The Cambridge Introduction to
Theatre Studies

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Some positions promulgated by reception research have achieved general acceptance. Vexed questions such as aesthetic innovation and artistic value, which are particularly intractable in an ephemeral art form such as theatre, have received clear answers from reception research. From the perspective of reception, no performance or production is intrinsically innovative, but is only so in respect to the receptive standpoints of the spectators present. An experimental stage and a Broadway theatre can, with respect to their respective audiences, both be innovative and derivative, although their products are entirely different. Innovation can only be located on a sliding scale within differentiated audience groups.

Further reading

The best introduction to audiences and spectatorship remains Susan Bennett's 1990 study, *Theatre Audiences*, revised in 1997. It is particular good on reception theory and on the necessity to involve questions of cultural specificity. Martin and Sauter devote the first section of their book *Understanding Performance: Perfomance Analysis in Theory and Practice* (1997) to reception research and provide a useful survey of existing research up to that time. Part 3 of Patrice Pavis's *Analyzing Performance: Theater, Dance, and Film* (2003) is devoted also to reception, with a particular emphasis on the spectator's role in decoding performance. It is less useful for questions of audience research. Herbert Blau's massive study, *The Audience* (1990), brings together poststructuralist ideas (see Chap. 5), particular Lacanian psychoanalysis and the concept of the 'gaze', with personal experiences as an experimental director. Difficult to read, Blau's book is full of startling insights amidst some difficult prose. Willmar Sauter's most recent study, *The Theatrical Event: Dynamics of Performance and Perception* (2000), tries to bridge the dichotomy between production and reception, and argues for integrating reception research into performance analysis (see Chap. 8). The most persuasive demonstration of this new approach is Tulloch (2005).

Historical theatre audiences have been the subject of study throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Alfred Harbage's *Shakespeare's Audience* (1941) ushered in a new sociological perspective on Elizabethan theatre, and remains an important point of reference, even though some of the factual detail has been superseded by more recent studies such as Andrew Gurr's *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London* (2004). John Lough's *Paris Theatre Audiences* ([1957] 1972) provides a similar approach to the theatre of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France.

Chapter 3

Spaces and places

Given the centrality of space in the performance experience, it is perhaps somewhat surprising to find that critics do not have a precise, widely shared vocabulary to enable them to name and talk about the multiple dimensions of the way space functions in performance.

(Gay McAuley 1999)

The Italian-style stage is the space of [a] lie: everything takes place in an interior which is surreptitiously opened, surprised, spied upon, savoured by a spectator hidden in the shadow.

(Roland Barthes 1972)

Roland Barthes's characterization of Western theatre's dominant spatial configuration as deceitful and voyeuristic is both overstated and accurate at the same time. In the context of his discussion of Japanese Bunraku puppet theatre, the European proscenium does indeed seem to hide the spectator from the stage. Yet the 'spectator hidden in the shadow' is, historically speaking, a late development (dating from the late nineteenth century), and is therefore by no means inherent in the Italian-style stage. Barthes's comment does, however, point to a question of central interest to theatre studies, and that is the close relationship between stage forms and spectatorial attitudes. In this respect, this chapter is in part a continuation of the discussion of spectators and audiences begun in Chap. 2. It will, however, concentrate primarily on the physical conditions of performance, and outline ways in which the discipline of theatre studies has studied this problem.

Today, the question of performance space is seen primarily as an interactive relationship between spectators, stage and the wider architectural or spatial environment encompassing both. This is, however, a relatively recent development. Initially, scholars focused on only two aspects: theatre buildings and stage design, both of which were more properly in the domain of art historians. Yet a focus on purely architectural or scenographic aspects of performances, past or present, neglected the crucial aspect of the dynamic character of theatrical space, even when the relationship seems to be stable and unchanging.

It was the German theatre historian and founder of theatre studies in that country, Max Herrmann (see Chap. 6), who stressed that the theatrical art is fundamentally a spatial one and a central question for the new discipline:

> Theatrical art is a spatial art. This should not be understood in the sense that the representation of space could be an end in itself in theatre . . . In the art of theatre we are not dealing with the representation of space but with the execution of human movement in theatrical space. This space is however never or hardly ever identical with the real space that exists on stage . . . The space that theatre creates is rather an artificial space which only comes into being through a substantial transformation of actual space, it is an experience by which the stage space is transformed into a different kind of space.   (Herrmann 1931: 153)

Herrmann makes three inter-related observations and distinctions that have come to be crucial for our understanding of the spatial dynamics of theatre. The first is that theatrical space only comes into being through the act of human movement. Secondly, theatrical space is the result of an aesthetic transformation: the physical space of the stage is never identical with the space on which actors perform. Thirdly, this transformation from one realm (the physical and actual) to the aesthetic or 'artificial' can only be described in experiential terms.

Herrmann examines this 'experiential' aspect from four different perspectives: that of the dramatist, the actor, the audience and the director. While his specific observations may seem today somewhat dated, he must be credited with being (probably) the first theatre scholar to have grasped the fundamentally communicative, interactive and experiential nature of theatrical space.

Herrmann's approach is a phenomenological one (see Chap. 5) in that he is concerned (in this case) with abstract and suprahistorical categories rather than specific meanings. Although today it is a commonplace to assert that spatial relations are crucial for the success or failure of a performance, we still find considerable terminological confusion when talking about the spatial factor of theatre, as Gay McAuley (1999) has pointed out in her major study of space in performance. Nevertheless, we can, despite oscillating terms, distinguish the following spatial categories:

- Theatrical space refers to the architectural conditions of theatre, usually a building, and encompasses performance and spectator space.
- Scenic space (or stage space) designates space where the actors perform, and includes the set design.

- Place or space of performance is a wider category that includes the wider civic or other environment in which the theatrical event is located.
- Dramatic space refers to the spatial coordinates fixed in and evoked by the theatrical text (drama, libretto, choreography, etc.).

The audience's reaction to the theatrical event is determined by all four factors to varying degrees. In the rest of this chapter, these categories will be examined in more detail, with a heavier emphasis on the first three, as dramatic space is not strictly speaking an area of research specific to theatre studies, as it also belongs to the sphere of textual criticism.

Theatrical space

The term 'theatrical space' is in itself a site of terminological contestation because the word 'theatre' implies, as we have seen (both etymologically and historically) a building or, at least, fixed area. The notion of architectural fixture is, however, by no means a *conditio sine qua non* for theatre. For this reason, Marvin Carlson has suggested that it is more accurate to speak of ludic space. Carlson defines the latter in very broad terms – 'a permanently or temporarily created *ludic* space, a ground for the encounter of spectator and performer' (Carlson 1989: 6) – thus enabling him to include flexible forms, such as street theatre, that do not depend on fixed architectural structures. Above and beyond its functionality as a building or as a temporarily demarcated performance space, theatrical space can be understood as a place of encounter that generates meanings and experiences that are an integral part of the performance itself.

For theatre studies, the category of theatrical space is a central field of research because it focuses most clearly the interactive relationship between actors and spectators. Following a suggestion by Marvin Carlson (see Fig. 2), it is possible to distinguish five basic spatial structures in theatre that regulate the relationship between performers and spectators.
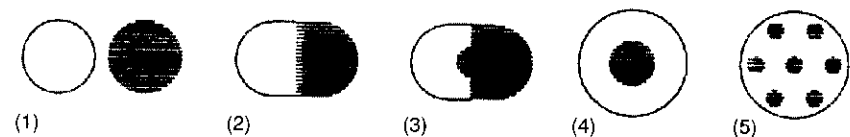

Fig. 2. Forms of theatrical space (after Carlson 1987: 67). (1) divided (cinema); (2) confrontation (proscenium); (3) apron stage; (4) arena; (5) environmental. The black areas represent the stage and the white areas the spectator space.

Of these five forms, *environmental theatre*, with its flexible performer–spectator relations, is both one of the most ancient and the most recent. The term was coined by Richard Schechner in his book of the same name, and refers to a flexible spatial arrangement by which spectators can surround the stage/playing area(s) or vice versa. Schechner's 'reform stage', a counter-model to the conventional proscenium arch, can be extended to include any form of theatrical interaction outside fixed architectural structures. It describes any type of theatrical performance where the spectators can move freely and choose their 'point of view' (see Plate 4). Within these fluid spatial borders, spectators and performers create, as it were, performance and viewing spaces around themselves. Even if spectators and performers are only feet apart (as we often experience in street theatre), they still inhabit quite distinct spaces. The performer is still very much an 'alien' presence, because he/she inhabits a different space, whatever the physical distance from the spectators. Performers demarcate with their own intrinsic rules a world into which the spectators seldom enter.

Theatre history teaches us, however, that the flexibility provided by environmental theatre was seldom regarded by authorities or performers as a particularly desirable state of affairs. We find instead a general tendency to restrict and regulate the spectatorial gaze and the spatial coordinates of the actor–spectator relationship. The reasons for this are manifold: they include aesthetic, religious, political and economic considerations, which will be outlined in the following comments on the other spatial models.

Next to environmental stages, *arena theatre* is the form that permits the largest degree of interaction between stage and auditorium, although here too the basic divide between the two spheres remains. The performance space is entirely surrounded by the audience. As this 'comprehensive' view of the stage permits only the most rudimentary degree of scenographic design, it has never established itself on a large scale in Euro-American theatre. It is found more frequently in temporary, improvised forms such as street theatre.

Historically more significant are those theatrical spaces that make use of the *thrust* or *apron* stage in all its variants. This 'extension' to the normal proscenium stage enables the performance space to be prolonged into the auditorium while at the same time retaining the scenographic possibilities of the separate stage. The apron stage is an ancient and modern form. Both the Greek and Elizabethan stages are examples. In Europe, the apron stage gradually disappeared as the baroque perspective stage with its illusionistic scenery gained dominance, but it made a comeback after 1900 in the course of the anti-naturalistic reform movement. Some reformers saw in it an architectural and metaphorical 'reunification' of spectators and performers after

Plate 4. Théâtre du Soleil, *1789* (1970). An example of environmental theatre. Spectators surround five different performance spaces.
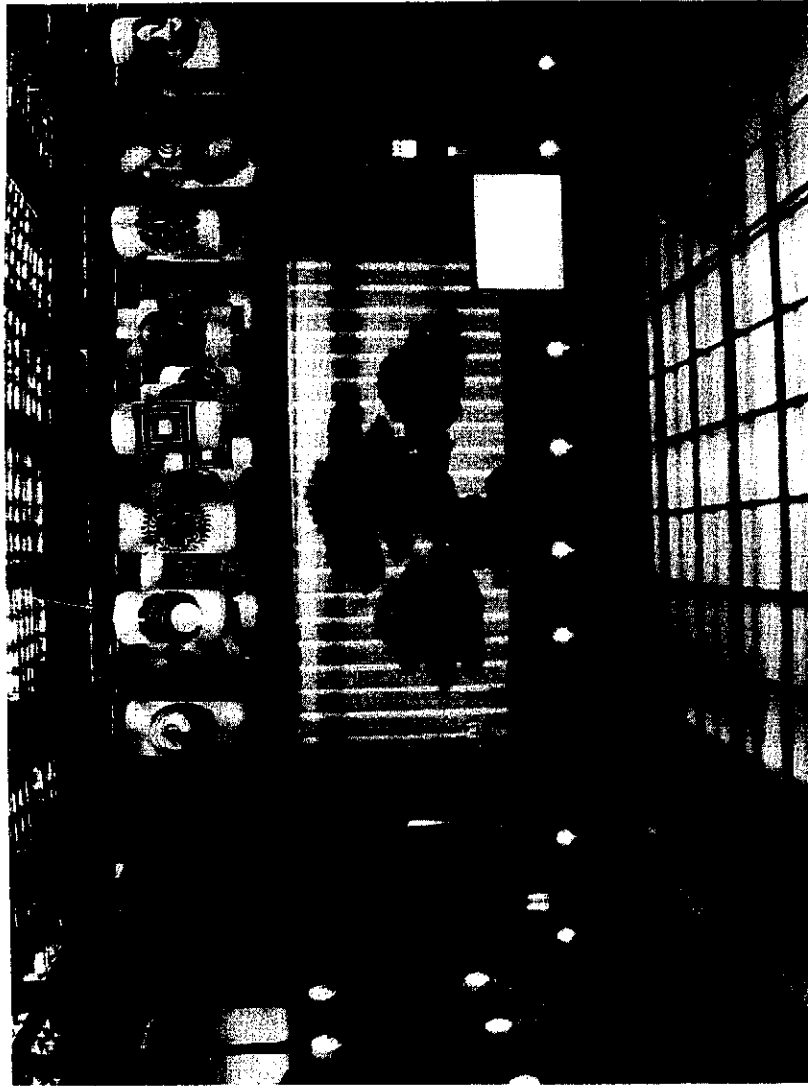
Plate 5. View of the *hanamichi*, the 'flower way' of the *Kabuki* stage at the Kanamaru-za Theatre on the island of Shikoku.

centuries of division enforced by the proscenium theatres with their orchestra pits.

A special kind of thrust stage can be found in Japanese *Kabuki*, with its famous 'flower way' (*hanamichi*) (see Plate 5). The *hanamichi* runs through the whole auditorium and thus enables the performers to act amongst the spectators. This extension of the main stage into the auditorium has undergone changes since its introduction in the eighteenth century, yet its basic principle has been retained. From a European perspective it represented a flexible alternative to the proscenium stage.

In comparison to the other forms, the *proscenium* stage symbolises a clear division between the performer and the spectator. What may seem an unremarkable architectural 'fact' has at different times in theatre history been discussed in highly polemical terms. The lines of arguments have been both aesthetic and ideological. Aesthetic opposition to or support for the proscenium stage is founded on the fact that the performer achieves perhaps the highest degree of integration into the mimetic-fictional world of the stage. This implies a corresponding demand that the spectator also immerse him or herself in this fictional scenic world. Opposition arose around the end of the nineteenth century as the hitherto self-evident mimetic function of theatrical and other art forms was called into question. Calls for an anti-naturalistic or anti-realistic theatre were usually framed by demands that the proscenium stage be abolished in favour of other spatial arrangements ranging from apron stages to arena stages. Ideological opposition arose as well. Ideas of politicizing theatre, whether from the left or right, went hand in hand with critiques of the proscenium stage, which was regarded as the epitome of bourgeois art. Most theories of political theatre demanded a 'unification' of spectators and actors or even a complete dissolution of the categories.

The models presented here must be understood in a *structural* sense. That is, they can occur at any time and are not indicative of a particular historical chronology. If we view theatrical space from a historical perspective, we can see that these models are by no means mutually exclusive: on the contrary, we often find a happy coexistence of different spatial forms in one and the same theatrical culture. A further structural feature of theatrical spaces that oppose spectator and performer (proscenium and apron stages) is the creation of what could be called *intermediary* or *transitional spaces*. These spaces allow for transitions of both spectators and performers from the realms of the everyday to the (usually) fictional and performative. In these intermediary spaces, performers make up and prepare themselves mentally and physically for their appearances. Spectators may deposit their coats, read the programme or, in the case of opera, digest the last minute recasting of singers. The creation of such spaces proved to
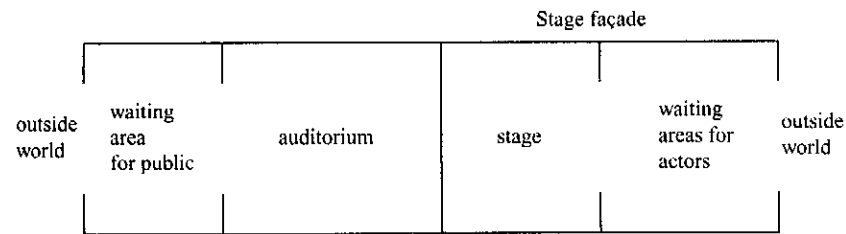
Stage façade

Fig. 3. Structure of theatrical space (after Carlson 1987: 68).

be necessary for cultural and aesthetic reasons: aesthetically, in order to better assist the concentration necessary for the execution and reception of what is a highly complex undertaking: culturally, in order to accommodate evermore complex and important social functions of theatre.

The 'stage façade' marked in Fig. 3 is a structural element that designates a flat plane located behind the stage space and separating it from the performers' rest area. In its simplest form, it can be simply a curtain (Sanskrit theatre, *Commedia dell'arte*, fairbooths). In Roman theatre and its epigonal Renaissance adaptations, it was a fixed architectural element in the form of a decorated arch (e.g. the *scenae frons* in Roman theatre or the seven doors of the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza).

Today, theatrical space is regarded as a highly flexible entity. New theatres try to take account of the multi-faceted nature of performer–spectator relationships. This may be in the form of different stages in the same building. A famous example of this is the Royal National Theatre in London, which opened in 1973. It has three different stages to accommodate different kinds of performance texts: a large apron stage (the Olivier), a smaller proscenium theatre (the Lyttelton) and a small multi-functional 'black box' (the Cottesloe). Many larger municipal or state-funded theatres now support several different spaces to take account of different performance requirements.

Stage space

In comparison to theatrical space, which regulates spectator–performer relationships, stage or scenic space refers to the narrower realm where the performer acts and thereby transforms his or her surroundings. Theoretically speaking, we can divide this space into two categories: the *kinetic* space (i.e. of movement) of the performer and the *visual* space of the spectator. While the visual space (that which the spectator sees) usually encompasses the

movement space (the space physically used by the performer), this does not work the other way round. What may appear as a unified space from the point of the spectator's perception is, in fact (especially when viewed historically), a complex inter-relationship that has not always been seen as a unity. In extreme cases such as the scenographic theatre of G.N. Servandoni (1695–1766), which consisted primarily of spectacular scene changes and did without performers altogether, the stage space can become exclusively a visual one.

Theatre studies has traditionally investigated the visual space, usually the area of scene design. Here, theatre studies intersects with art history, especially when the set or scene designer is a famous artist. The danger here is that the emphasis will be on questions of artistic style and less on the inter-relationship with the performative dimension of the design. Older terms for scene design such as 'scene painting' or 'décor' accentuate a purely decorative/ornamental view of stage space. Today, scholars are increasingly using the term 'scenography' instead of set design because it refers to the dynamic combination of visual image, lighting and space, including technical questions (Howard 2002).

Western theatre employs two main forms of stage space:

(1) The dominant form is the *successional* stage, where all action takes place on one and the same space; changes of time and place are usually indicated by exits and entrances of the actors and/or changes in the visual space (scene changes).

(2) The *simultaneous* stage refers to a plurality of spaces coterminous with one another and which usually represent concrete places. The stage action does not usually take place at the same time, but this is also possible. Historically speaking, this form is associated with the late Middle Ages and the production of large-scale Passion Plays, but it is occasionally revived as in Ariane Mnouchkine's production of *1789* (see Plate 4).

The 'rediscovery' of the successional principle in the Renaissance was a result, as already mentioned, of renewed interest in the theatre of classical antiquity. It reflects – and was indeed determined by – the move from representing simultaneous actions in paintings to representing one scene regulated by the rules of perspective. The reasons for this shift to the successional principle are manifold: they have as much to do with new thinking about history and science as they do with purely aesthetic questions. The successional stage of the Renaissance corresponds to a growing desire for empirically verifiable copies of historical or contemporary reality – even if the subject presented is Greek mythology.

A further innovation of the Italian Renaissance was the introduction of perspective scenery in the early sixteenth century. The development of the perspective stage resulted in a far-reaching shift in perception on the part of both artists and spectators, in the sense that the visual space of the stage became increasingly divided and separate from the kinetic space of the performer. The visual space was increasingly subjected to the aesthetic demands of painting, with the proscenium arch taking on the role of picture frame. Architects and scene painters were confronted with the dilemma of harmonizing the static visual space with the physical presence of the performer. The most famous dilemma, and one that plagued scene designers until the end of the nineteenth century, was that the rules of perspective require that the backstage space slope upwards in order to achieve an illusion of depth. Placing life-size performers in front of the backstage area produced distorted proportions, with human beings towering over buildings. Generally speaking, this resulted in a restriction of kinetic space to the area in front of, rather than beside, the painted backdrops. One 'solution' to the problem (and one which was used until the end of the nineteenth century) was to position children dressed as adults in the back reaches of the stage.

The twentieth century saw the gradual disappearance of perspective scenery, which was replaced by the three-dimensional stage with its unlimited potential for movement and design. The abolition of perspective scenery ended the long division between kinetic and visual space. The stage now became accessible as a performance space without visual restrictions. The most important theoretician of this shift was the Swiss designer Adolphe Appia (1862–1928), who demanded the introduction of a three-dimensional 'practicable' stage utilizing moveable elements such as steps and platforms. The latter are both kinetic and visual spaces, especially useful as surfaces for lighting, and became for Appia the central element of stage design.

The 1960s and 1970s saw a trend towards overcoming the restrictions of the physical space of the open stage. Productions sometimes dispensed with decoration altogether and revealed the naked walls of the theatre. Sometimes the back doors of the stage were even opened to reveal the outside world. This tactic was designed to make spectators reflect on the relationship between life and art.

This process of spatial extension seems to have become even more acute in the age of multi-media theatre. The possibilities of integrating *live* radio, television or even internet links into stage action suggest that the question of stage space will become an important area of experimentation in the coming years. If stage is linked in real time with the outside world via other media, then the whole notion of stage space in the terms discussed here becomes a

contested one. The stage space is no longer, then, a division between visual and kinetic space with the aim of creating a third fictional space. Stage space becomes a thematic and philosophical problem in its own right.

The ideology of dramatic space

Although we will not be dealing with the spatial semantics of dramatic texts in this book, it is still important to think about the conventions regulating the use of space, especially in the realistic tradition still prevalent on the mainstream Anglo-American stage. Dramatic space can be divided into two broad subcategories: *mimetic* and *diegetic* space. Mimetic space refers to space depicted on stage and visible to the spectator, while diegetic space is only described or referred to by characters in the play. Mimetic space can also include space evoked by acoustic signs such as off-stage noises, but is mainly connected with scenography and the visual design of a stage space. It corresponds to the differentiation suggested by Hanna Scolnicov of 'perceived space' (dramatic) and 'conceived space' (diegetic) (Scolnicov 1987: 15).

If we look at these conventions from non-European perspectives, as most postcolonial dramatists do, then they appear highly problematic. Thus, even an apparently neutral spatial notion such as a living room as a place of encounter is a highly problematic phenomenon, as the Indian dramatist and director Girish Karnad has argued. The living room is the quintessential space of Western realistic drama, and, as such, it was adopted by Indian dramatists working in the realistic mode as the setting for their plays:

> From Ibsen to Albee, the living room has symbolized all that is valuable to the Western bourgeoisie. It is one's refuge from the sociopolitical forces raging in the world outside, as well as the battleground where values essential to one's individuality are fought out and defended. But nothing of consequence ever happens or is supposed to happen in an Indian living room! It is the no-mans-land, the empty, almost defensive front the family presents to the world outside.   (Karnad 1995: 10)

In a traditional Indian house, caste and social status determine which parts of a house are accessible:

> [It] is in the interior of the house, in the kitchen, in the room where the gods are kept, or in the backyard, where family problems are tackled, or allowed to fester, and where the women can have a say . . . It may also be said that the refusal to go beyond the living room exactly mirrored the reluctance of these Westernized, upper-caste writers to go to the heart of the issues they were presenting.   (Karnad 1995: 10)

The fact that Indian dramatists continued to set their social–critical plays in living rooms, despite the evident discrepancy in cultural spatial conventions, is, for Karnad, symptomatic of a tendency amongst colonial and postcolonial dramatists to use imported aesthetic tools without adapting them sufficiently to local conditions.

The place of theatre

The generation of meaning in the theatre is not just restricted to factors within the enclosed space of the building (if a building is indeed where it takes place). Of equal importance is the positioning of theatre space in the wider cultural, usually urban, environment. This means that the place of performance is defined to a large extent by the field of relations created by the urban or rural environment. This placement in a system of mostly urban signs has a decisive influence on the receptive codes of the audience, i.e. expectations spectators have of the theatre they visit. It determines which spectators visit which theatres. The history of spatio-cultural interaction between spectators and spaces would be a history of how theatrical spaces change under different cultural conditions, owing to factors such as location, size and shape of the theatre space.

Research on the place of theatre in this sense is a relatively recent development in theatre studies, and is largely a product of semiotics. The most thorough study to date on the place of theatre is by Marvin Carlson in his book, *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture* (1989). Here he investigates the question: how do theatres mean? Carlson examines a number of important theatre buildings from the Renaissance to the present in respect to the way they are integrated into the semiotic system of the urban environment. Carlson describes the inter-relationship between space, work and performance as a semiotic process: 'places of performances generate social and cultural meanings of their own which in turn help to structure the meaning of the entire theatre experience' (Carlson 1989: 2). According to this definition, even specially constructed theatre buildings generate a whole spectrum of connotative meanings in addition to their functional level of signification. These connotative semantic dimensions depend, in turn, on other cultural codes, for a theatre building is part of the cognitive cartography of a town or city. Thus, a place of performance is determined by its integration into the wider referential system of the urban environment. This position in the urban system influences, in turn, the construction of receptive codes, with the result that any discussion of theatrical or performance space must take cognizance of questions regarding audience and theatrical reception.

Before looking at the specifics of theatre buildings and cities, it is necessary to take a step back and ask a larger question regarding the inter-relationship between culture and space in general. Firstly, we should note that the concept of 'space' in its abstract sense is a relatively recent one. Before the eighteenth century, no architectural treatise ever used the word 'space' in the general sense

we do today. Yet the assignation of special meaning to particular spaces is one of the basic conditions of cultural definition. Space is, as the German philosopher Ernst Cassirer put it, one of the fundamental 'symbolic forms'. As with all symbols, the meanings assigned to spaces are dependent on the cultures that use them. Each culture has its own way of organizing and semanticizing space. Cassirer illustrates his thesis by reference to what he calls 'mythic or sacred space'. Cassirer argues that the consecration of space begins by separating off a certain section from everyday space as a whole and defining it as religious or sacred. The notion of religious sacrality, which implies also spatial delimitation, is contained in the etymology of the word 'temple'. It goes back to the term 'templum' (Greek τεμυος) and the root τεμ, meaning to 'cut' (Cassirer 1955: 100).

Theatre scholars have adapted Cassirer's concept to describe how theatrical space has been demarcated from the space of everyday culture. Viewed in evolutionary terms, it could be argued that the place of performance developed from a sacred to an aesthetic one. In ancient Greek theatre, the theatre is part of the *templum*, not separate from it. In early medieval liturgical drama performed within the space of the church, theatre and *templum* are also spatially indistinguishable.

The examples of Greek and liturgical theatre illustrate two further fundamental distinctions that have to be made in respect of the semantic dimension of the place of theatre. We must distinguish between (1) theatres that are purpose-built as theatres, and (2) those spaces that were created for another practical function but which are temporarily or permanently used as theatres. The question of function leads either 'inside' to considerations of theatre space as defined above, or 'outside' to questions of how the building is located in the wider cultural environment. For example, the particular form of the Elizabethan stage may originally have had less to do with the type of plays staged there than with the necessity to transform it into a bear-baiting pit in case the theatre performances did not provide enough profit (Dillon 2006: 36). This hypothesis draws attention to the fact that Elizabethan theatre had to compete in a cultural system where it was perceived less as high art than as one form of popular entertainment among others. The existence or absence of specialized theatre buildings do give an indication of the status of the medium within a culture.

Compared to Elizabethan theatres, the theatre buildings of the Italian Renaissance were, in the early stages, temporary constructions erected within the confines of palaces. They were not even visible to the normal citizen, let alone accessible. Extant examples in Northern Italy are the Teatro all'Antica in Sabbionetta and the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza. Both are 'concealed' within

the confines of their respective buildings: the former in the Ducal palace; the latter within the walls of the local academy. Both are today museums, but in former times they have served in a variety of functions ranging from storehouses to cinemas.

The question of theatrical cartography gains in importance with the growth of cities. Scholars have begun to investigate the question of location and clustering. The Elizabethan public theatres were located outside the city boundaries of London to remove them from municipal jurisdiction. With the growth of commercial theatre in the eighteenth and especially nineteenth centuries, particular sections of the larger cities were reserved for theatrical entertainment, often those in close proximity to red-light districts. The most famous examples of such clustering are London's West End and New York's Broadway. A major theatre city such as Berlin, which was divided for forty years, reflects different processes of clustering as both parts of the city created their own theatre districts.

The choice of venue can and does have a decisive influence on the theatrical experience, both positively and negatively. This insight is the result of a historical development that begins at the end of the nineteenth century with the call for theatre festivals at places of cultural and/or political significance. Generally speaking, theatre festivals are site-specific and often draw some of their legitimacy from a particular place, often away from the madding crowd of the larger theatre centres. In some cases, the place is somewhat remote and has the added function of a pilgrimage (Oberammergau, Bayreuth) or it is endowed with a special artistic tradition (Salzburg, Glyndebourne). The Salzburg festival, founded by Max Reinhardt and Hugo von Hofmannsthal in 1920, is perhaps the most rewarding example for an investigation of the inter-relationship between place and performance, as it has a famous tradition of changing non-theatrical spaces into theatrical ones (cathedral fronts, churches, riding stables).

Site-specific performances

Perhaps the most important development in recent times has been the move out of specialized theatre buildings and into spaces not originally designed for theatrical performance but usually defined for some other cultural function. These many experiments have been grouped under the rubric 'site-specific' theatre. These are performances that take place outside pre-existing and pre-defined theatrical spaces. Site-specific performances utilize natural features or historical spaces and buildings to provide a spatially determined semantic frame for the actual performance. They use the properties and meanings found

at a given site, be it a landscape, a city, a building or a room. This form of theatre emphasizes particular images, stories and events that reveal the complex relationship between ourselves and our physical environment. Needless to say, the defining aspect of site-specificity is its rootedness in a particular place and hence the impossibility of transferring such performances to other locales. That such performances, do in fact, get transported has meant that the category itself has become too broad to accommodate the various experimental forms emerging under its conceptual umbrella. Indeed, a new subcategory has emerged, that of site-*generic* performance. These are performances that require a specific *category* of space but are not tied to one place (Wilkie 2002).

Today, it is generally accepted (and not just among theatre scholars) that theatre can take place anywhere. It is the task of the theatre scholar to investigate, with the different methodologies at his or her disposal, the complex interactions that take place on the levels of theatrical, scenic and cultural space. Theatre is very much a spatial experience, and its investigation is a central task of students, artists and scholars alike.

Further reading

The best discussion of theatre space from a systematic and mainly semiotic point of view is Gay McAuley's *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre* (1999). It provides the most extensive discussion to date of the various terminological difficulties and confusions involved in analysing the many spatial dimensions at work in theatre. Marvin Carlson's *Places of Performance* (1989) has been very influential with its combination of semiotics and historical case studies of particular theatre buildings. David Wiles's *A Short History of Western Performance Space* (2003) is an excellent combination of historical survey and theoretical reflection. Nick Kaye's *Site-specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation* (2000) provides a good combination of theoretical discussion, documentation and case studies of a rapidly developing trend in contemporary performance. A fascinating combination of theoretically informed relection on site-specific practice and case studies can be found in *Theatre/Archaeology: Disciplinary Dialogues* by Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks (2001). Pearson, co-founder and director of the innovative Welsh-based performance group Brith Gof (1981–2004), collaborated with archaeologist and archaeological theorist Michael Shanks to investigate the inter-relationships between the past, both collective and personal, and how performance can provide a way of accessing these relationships. Historical treatments of theatre buildings in Europe include Allardyce Nicoll's *The Development of the Theatre: A Study of Theatrical Art from the Beginnings to the Present Day* (1966) and Richard and Helen Leacroft, *Theatre and Playhouse: An Illustrated Survey of Theatre Building from Ancient Greece to the Present Day* (1984). Scenography and theatre architecture are closely linked.