera House Trust, <http://www.sydneyoperahouse.com/sections/tours/guided%5Ftours/?sm=3&ss=10> (accessed 20 October 2005).

²² Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, Social Sciences Research Centre, 1956).

²³ Rayner, "Rude Mechanicals and the Specters of Marx," 538.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 539.

is ultimately the source of their capital as performers: “One of the actor’s *secrets* is the preparation or warm-up before the performance.”²⁵

The ‘Professional’ Performer

When questioned, performers demonstrate that they are not unaware of the failings of the places and spaces provided for them. The pages of this thesis are testament to performers’ perceptions of the environments in which they work, and the language they use to describe their various places of work is unambiguously strong; backstage areas have been variously labelled as “inadequate,” “run down,” “very poorly designed,” “dreadful,” “shocking,” and “tragic.”²⁶ However, while conducting fieldwork, I was constantly confronted by the frequent insistence of performers that what happened backstage was unimportant and secondary, or that it did not matter at all. Comments in this vein included that the backstage was “irrelevant,” “void, nothing,” and that what occurred there was purely “incidental.”²⁷ One performer even asserted, “There’s no doubt that the house itself has nothing to do with the performance.”²⁸

What performers perceive is of great value is, first and foremost, the performance space/performance, and secondly, the social relations inherent in the production process. Poor conditions are endured “for the beauty of the stage,”²⁹ and “actors are prepared to put up with a lot for the sake of the atmosphere and the show.”³⁰ Performers posit a ‘worthwhile’ performance as the justification for enduring backstage conditions: “I’m comfortable with any situation as long as I know what I’m doing is worthwhile.”³¹ “Really,” stated Michael Lewis, “the performance is everything, the work that you are going to be performing is everything and so you just focus on that really.”³² Indeed, the experience of the performance space/performance

²⁵ [Italics added] Erik Exe Christoffersen, *The Actor's Way* (London: Routledge, 1993), 165.

²⁶ Ah Kin, interview; Zemiro, interview; Carroll, interview; Kennedy, interview; Gore, interview; and Dickson, interview.

²⁷ Kennedy, interview; Bogdan Koca, interview with author, Sydney, New South Wales, 18 September 2001; and Cutting, interview.

²⁸ Peasley, interview.

²⁹ Cutting, interview.

³⁰ Bell, interview.

³¹ Koca, interview.

³² Lewis, interview.

effectively occludes backstage spaces from attention: “If the stage is nice, it makes up for everything else.”³³ Good social relations amongst those involved in a production are also proffered as more important than backstage physical conditions. Andy Rodereda expressed a common sentiment: “I’d rather live in a tin shed with good people [...] than a mansion where you are not speaking.”³⁴ Such an attitude is especially prevalent amongst performers working in independent and fringe theatre where the physical conditions and monetary remuneration are the worst.

Together with their valorisation of the performance space/performance and social relations, performers also emphasise their own flexibility and their ability to adapt, and thereby overcome, any and all circumstances. During fieldwork, performers’ acknowledgments of less than ideal circumstances were frequently qualified with statements that, “we’re making it work, so it’s fine.”³⁵ Shortcomings in physical spaces, lack of time, tiredness, and boredom from the repetition of long seasons are all figured as challenges that must be overcome. This was evident in Eliza Logan’s description of her response to an unhelpful emotional state she experienced during the season of *Frozen*:

I felt a bit wonky the other night. I felt a bit wonky before the show ... I felt a bit delicate or something and went, ‘Oh, I don’t know if ... where is it, where is it ... oh use it!’ I just went, ‘You’re going to have to use it! [...] you know, come up with something, do something. Stop dwelling on it’ ... because you can’t.³⁶

As an actor, “You kind of try and use the difficulty,”³⁷ stated Eileen Camilleri. One of the most valuable skills a performer can possess is the ability to be flexible. No matter what the problem, “You’re flexible and you adapt.”³⁸

Performers’ dominant discourse of ‘professionalism’ is largely informed by the three attitudes I have just described, and distinguishes performers who possess a ‘correct’ attitude from those who do not. For a performer to take anything onto the stage that

³³ Zemi, interview.

³⁴ Rodereda, interview.

³⁵ Cutting, interview.

³⁶ Logan, interview.

³⁷ Camilleri, interview.

³⁸ Parker, interview.

detracts from the performance is to be “unprofessional.”³⁹ Instead, professionalism entails the possession and display of ‘performance discipline.’ Amelia Farrugia stated quite specifically, “My performance discipline requires me to be the same performer onstage no matter what the conditions backstage.” This, she commented, was the case with all her colleagues, because “we’re all professionals.”⁴⁰ Whatever the conditions a performer encounters, either backstage or in their private life, their performance discipline should prevent it from influencing the performance. Dennis Olsen stated that despite the tiredness and repetition of a long season, his “discipline is still there to not let them [the audience] know.” This was because, “they’ve paid their money, and that’s what being a professional is.”⁴¹ The self-discipline of a professional performer derives from a recognition of responsibility to audience members, particularly as each successive performance in a season is often the one and only time individual audience members will attend; “The thing that I try to remind myself of is that people have paid lots of good money for this, so I’ve got to give them a good show.”⁴²

Professionalism doesn’t override or replace the category of ‘artist,’ but rather is a quality that marks certain individuals as artists who are disciplined, focussed, and marketable. A professional performer is therefore a performer whose focus is entirely on the performance at hand, and who can adapt to any situation and thereby produce performances of the highest standard no matter what. In less commercially driven theatrical practice, the word ‘professional’ is not specifically invoked, but is replaced instead by an implicit positioning of performers in relation to an ideal of ‘worth.’ An actor or performer who recognises, and acts, in accordance with the ‘correct’ priorities of performance space/performance and social relations is one of worth. Hence the comment by Blair Cutting as he indicated the cramped downstairs environment of the Belvoir Street Theatre: “Any actor *worth their salt* will put up with it and won’t mind.”⁴³

Such a discourse of professionalism and worth does, however, promote an ideal that is never quite obtainable. In attempting to explain his performance discipline, William

³⁹ McIvor, interview.

⁴⁰ Farrugia, interview.

⁴¹ Olsen, interview.

⁴² Ryan, interview.

⁴³ [Italics added] Cutting, interview.

Zappa tacitly acknowledged this when he stated, “I’ll give myself to the work no matter what the comfort value of the [theatre] space. [...] It shouldn’t affect your creativity at all.”⁴⁴ Zappa didn’t go as far as to suggest that ‘comfort value’ *didn’t* affect his creativity, simply that it *shouldn’t*. Indeed, when I off-handedly suggested to Zappa that, like a grain of sand in an oyster shell, the poor conditions and irritations actors experience backstage might actually enable them to create something of great value and beauty, he responded vehemently, “But we’re not oysters, we’re *actors!*”⁴⁵

Instead of seeking to change, in any comprehensive manner, the shortcomings of the environments in which they work, performers downplay and deny that those surroundings matter at all, instead promoting a set of values that emphasises exclusive focus on the performance space/performance, good social relations, and adaptability. This is not because the backstage doesn’t matter at all, but because other things matter more. Indeed, what matters most is the success of the performance at hand and the opportunity that entails to continue performing. As Nicholas Papademetriou explained, this places immense pressure upon performers simply to accept, conform, and ‘make do’:

I think [...] actors generally don’t complain because they really want to work and they want to have a good reputation and they want to be considered for other jobs, and there’s so few around [...], so you don’t want to kick up a fuss. [...] There’s heaps of actors, they’re disposable commodities.”⁴⁶

Through an investigation of the backstage spaces in Sydney, and an analysis of performers’ backstage practices, I have argued that the place of the performer involves a negotiation of various strong tensions; between the dominance of the hermetic and a desire for the hestial; between being both artist and instrument; between the need for control and the requirement to submit; and, between their own psychological needs and requirements and the dictates of the market within which their skills are valued. Motivating performers is their strong desire to perform (and to experience the heightened sensations of performance: flow, energy, and connection) and their desire for inclusion, for recognition, and for a sustainable artistic practice.

⁴⁴ Zappa, interview.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Papademetriou, interview.

The place of performers is one on the margins, a place beset by continual frustrations and disappointments, and located astride the collision between the ideals of art and the assimilative demands of the market. It is a place of disappointment in the face of ambivalence and ignorance, but nevertheless a place that still allows performers enough room to attain an experience that only they can know and which, in the long term, almost makes the rest of it worthwhile.