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Excerpt

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I

Introduction

Firste the Kinges Grace with the lordes spirituall and temporall and other noble men went out of the Kinges dyning chamber into the hall, and ther a little beneath the middest of the hall the Kinge pawsed till the Legates were entred within the hall door, and then the King advanced himselfe toward him [*sic*] till he came as farre as the spere and there embraced they, and after a little speche betwene them the ii Legates dissevered themselfe, that is to saie the Cardinall being cheefe in Commission upon the Kinges right hand and a little distance before the King, and bearinge his trayne, upon his right side very little behind him, the other Legate on the Kinges lefte hand in like distance and manner and their Crosses and their Pillers and hates borne before them, the Erle of Surrey being Admirall bare the Kinges sword goinge betwene the said Legate somewhat behind him and so passed through the hall all the lordes spirituall and temporall which passed forth into the dyninge chamber.

Which chamber was hanged with rich arras having a cloth of estate, chaire and cushions for the King of rich cloth of gold of tissue, the chaire standing on a stage of tymber halfe a foote or more above ground covered with cloth of gold, two chaires of cloth of gold for the two Legates set upon the right hand of the King in manner as shall appeare in a plate hereafter.

[Cardinal Wolsey passed through his house to Westminster] with ii great crossis of sylver borne byfore hym; with also ii great pillers of sylver, and his serjaunt at armez with a great mase of sylver gylt. Than his gentilmen usshers cried and sayd: On, my lordes and maysters! Make way for my Lordes Grace! Thus passed he downe frome his chambers thourouge the hall.

Trumpets, sennet and cornets. Enter two Vergers with short silver wands; next them, two Scribes in the habit of doctors; after them, the Archbishop of Canterbury alone; after him, the Bishops of Lincoln, Ely, Rochester and St Asaph; next them, with some small distance, follows a Gentleman, bearing the purse, with the great seal and a cardinal's hat; then two Priests, bearing each a silver cross; then a Gentleman Usher, bare-headed, accompanied with a Sergeant-at-arms, bearing a silver mace; then two Gentlemen, bearing two great silver pillars; after them, side by side, the two Cardinals, two Noblemen, with the sword and mace. The King takes place under the cloth of state. The two Cardinals sit under him as judges. Queen Katherine], attended by Griffith,]

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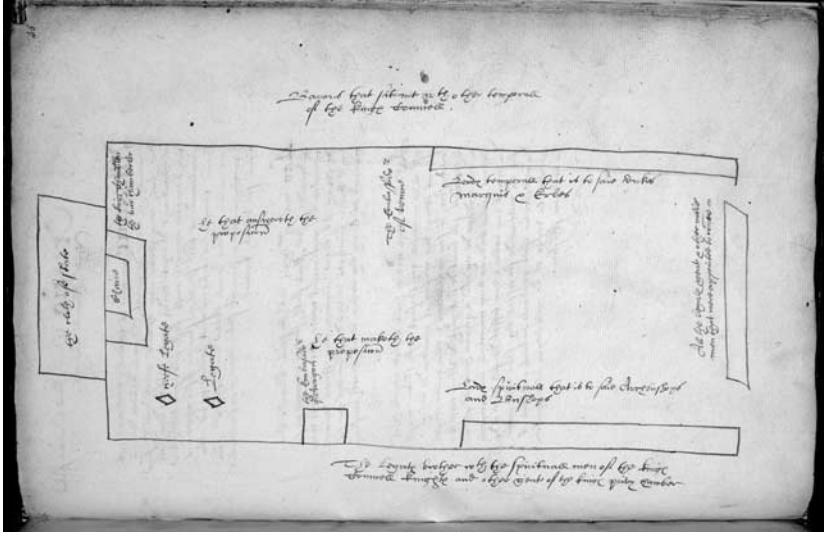
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Figure 1.1 Layout of the Presence Chamber at Greenwich Palace for the reception of the Papal Legates in 1518.

*takes place some distance from the King. The Bishops place themselves on each side the court in manner of a consistory; below them the Scribes [and a Crier]. The Lords sit next the Bishops. The rest of the attendants stand in convenient order about the stage.*¹

Above are three accounts of movement in or through a given space. The first is from an anonymous manuscript description of a reception at Greenwich for two Papal Legates in 1518; the second is from George Cavendish's *Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey* (written in the mid-1550s); and the third is a stage direction from Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII*, first performed in 1613. What they have in common is an intense concern with the precise way that movement takes place within the given space. Indeed, the first event, the reception of the Papal Legates, is reported by two other sources, one textual and one pictorial, both of which further confirm the detailed attention to spatial arrangement and movement within it (see Figure 1.1).² In the case of the first two texts, which report actual events rather than describe or prescribe movements for actors, we can also see that the concern for the impact made by movement in space is equally intensely shared by the participants: the recorder of each event is reproducing an interest in kinesics and proxemics (movements and spatial disposition) which is already inherent in the careful planning of

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these aspects by the participants themselves.³ In the first extract the King deliberately pauses in a very specific location ‘a little beneath the midst of the hall’ so that he can time his coverage of the necessary distance in order to embrace the Legates in the place deemed appropriate. The Cardinals and the Admiral in turn understand their places, knowing exactly how to position themselves. In an ironic twist, however, the reporter of this event has become so tied up in the intricacy of the detail that he has produced a text which blurs the very precision he is seeking to convey. The chief Legate, he writes, stood ‘a little distance before the King, and bearinge his trayne, upon his right side very little behind him’. Even changes to the punctuation within the wider syntax of which this is part, seeking to shift the application of the later phrase/s to the other Legate, cannot clarify the confusion at the heart of this sentence. Yet there seems no doubt that the writer knew what he meant, and his failure to render it clearly perhaps expresses the degree of anxiety underlying such protocols. Though this account does not make the proxemics clear, we are nevertheless made aware of how important every nuance is in such matters and of the way this recognition is shared and strictly observed by both host court and foreign visitor.⁴

Cavendish’s report of Cardinal Wolsey’s movement is interesting because it is an account not of a special occasion, but of a daily event (though a daily event in the life of someone at the apex of the social hierarchy). This is Wolsey passing through the rooms of his house to mount his mule, ‘trapped altogether in crimson velvet and gilt stirrups’, and make his way in procession to Westminster Hall, ‘with his train and appurtenances . . . having about him four footmen with gilt pole-axes in their hands’, in order to take up his daily business as Lord Chancellor. It functions as an important reminder of the element of ceremony that operated all the time in royal and noble households. When the lord of the household moved from one part of the building to another, however routinely, this constituted a minor ceremony, and none knew that better than George Cavendish, who was a gentleman-usher in Wolsey’s household. Whereas in the first text above, this sense of ceremony is translated into a heightened concern with spatial and kinetic protocols, in this second instance it is displayed more evidently through the lavishness of ‘train and appurtenances’. The ostentatious display of wealth through rich objects and materials, as well as multiple attendants and the slowing of pace that these features are likely to produce, turns what might otherwise be merely routine movement into procession.

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Occasionally, the careful planning of appearances could go very wrong, however, as the historian Edward Hall's account of Cardinal Campegi (the other Legate accompanying Wolsey at the Greenwich reception described on p. 1 above) entering the city of London demonstrates in merciless and mischievous detail:

The night before he came to London, the Cardinall of Yorke, to furnishe the carriages of the Cardinall Campeius, sent to him twelve mulettes with emptie cofers covered with redde, whiche twelve mulettes wer led through London, emongst the mulettes of Campeius, which were but eight and so these xx mulettes passed through the stretes, as though thei had been full of treasures, apparell and other necessaries. And when they came into Chepe, one of the mulettes brake from her keeper, and overthrewe the chestes, and overturned twoo or three other mulettes cariages, whiche fell with suche a violence, that diverse of theim unlocked, and out of some fell olde hosen, broken shoen, and roasted fleshe, peces of breade, egges and muche vyle baggage: at whiche sighte the boyes cryed, see, see my Lorde Legates treasure, and so the muleters wer asshamed, and tooke up all their stuffe and passed furth. And about thre of the clock at after none on the xxix day of July thesaid Legate entred the cite, and in Sothwarke met him all the clergie of London, with crosses, sensers and copes and sensed him with great reverence. (*Performance and Spectacle*, p. 61)

Cheapside, where the unfortunate Cardinal's chests spill open, was one of the grandest streets in London and the high point of formal processions, as will be seen in Chapter 2. The straight-faced transition here from this parodic procession to the solemn welcome by the clergy produces an irony that may or may not be intentional on Hall's part.

Shakespeare and Fletcher, as professional dramatists, were habituated to thinking about how to script the movement of, and distances between, bodies in the restricted space of the stage; but in writing a play as firmly based at court as *Henry VIII*, and as well documented, they were dealing with material that was already in the chronicle sources saturated with detailed descriptions of order and movement in space.⁵ Aside from being restricted by the number of actors and the size of the space, which meant reducing the whole effect by comparison with the original event, Shakespeare and Fletcher could simply follow the detail of the chronicle sources in creating a processional entry of this kind. The parallels with the previous two texts are evident: the distinction of degree between 'some distance' prescribed between the King and Queen and 'some small distance' between the Bishops and the Gentleman is reminiscent of the anonymous description of the reception of the Papal Legates, as is the strongly symmetrical disposition

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of figures, while the carrying of the two great silver pillars and the concern with ceremonial objects generally recalls Cavendish's description of Wolsey's progress.

The inclusion of a play alongside historical sources here highlights the element of conscious performance inherent in many aspects of court life and deliberately problematizes the distinction between fiction and historiography. The court event, whether a daily ritual or a special occasion, is as much a performance, it might be argued, as a play, and this question of what constitutes performance is one that I will return to below and throughout the book. Performance, however, cannot be defined via any simple binary between itself and 'not-performance'. It is more useful to think in terms of a spectrum in which the framing of a piece of action as a performance makes it visible as such to varying degrees.⁶ Performance can be social, where its framing is barely visible to those who witness it; or it can be framed by a particular occasion; or it can be framed aesthetically, as a piece of fiction or art. The court is an especially rich environment for exploring this spectrum since it is putting itself on show so consistently and in so many different frames, from daily rituals to solemn ceremonies, marked off from the quotidian routine. As a result, the different kinds of framing often overlap and intersect (as is evident throughout the book, but particularly explored in Chapter 5). A distinction between plays and other kinds of performance is thus not simple to apply. Plays, including history plays, are fictional to a degree and consciously structured; but historical records are also authorially structured and necessarily stop short of providing full or transparent access to reality. While those records we think of as 'historical' do not share the same status as drama or fiction, they may come closer to them than is always admitted. No record (and the term 'record' itself occludes the problematic here) is neutral or objective or allows unmediated access to real events. Every written record is produced from a subject position that determines the selection, omission and distortion of what took place. The retention or exclusion of particular records, moreover, also usually indicates a bias; the archive is not a neutral space.⁷ A play has an overt citational quality that acknowledges its own status as repeated or restored behaviour; but other forms of activity, like trials, can be just as citational, and other forms of record, by virtue of their very claim to the status of 'record', play down their own position as mediators.⁸ A play is as reliable a witness to the cultural concerns of a society as is a non-fictional record; and what all three texts quoted above witness is an ongoing concern, verging almost on obsession, with ceremonialized space and the way it is produced.

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PLACE AND SPACE

To quote Norbert Elias: ‘every kind of “being together” of people has a corresponding arrangement of space’.⁹ Study of the early modern court, however, based as it largely has been upon written record, retains an innate verbal bias, and has paid insufficient attention to the occupation of space. It is the aim of this book to bring spatial and kinetic evidence to the fore and to let that lead the analysis of events. The space of the early modern court, as John Adamson has written, was ‘hierarchical and politically charged’.¹⁰ Both he and Elias recognize space as shaped by human occupation; yet they suggest interestingly different models of the court. Adamson offers a linear model, seeing the palace as a series of thresholds, with the court gate, guard chamber and presence chamber functioning as a sequence of barriers between the outside world and inner sanctum of the royal bedchamber; while Elias, seeing a more centripetal arrangement of chambers and antechambers around the nucleus of the bedchamber, emphasizes ‘the co-existence of constant spatial proximity and constant social distance, of intimate contact in one stratum and the strictest aloofness in the other’.¹¹ These models are not really mutually exclusive, but rather ways of emphasizing different aspects of the way the space of the early modern court functioned. If one were to focus strictly on changes in the material development of court architecture, one might argue that the layout of buildings did in fact develop from a broadly linear structure in the medieval period to a more centripetal one; but this is not really the point here. The point is that both of these topographies are as metaphorical as they are material. They are mental maps related to, but not synonymous with, physical structures, and speak kinds of social truth that are not incompatible in the way that literal diagrams of spatial layout would be. It is true that palaces remained a series of thresholds even as their architecture became more complex. Indeed, as the architecture of courts and great houses moved, with time, towards increasing privacy, one might argue that this sense of the household as a sequence of thresholds increased rather than decreased, even though the actual linearity of the building was giving way to more complex shapes.

What we can see, in other words, is that space is not really a fixed material feature, but is constructed by the way it is occupied. Our mental maps of physical structures stem from our understanding not only of the material elements of those spaces but of how their occupants functioned within them. Every ‘arrangement of space’, though Elias did not go on to say this, occupies a particular place; and place as well as space contributes

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to the making of meaning. In order to understand how the space of a given environment is occupied and constructed, we have to understand the given environment 'itself'. The separation of the built or natural environment from its occupation is artificial, of course; in exploring the material facts and historical associations of the environment, we cannot avoid consideration of how earlier human beings have, within its material constraints, designed and used it.¹² 'We shape our buildings and they shape us.' These words were uttered by Winston Churchill during a debate on restoring the House of Commons after the war. His fear was that any change to the spatial arrangement of the House, currently set up with opposing parties facing each other across a narrow aisle, would directly affect existing patterns of government.¹³ As Lena Cowen Orlin has recently shown in her wonderful study of domestic spaces in Tudor London, the material specificities of each particular type of space produce particular ways of being. Privacy as a way of being, for example, was partly produced by, and in part produced, the spaces of closets, galleries and gardens.¹⁴ Specific environments, furthermore, are linked with specific behaviours. As Orlin argues, not only did gardens encourage walking, and walking in turn encourage intimacy (because of the lower probability of being heard), but the very activity of walking could, by association, incite 'the state of being, privacy'.¹⁵

A separation between 'space' and 'place' is not only arbitrarily imposed by certain kinds of study, but complicated by current linguistic usage, which offers no consistency as to which is which. The editors of *The Anthropology of Place and Space*, for example, describe the subject of one section as 'how people collectively form a meaningful relationship with the locales they occupy, how they attach meaning to space, or transform "space" into "place"'.¹⁶ Yi-Fu Tuan's use of the terms is similar: "Space" is more abstract than "place." What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value.¹⁷ Jean Howard's recent study of the representation of London in early modern theatre, by contrast, describes her subject thus: 'Throughout this book I am in part investigating the process by which, to use de Certeau's language, plays helped to transform specific places into significant social spaces, that is, into environments marked by the actions, movements, and daily practices of the inhabitants.'¹⁸ These ways of employing the same terminology are self-evidently antithetical. Howard's use, as she notes, is based on that of de Certeau, whose work has been central to the recent upsurge of work on city spaces. He is even quoted by another writer in the very section of *The Anthropology of Place and Space* introduced by the opposing use of the same terminology quoted above: "space is a practiced place"

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(de Certeau 1984: 117) where historically and culturally situated people create a locality of familiar *heres* and *theres* in the same way that speakers act out language systems in the creation of vernacular meanings'.¹⁹ *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau's highly influential book, alluded to here, was first published in 1980 and translated into English in 1984. Its usage and understanding of the concepts of space and place (*espace* and *lieu*) coincides with those of the other major pioneer in this field, Henri Lefebvre, whose most influential work, *The Production of Space*, was first published in 1974 and translated into English in 1991. It is therefore this usage I will adopt in this book when it is necessary to distinguish between the two terms.

It is important at this point, however, to reiterate the broader argument underlying this book, that there is no simple opposition between place as material and space as perceptual. Both place and space are constituted partly through perception, so that their meanings are made through a negotiation between materiality and consciousness. Even the seeming binary between materiality and consciousness in that last sentence is false. 'Negotiation' is the key word here. Consciousness itself is experienced in and through the body, and the body is always produced within the space of a given place. 'We get into place, move and stay there with our bodies. But the fact is neither innocent nor trivial; it is momentous in its consequences.'²⁰ The quotation is from Christopher Tilley, who argues for the importance of phenomenology in understanding the material environment. Perception, he argues, is a transaction or exchange between people and the space they occupy, and this in turn has implications for the way a society is understood: 'Social relations are simultaneously relations between material forms . . . Social identity is always experienced and enacted in specific contexts.'²¹

Two further terms, again not consistently used across the wide spectrum of disciplines that attend to matters of place and space (including archaeology, anthropology, architecture, sociology, geography and theatre history), are worth mentioning here as useful to further discussion. The first is 'locale', used in the quotation above from *The Anthropology of Place and Space*; and the second is 'site'. 'Locale' is a term coined by Anthony Giddens to demonstrate his theory of structuration, namely that human beings structure their environment through their agency but are also constrained by it. 'Locales', he writes, 'are not just places but *settings* of interaction'; and it is the capacity of the term to signal interaction as well as position that makes it preferable to 'place'.²² The concept of the locale, a specific and physically bounded space which acts as a setting for

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‘institutionally embedded social encounters and practices’, signals the degree to which materiality and social being are mutually bound up.²³ Giddens also goes on to explore what he calls ‘regionalisation’ within the *locale*, that is, the way it is ‘zoned’ by the different forms of activity that take place within specific areas of it.²⁴

‘Site’, on the other hand, is a term that has been in much longer and more general use, sometimes simply meaning location or position, but also in the more specialized sense within the discourse of archaeology of a site of excavation. Recent theoretical work has emphasized the potential specificity of the term, while widening the context beyond that of archaeological discourse. Thus Hilda Kuper, for example, defines a site as ‘a particular piece of social space, a place socially and ideologically demarcated and separated from other places’. ‘Some sites’, she goes on to argue, ‘have more power and significance than others, and these qualities need have no *fixed* relationship to a physical, empirical dimension.’ Particular sites may generate a sense of authority or of sacredness. ‘In short, there is a condensation of values in particular sites, and transactions that constitute the totality of social life may be spatially mapped with specific sites expressing relatively durable structured interests and related values.’²⁵ Discussion of events particularly heavily invested with symbolic value in the subsequent chapters of this book will inevitably focus on sites of this kind, representing a ‘condensation of values’. The terminology of ‘locales’ and ‘sites’ is thus not mutually exclusive, since very many locations will be illuminated by being considered within both these discourses of analysis.

PERFORMANCE

An emphasis on the importance of place and space has been central to performance practice and theory since at least the 1960s. Long before the recent turn towards the environment in popular thinking, ‘environmental theatre’ was exploring how to ‘create’ an environment by transforming a space or how to ‘negotiate with’ an environment by ‘engaging in a scenic dialog with the space’.²⁶ Since then, ‘site-specific’ works of art have made very familiar the idea that human beings and particular environments produce and mark one another; and the more recent ‘place-based performance’, differentiated from site-specific performance by the fact that it ‘expects more from its participants’, has foregrounded the relationship between place and participants even more emphatically.²⁷ Conceiving of the early modern court as a place in which the participants are deeply

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immersed and which is performed by them through their immersion in it, is a shaping perspective of this study.

Thinking about the court in terms of theatre more generally is of course not new. Historians and others writing about the early modern court have found the metaphor of theatre irresistible over a long period, and early modern writers themselves often resorted to it. 'We princes, I tell you', Elizabeth I famously said, 'are set on stages, in the sight and view of the world duly observed'; kings, wrote her successor James VI and I, 'are as it were set (as it was said of old) upon a publike stage, in the sight of all the people'.²⁸ More broadly, the term 'performance' has spread across different domains and disciplines of thought in recent decades, so that its parameters are almost impossible to limit. It is now over sixty years since Erving Goffman popularized an understanding of the term as referring to 'all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers'.²⁹ The events selected for this study, however, will focus on a more limited kind of performance by selecting for analysis events which are consciously set apart from everyday life by being scripted or ceremonialized to a degree. Yet the word 'ceremonial' is also one that Goffman uses in exploring the nature of deference and demeanour. 'The self', he writes, 'is in part a ceremonial thing, a sacred object which must be treated with proper ritual care and in turn must be presented in a proper light to others'.³⁰ Goffman is writing about everyday behaviours in twentieth-century social environments, but the observation is if anything even more applicable to an earlier society which was more rigidly and hierarchically ordered, such as the early modern court. Indeed the ceremonial events that will structure this study arise precisely out of a heightened concern for establishing and reaffirming the place of each individual within a structure of both bonds and boundaries. Though routine behaviour in the modern workplace may seem very far from the formalities of behaviour at a royal funeral, ceremonial formalities may be understood to some degree as a heightened form of manners. Indeed one of the early terms to describe the routine courtesies of social interaction before 'manners' became established with this meaning was 'ceremonies'.³¹

Ceremonial events as selected for this study, however, have a slightly more specialized inflection. They are the kind of events which throughout the period of this book were often called 'solemnities' (as is evident in several of the quotations in Chapter 2 below). They have, in other words, a recognizable 'rhetorical quotient'. They are shaped by some visible awareness of the act of making, some element of what Eugenio Barba would