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## **Environmental Distinctions: The discriminating dining environment**

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### **ABSTRACT**

How a cafe or restaurant is experienced is different from how the cafe is largely discussed in the media, that is, as an objectified physical setting. The distinction between physical settings and architectural experience was explored through an investigation of dining environments located in Paris and in an inner suburb in Brisbane, Australia. It was noted that the previous discussions of social and cultural practices had given little consideration to the influence of the environment on interpretation. Instead, the dining environment was discussed as a site for action, or as a three dimensional sculpture removed from habitation, and represented in design magazines through photographs which were usually devoid of people. Even fewer journals included the built environment (in an architectural sense) in the discussion of social acts. The environmental situation was often simply discussed as objects in a setting. Little attention had been given to the inherent potency of space, and the way in which objects and people influence and construct a sense of place. Everyday practices involve both the setting—or the sculptural space—and the activity or practice. In this study, the dining experience was shown to come into existence through the combination of these aspects—neither being able to represent the experience alone. The interior volume was not understood as emptiness filled with things but, rather, as a dynamic part of being-in-place. The space, when understood in this way, cannot exist without the person and vice versa. As a consequence, questions of identity and discrimination were raised, and examples of the role of the built environment in our interpretation of ‘the other’ were revealed.

*Key words: design, architectural experience, discrimination, grounded theory, narrative inquiry*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Within this paper the role of the built or physical environment in discrimination is identified. The study aimed to reveal how the environment may be involved with our propositional lives and with our understanding of others and therefore our actions toward them. The current study, which involved a cross section of dining environments located within two cultural settings, revealed that the built environment is not just a backdrop to human activity. Instead the environment operated as a participant in our interpretative processes and in our daily experiences. In association, the physical environment was shown to be active in the discriminatory process. The nonhuman aspects of an environmental setting are participants in the interpretative process of individuals in regard to the other—human and nonhuman. The current detailed study is important because it informs designers and managers of environments about the potential impact of their creations or facilities. It also informs the public about how they interact with the environment and form impressions about others and themselves. This in turn influences their experiences and interactions.

The study incorporated a multidimensional framework in order to investigate how humans encounter, interpret, and experience their world. Such a framework draws upon what may appear to be contradictory theoretical positions in order to interrogate the phenomena under investigation. Research, which is based in this emerging field, embraces diversity and recognises that by deliberately placing side by side aspects of a situation that have been traditionally isolated, unforeseen and insightful understandings may come to light. The methodology in this case was informed by the work of the philosopher and scientist, C.S. Peirce, who described how we could understand a particular ‘thing’ (such as an idea, a tangible object, or a situation) by looking at it in different ways. Kelson describes Peirce’s approach, Pragmatism, in the following manner; ‘...we inquire about ‘something’ by releasing it from what we already know—give it power to become related to other qualities, other grounds’<sup>1</sup>. The procedure of inquiry proposed is: ...the making of solutions—resolutions of conflicts and metamorphoses of conflictual structure into symbolic currency...and is

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<sup>1</sup> R. Kelson, *Peirce’s Pragmatism: The Medium as Method*, Peter Lang Publishing, New York, 1998, p. 27.

explicitly concerned with human interaction...'<sup>2</sup>. The purpose of Peirce's semeiotic 'is to show how two distinct systems of inquiry become interrelated'<sup>3</sup> and any paradoxes in thought, rather than being seen as aberrations or errors, are in fact recognised as points of disjuncture which may be reconciled<sup>4</sup>. Any two 'universes of discourses' (theoretical framework or paradigm) may be understood as occupying the same theoretical space when they are applied to the same 'thing'. Kvelson states that in this instant we have 'con-fusions' of ideas, and there is opportunity for new generalities. The discourses are described as 'habits of thought'. When these disparate discourses are brought together, the boundaries can be interrogated and new ideas are allowed to emerge<sup>5</sup>.

Such a research approach was essential for the current work because our everyday experiences come into existence through relationships between people and the physical environment. To understand the role of the physical components in the experience of the dining environment, it was important to be able to reveal the different modes of the person environment relationship. These had been described in the literature, and in simple terms the person (P) and environment (E) can be understood and labelled as separate entities (P+E), as reciprocal entities (P-E), and as interdependent entities (P~E, PE). These were discussed as separate exclusive modes that rarely intersected. This study overcame the perceived limitation of the P E discourses by bringing together a range of methodologies including textual analysis, phenomenology, ethnomethodology, narrative inquiry, and grounded theory which collectively captured the various P E dimensions, thereby enabling interrogation of 'the thing' which was (and is) the dining environment. This study challenges the constructs of the physical environment which are embedded explicitly or implicitly solely within one mode of the person environment relationship.

Before discussing the findings in relation to discrimination, key concepts that underpin the study will be introduced. These include environmental interpretation, the dining environment as a site of investigation, and discriminatory environments. In conclusion, the application of the study for designers and non-designers will be discussed.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL INTERPRETATION**

In order to understand how an environment is discriminatory it is important to understand the process of interpretation. The environment itself, when not in relationship with people, is simply a collection of objects and spaces in an arrangement. These have the potential to become a variety of experiences or places depending on the meaning that the environment comes to have for those who form a relationship directly with it or indirectly through media such as images, film, descriptions, or anecdotes concerning aspects of the building or site. An interior or building may be understood to have a predetermined purpose and therefore meaning to all within a particular subculture or culture. In his seminal work on the nonverbal communication of buildings, Rapoport<sup>6</sup> states that buildings are physical expressions of belief systems and that these may become stable over time. Consequently, we generally can correctly distinguish a house from a shopping mall. However, when comparing places that have similar purposes or uses such as a Presbyterian and a Methodist church or a café and a restaurant, the distinctions may not be as clear. In order to recognise such a situation as a particular environmental type, a deeper knowledge of the subcultural belief systems that are embedded in the artefact is required.

In some instances the creator of an artefact may deliberately strive to present opportunities for multiple interpretations. Umberto Eco relates that, when writing scientific texts, his interpretative intentions differ from those for the novel.

... I try to reach, from a disconnected lump of experiences, a coherent conclusion and I propose this conclusion to my readers...When I write a novel, on the contrary, even though starting (probably) from the same lump of experiences, I realise that I am not

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<sup>2</sup> R. Kvelson, *ibid*, pp. 2--35.

<sup>3</sup> R. Kvelson, *Peirce, Paradox, Praxis: The Image, the Conflict, and the Law*, Approaches to Semiotics 94, Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin, 1990, p.6.

<sup>4</sup> R. Kvelson, *ibid*

<sup>5</sup> R. Kvelson, *Peirce's Pragmatism: The Medium as Method*, 1998.

<sup>6</sup> Amos Rapoport, *The Meaning of the Built Environment. A Nonverbal Communication Approach*: University of Arizona, Tucson, 1990.

trying to impose a conclusion: I stage a play of contradictions. It is not that I do not impose a conclusion because there is no conclusion; on the contrary there are many possible conclusions...Eco<sup>7</sup>.

A designer of a building or interior may also deliberately design for ambiguity. A resultant interpretation manifests in different ways such as a fixed proposition or opinion about something which a person (the interpreter) holds in regard to a thing or situation. However, interpretation may also be the process by which we come to make 'sense of something'. At the commencement of the study, the interpreter was understood to bring a personal understanding to a communally defined entity and that the physical environment communicated certain information that became part of the interpreter's story in a particular way.<sup>8</sup> However, regardless of the intention, interpretations are multiple. The design offers only the raw material or potentiality.

The world that we live in is understood by many theorists to be of our own making. It is not an interpretation that is imposed upon *something* but is the way we exist in the world. For example Wittgenstein states that we do not *force* our view onto the world, but rather, we conceptually adapt and engage with the situation.<sup>9</sup> As the phenomenologist, Schutz, proposed, we often operate as part of a world that is known to us without conscious thought — our *life-world*. In addition, a building or site may be seen as a text. The text exists only as potential; that is, the entity is only *virtual* until taken up by the interpreter into a *system of signification* by interpretative action. These aspects become signs as part of a meaning making process or interpretative circle—thought and action<sup>10</sup>; the interpreter is 'suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun'<sup>11</sup>. By considering Wittgenstein a sense of these multiple realities begins to emerge. He states in *Philosophical Investigations*:

I look at the landscape, my gaze ranges over it, I see all sorts of distinct and indistinct movement; *this* impresses on me, *that* is quite hazy. After all, how completely ragged what we see can appear! And now look at all that can be meant by 'description of what is seen'.—But this just is what is called "description of what is seen". There is not one genuine proper case of such description—the rest being just vague, something which awaits clarification, or which must be swept aside as rubbish<sup>12,3</sup>

Schwandt<sup>13</sup> points out we live in the 'remaking of the world' rather than a mirroring of the world. Our understandings are reached through a continual reinterpretation of interpretations toward stable propositions or beliefs where the immediate interpretation becomes a sign for future interpretation.<sup>14</sup> If we experience our world through our understandings of the world that we live in, if we are continually making propositions about the way things are which inform our actions, and if we are situated in relation to a physical world in some way, then the physical world is also part of our propositions about place and about other people.

## THE DINING ENVIRONMENT AS A SITE OF INVESTIGATION

Everyday environments, such as cafes or other dining environments, provide us with a way to unravel some of the complex relationships that are operating as part of the interpretative processes. The investigation which I undertook as a participant observer brought forth a

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<sup>7</sup> U. Eco, R. Rorty, J. Culler and C. Brooke-Rose, *Interpretation and Over-interpretation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992, p. 140.

<sup>8</sup> D. Smith, *Architectural Experience: Composition of Viewpoints*, PhD thesis, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, 2000.

<sup>9</sup> L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. revised, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1967.

<sup>10</sup> W.E. Rogers, *Interpreting Interpretations: Textual Hermeneutics As an Ascetic Discipline*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, PA, 1994.

<sup>11</sup> C. Geertz in T.A. Schwandt, 'Constructivist, interpretivist approaches to human inquiry', in N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln, (eds) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA, 1994, p. 123.

<sup>12</sup> L. Wittgenstein, *op. cit.* p. 200.

<sup>13</sup> T.A. Schwandt, 'Constructivist, interpretivist approaches to human inquiry', in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 1994, pp. 118–137.

<sup>14</sup> C.S. Peirce 'Of reasoning in general', in Peirce Edition Project (ed.) *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN, 1998, 1903, vol. 2 (1893–1913), pp. 11–26.

theoretical understanding of how we as individuals are intrinsically related to the environment in a number of ways. Through these person environment relations, individuals take on identities that are related to the belief system of the interpreter. Whether in regard to a diner in Paris, France or a café dweller in Brisbane, Australia, it was revealed that the environment is not simply a setting for that person's activities. Instead what is extracted *is* the person environment relationship that is his or her identity at a particular point in time and within a particular space. The café or restaurant is revealed to be a site of discrimination as the self, people, environments, and objects are positioned in various forms of 'the other' in relation to the interpreter.

Drinking coffee and dining out are examples of social formations. A social formation is a gathering of people which occurs to carry out a task, partake in an activity, or to attend an event<sup>15,16</sup>. The formation is constant (for example, dining at a particular café) but the people who make up the formation need not be the same. In addition, those who partake in a particular formation may have nothing in common except the fact that they are simultaneously present in this point of time and in this place. Therefore, the experience of the relationship is not captured in the generic descriptors of a user group such as 'the patrons' or 'the diners'; these being descriptors of the social formation. The concept of the 'generic user' implies all people can be dealt with in a similar manner. The concept of 'user' also implies one who only pragmatically attends to using the space or the facilities. In addition, the common construct of 'the enduser' in design discussions implies that the person is removed from the development of the place and is instead an insertion. However, as discussed above, the environmental situation or place does not come into being without the person. Prior to the relationship the physical environment is simply a site which exists as embedded potential; and what Peirce terms firstness<sup>17</sup>. Such references to people within the environment do not capture the experience that arises from the relationship between the person and the environment. What needs to be incorporated, is that the experience is concurrently the interpretation and that which is formed through the interpretative process.

Through the investigation of dining environments, I strove to reveal how the environment may be involved with our propositional lives and with our actions toward others. To understand it more fully without predetermined propositions, I embraced a grounded theory approach to the study. Narrative inquiry was selected as a complementary mode of data collection. Narratives are the stories people tell about themselves and one another. These stories encode the practices and artefacts of culture with their meaning<sup>18</sup>. Narrative inquiry 'captures in a first hand way what it is to experience the environmental setting as it is lived out. Although there are various research approaches that provide insights into the relationship between people and environments, data that does not directly address the experience of the environment fails to address one of the essential roles of the interior designer or architect. That role is the creation of environments that engender or support the meaningful connections between people and the physical environment. Narrative inquiry served that end.'<sup>19</sup>

Theory was combined in a first hand manner with the experiences. The process involved a form of inquiry that integrated a range of theoretical frameworks and insights from the literature and/or from other academic sources. Diaries (or journals), photographic analysis and participant observation were the main forms of data collection for the current study. As Clandinin and Connelly<sup>20</sup> emphasise, it is important that the researcher stands aside as evaluator and critic of the processes and the interpretations being drawn. The stories

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<sup>15</sup> J. Fiske, 'Audiencing: Cultural Practice and Cultural Studies', in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, pp. 189–198.

<sup>16</sup> K.C. Schrøder, 'Audience semiotics: Interpretive communities and the "ethnographic turn" in media research', *Media, Culture and Society*, 1994, vol. 16, pp. 337–347.

<sup>17</sup> C.S. Peirce 'Sundry Logical Conceptions', in *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, pp. 268–269.

<sup>18</sup> L. Brodkey, 'Writing ethnographic narratives', *Written Communication*, 4 (1), 1987, pp. 25–50.

<sup>19</sup> D. Smith, Narrative research and the built environment, *IDEA*, 2001, vol.1, issue 2, p. 25.

<sup>20</sup> D.J. Clandinin and F.M. Connelly, 'Stories of experience and narrative inquiry', *Educational Researcher*, 1990, 19 (5), pp. 2–14.

gathered needed to incorporate all aspects and the story of the narrative critic becomes an important aspect of the study<sup>21,22,23</sup>

This study involved an investigation of all the dining environments within two sites over a period of approximately two years. Both sites were selected due to the strong connection to dining culturally and due to the high number of venues in each area. As I did not speak French well, I selected Paris as a study site for six months in order to amplify the role of the physical environment. I engaged in the task of making sense, finding my way, and meaning making by attempting to read the environment. In fact the task of dining became a conversation between the environment as a whole or its individual elements and me. I was the participant and the researcher. The selected Parisian and Brisbane sites provide a context that contains a multitude of beliefs, behaviours, actions, and events that are part of what it is to be in *that* particular place at *that* particular time. The first site included four categories of locations in Paris, however, the study was focussed predominantly on the 14<sup>th</sup> arrondissement. The second was located in an inner suburb undergoing gentrification in Brisbane. The area was selected as dining venues are a major component of this type of urban renewal. These experiences formed the basis of a narrative which was recorded. Another aspect of the narrative, was my companion in Brisbane. Samantha [pseudonym] was a local resident who represented the traditional artist, student, non-traditional Brisbane resident that had given the suburb, New Farm its character and in part its desirability. She frequented the site and her experiences of the area and dining, and the belief that she was a 'genuine New Farmer', formed the basis of my investigation of the person environment relationship.

The sites contained numerous restaurants, cafes, brasseries and the like, which became the vehicles of the study. A total of forty six venues in Paris (16 in local residential street, 10 design venues, 4 iconic-tourist venues, plus 16 in pilot local precinct study) and twenty venues in Brisbane (11 residential node, plus 9 in pilot node two investigations) were considered. Visits to the study venues with and without companions were undertaken. The particulars of each café or restaurant will not be described here due to the number involved and as it was the process of interpretation that was being interrogated rather than the environmental style or location per se. Neither is this a comparative study as it was a richness of data concerning environmental situations involving dining experiences that was sought. It was the diversity of the concepts that arose rather than their frequency that was important.

Through an integrative process based on that first described by Strauss<sup>24</sup>, a deep understanding of the process and the role of the environment was achieved. For each venue I sketched the exterior and wrote a one-paragraph hypothetical about arriving and a one-paragraph hypothetical about entering. I narrated my experiences as stories about my visits. I experimented with the most informative and authentic way of doing this. I found that free flow descriptions were the most appropriate, although I did initially try to structure my observation, critique and analysis. Photographic images were compiled as a visual diary with a written analysis. These in association with the written diaries, were read as aspects of the overall narrative. The visual diary involved three steps—constructing a recall-narrative about the experiences of 'being there', deconstructing the relationship between the image and the words to identify which elements were associated with the memories, and recording how the visual image served to stimulate and/or distract; how it related to physical, social and emotional aspects of the narrative. The method strove to identify connections in a reflective manner. All study venues were analysed in a similar manner.

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<sup>21</sup> D.J. Clandinin and F.M. Connelly, 'Personal experience methods', in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, pp. 413–442.

<sup>22</sup> J.E. Cooper, 'Telling our own stories: the reading and writing of journals or diaries', in C. Witherell and N. Noddings, (eds) *Stories Lives Tell: Narrative and Dialogue*, Education Teachers College Press, New York, 1991, pp. 96–112.

<sup>23</sup> D.F. Hones, 'Known in part: the transformational power of narrative inquiry', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 1998, 4 (2), pp. 225–49.

<sup>24</sup> A.L. Strauss, *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987.

## DISCRIMINATORY ENVIRONMENTS

In this study the restaurant or cafe was also shown to discriminate. Discrimination occurred in a number of ways including discrimination between places, toward place, and/or toward people. It is important to understand the meaning of a place (including people, objects, and activities) as it is experienced rather than simply as what the intention was for designers. We need to be aware of how environments are discriminatory rather than ask if they are or not.

Links between discrimination and design have been discussed by a number of researchers. For one, Weisman, in her book *Discrimination by Design: A Feminist Critique*, highlights how design has been active in developing social inequality. She emphasises the importance of people being able to control their boundaries or their territory. It enables division from others while others judge our ability to establish and control our boundaries<sup>25</sup>. For example, she describes the evolution of the workplace from the advent of Taylorism whereby people were located in space so that they could be monitored and in turn ensure efficiency of 'production'. As an extension of this, the corporate, high-rise interior layout of today reflects office structures that establish and express workers' status and hierarchy, while the exterior office tower marks its place among other 'corporate giants who build and own them'<sup>26</sup>. Weisman also describes hospitals. She outlines how the development of specialist care has meant the need for the design of specialist workplaces. She compares the obstetrical units (that were designed for efficiency through the spatial layout and compartmentalised activities) with birthing units which now incorporate families and less formal interactions<sup>27</sup>. The differing solutions reflect different attitudes to the medical model of giving birth, and the role of the mother and child.

Discrimination is understood in this study to mark a point of distinction, and in relationship to people in environments, to also extend to notions of inclusion, exclusion, appropriateness, and inappropriateness, to belonging, and to a sense of rejection. The notion of otherness is therefore relevant; the particulars of what actually constitutes 'otherness' or 'the other' were revealed through the data and will be discussed below. In the thesis *Architectural Experience: A Composition of viewpoints* it is noted that: 'For something to be defined as 'other' there must be some form of distinction or disjuncture. We view the world as radiating from where we are—as out there. In most situations, we are aware of how things are relatively to ourselves'<sup>28</sup>; or as Merleau-Ponty called it, the zero point of spatiality, because we are its perceptual source and that 'our awareness is an act of our organic, bodily presence and at the same time social.'<sup>29</sup> Therefore disjuncture is also associated with the concept of continuity. As Peirce states:

"...I am altogether myself, and not at all you." If you embrace synechism, you must abhor this metaphysics of wickedness. In the first place, your neighbours are, in a measure, yourself, in a far greater way than, without great studies in psychology, you would believe. Really, the selfhood you like to attribute to yourself is, for the most part, the vulgarest delusion of vanity. In the second place, all men who resemble you and are in analogous circumstances, are in measure, yourself, though not quite in the same way in which your neighbours are you<sup>30</sup>

## OUTCOMES: THE ROLE OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT IN DISCRIMINATION

The environment when created exists only as its potential or firstness. However, it should be noted that otherness exists as a relationship and as such is a concept that can not exist except as what Peirce defined as secondness<sup>31</sup>. Discrimination and distinction were revealed

<sup>25</sup> L.K. Weisman, *Discrimination by Design: A Feminist Critique of the Man-Made Environment*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, IL, 1994, p. 23.

<sup>26</sup> L.K. Weisman, *ibid.* p. 40.

<sup>27</sup> L.K. Weisman, *ibid.* p. 52.

<sup>28</sup> D. Smith, *Architectural Experience: Composition of Viewpoints*, chap. 1.

<sup>29</sup> A. Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, PA, 1992, p. 132.

<sup>30</sup> C.S. Peirce, 'Immortality in the light of synechism', in *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, vol. 2, p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> Peirce Edition Project (ed.) *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN, 1998, 1903, vol. 2 (1893–1913).

to be products of relationships. Some related predominately to the physical, some to the human, and others pertained to both aspects of the environmental situation. This study sought to identify in what way the physical environment is implicated in these understandings of 'the other'. The environmental attributes were revealed to be associated with the concepts that included flow, judgements, expectations, appearance, image, authenticity of place, interactions, and style. The concepts arising can be described in terms of the most dominant environmental aspect associated with points of disjuncture, and its impact or effect.

The integrative process, which is part of the grounded theory analysis, generated nine main conceptual categories relevant to the interpretative process in relation to the physical environment. These were: action, control, experience, interpretation, otherness, relationships, spatiality, style, and time. They all provided insights into the interpretative process, the environmental situation, and otherness. As it is the latter that is of most relevance to this paper, a summary of what was revealed from the data in relation to discrimination or 'otherness' will now be discussed with examples from the raw data inserted.

#### **a. Physical elements subsume an individual person's identity**

In many restaurants, people were interpreted only to be part of a homogenous grouping or with a high degree of sameness. Identity was expressed through the grouping rather than the self. Sameness took a variety of forms. The silent majority, a crowd whose members did not call attention to themselves although devoid of uniformity, was a common feature. They were the collective 'otherness' relative to the person who was interpreting the situation. The collective resulted from the environmental pattern; that is, due to the repetitive elements and ordered layouts, the non-human (physical elements such as chairs and tables) and the human aspects merged into one.

*We walked along to ... This was also rated as nothingness. M (dining companion) compared it to a particular local housing estate with its rows of houses and powerlines. The rows of chairs —that's all there is for her.... Again she said she wasn't interested (to dine here) at all. [Dairy NF 11/10]*

This phenomenon did not only occur within the individual venues. Many of the Parisian cafes and brasseries constitute a continual flow of diners, service, and street-life that could be observed. This larger collective or continuum had a 'peacefulness' and surety about it. Only the abnormal, who contravene or amplify a particular interpreter's understandings, stood out. In Brisbane the distinction between the in and the out meant that the entry and penetrations in relationship with the interpreter are important in the definition of place, self, and others.

*It is a different way of relating to the street: being placed on view and as the viewer. Paris in contrast is an extension and shift in interior. Here the idea of 'real interior' and the street in relation to gaze is defined. It is an intellectual separation and merging. In Paris the in/out are experiential. The street becomes the interior: the street acts at other times as 'the sign' of the interior. The experience of the interior in relation to viewer, (and the) participant changes differently than it does here [Field Notes NF 9/10]*

#### **b. Physical elements influence identity construction**

Understandings of people are constructed by their actions even if they are observed from afar. Their relationship with environmental elements or to a physical setting influences who a person is understood to be.

*It looked trendy and appeared filled with a crowd that managed to completely mute the usual colourful tapestry of contrasting people one expects to see in the valley/new farm. This particular place had a strong message emanating from it —You must be white, young, anglo and relatively well off to be welcomed and feel comfortable in here... [NF: written impressions from outside by companion M 11/10]*

In one venue, *chez Roberto*, my interpretation of the owner's identity evolved over visits and during visits. This was informed by the layout of the local brasserie and the various environmental elements in the interior. Examples included the following actions; by 'leaving-the-bar' unattended (a boundary between private and public) she indicated her trust in the clientele; by taking tablets and drinking beer while behind-the-counter (a place where she 'should be' acting as the staff-in-control); by singing when busy with customers 'at the bar' and when 'in the kitchen' (areas of different functions and expected behaviours); and by interacting or sharing and helping out others outside the limits of the brasserie (challenging the boundaries of her domain and of the place). Her identity for me was revealed through her



relationship with the environment, indicating how people come into focus through their actions which are integrated with objects, settings, and/or places.

...—I looked at this environment still from the outside and felt it is not for me. I don't have an interest in the people nor the place. It is visually drab, it has no sense of context in street or Paris for that matter. It is just here. I wonder what is about these people than those across the way. I will never know not speaking French. I am interested also in the decoration and that brings me to the second point. This woman—how come she runs the brasserie, is this like a home to her or to the clients? It is this which I find visually awful but at the same time secure—clean, potplants, fruit, paintings, flowers—they look like extensions of her not selling tools. Why does she work on her own and if she does the distance kitchen, phone, grill, bar etc. is a problem. Even her escape to the toilet—people waiting, someone talking to her on the way out. **She sits at the bar and looks out the window**, runs out to talk to people, takes pills, is cook, cleaner, and barmaid, and chair stacker. The environment **seems to be an extension of her** but I can't converse to find out how—it is only through her actions...

[field notes 19/05]

### c. Physical elements challenge codes relating to personal appearance

Explicit or implicit opinions about particular people were formed by contrasting with others. Noticeable was the role of clothing, which always comes to the fore as an indicator of style, cost and care. However, of interest to this study was the link between the clothing and the interior physical attributes as indicators of personality, capability, normality, and/or appropriateness. People who may have been dressed to suit their personal characteristics, when viewed contextualised within a particular dining environment, were no longer interpreted in isolation. For example, they were interpreted as odd or abnormal in the case of the women in *chez Roberto* wearing what appeared to be an evening dress amongst the the basic decore of the brasserie; or stylish and of a high socio-economic status in the case of the couple clad in refined designer labelled clothing who were considering the themed but inexpensively decorated dining area on *rue Tanneur*.

*She asked me for my drink and brought bread and a glass into which she poured some bottled 'rouge.' The bread was in an aluminium oval bread basket. No frills—a shame the meal wasn't hot. Meanwhile the lady across and the other in black had left. They had both sat staring into nowhere, the former smoking. both wore inexpensive clothes. A blue pant-suit, stockings, blonde hair (in 50s), the other a black 'fur' waist length jacket and longer blonde hair. It went through my mind 'I wonder what the clothes would look like in another environment'—for to me the lady in black's outfit looked so odd for women in a brasserie of this calibre. I am of course making assumptions but the floor tiling ,cigarette papers on floor, pinball machines etc. all seem so "everyday" and literally "mundane."*[Field notes 19/5]

The interpretation was generated through the relationship of environmental style and identity with the clothing style and identity. When encountering someone who does not appear to belong or to fit a place, the tacit understanding of the place became explicit and revealed the links between the particular physical environment and the process by which we develop our understandings of the appropriate or anticipated other. As a person's appearance is indicative of environmental norms and preconceptions, then identifying which aspect has the greatest impact is of interest for future work.

### d. Environmental aspects influence role definition and expectations

Role identities contrast personal identities. The environment positions people so that we understand their role. This in turn influences what we expect them to do in that role and how we relate to them accordingly. Understanding the role also influences the enactment of the dining event. For example, the role of waiter may be understood simply as service provider in a dining environment. However, different settings shift our expectations. For example, the waiter was shown to be simply provider of food in some of the most basic settings, to be the waiter as a controller in the highly designed settings who influenced the degree of choice and interaction, and to be waiter a choreographer in the large restaurants where rituals were highly orchestrated and diners joined 'the performance'.

As the environmental setting assists to define the roles such as waiter, diner, other diners, non-diners, kitchen hand, manager, chef, and the like—for the interpreter, other people and the self are positioned accordingly.

..Having squeezed through the line of tables I remember feeling that I wanted to leave but that I couldn't – that it wasn't appropriate nor easy to do gracefully. We ordered tea & café & made the most of it. While sitting there the owner/waiter set the tables with paper covers & 'silver' cutlery. Working around us. It was as though we were welcome but we had to fit within the schedule of the place & we couldn't influence timing or ritual. There was a

certain mismarrying between anticipation, expectation & the experience. It will be interesting to return here now that it is part of the study site. (sic) [Field note12.1.1999]

### **e. Environmental features influence level of inclusion or engagement through positioning**

The external features of the building or place constitute a palette that provides potential triggers for meaning making. Each venue presented a physical barrier to the outside or from the outside for the interpreter or potential 'diner'. Boundaries due to their physical and material nature established the degree of visual and physical access, permeability, exposure, and integration with the street and the street inhabitants, and between internal zones. The interpreter, in relation to the object or environment was therefore positioned in a variety of ways. The boundary acted as a point of distinction where an assessment of belonging was undertaken by the self and by others. Ownership of the external boundary was amplified by the façade openings, the occupancy of the punctuations (such as window seating or bar stools), and/or positioning of the controllers of 'the gaze' (due to position, exposure, and sight lines). The resultant hypothesis of what kind of place 'this is', what the occupants are like, and/or anticipated experiences are all affected. The decisions to enter or dine or not to dine are also affected. Therefore, for the building or place to have appropriate meanings for someone or subgroup, designers need to know more than the type and description of the place. The categorisation by encoding and decoding or signifiers/signified relationships needs to be expanded.

*If I leant on the sill — I could see into the restaurant — it didn't look to be occupied...*

- *P [me] : a voyeur, removed, excluded, tantalised...*
  - *restaurant: as a framed view, removed, to be discovered*
  - *the window sill; transition zone, revealer, disclosure, filter, barrier, penetrator [IC Sites: Fd06 15.6.99]*
- In the midst of this it turns its face ...the blinds are drawn... — stops the view*
- *Me: as the excluded, distinct from, irrelevant to its operation*
  - *the restaurant: self-contained, removed, in control*
  - *blinds: filter, disguise, clothing, wrapping [IC Site: Fd11 15.6.99]<sup>32</sup>*

\* Insert Figure 1 (see below)

[Boundary Sketches from diaries and analysis<sup>33</sup> ]

### **THE APPLICATION OF THE STUDY FOR DESIGNERS AND NON-DESIGNERS**

This study was generated from my experience as an architect, interior designer, and academic in the field of design for the built environment. I observed that generic understandings were often used as drivers for design solutions with very little consideration given to the people, who would in reality experience the place or how they would be interpreted by others. This loss of an individual's identity as he or she becomes the student, the child, the aged, the shopper or the like, I considered had implications for the design of our environments. The building or setting became simply a container of a particular style or expression that needed to house individuals so that they could carry out the necessary activities in a suitable manner. The design process as a consequence, although recognising that users have needs and aspirations, focused on the production of the artefact. My study sought to address this perceived lack of sensitivity and awareness. It is important to understand the meaning of place (including people, objects, and activities) as it is experienced rather than simply as what was the intention for designers. The environment needs to be considered as a player or actor in identity formation, and therefore in association, discrimination.

The role of the physical environment in discrimination was shown to include an ability to subsume a person's identity, influence identity construction, challenge codes relating to a person's appearance, influence the definition of roles and the associated expectations, and influence the level of inclusion or engagement through the way the interpreter and interpreted are positioned. This work demonstrates that our interpretations of people intrinsically involve the environment. The importance of this work is the proposition that we can no longer look at the physical environments, social environments, and the individual experience as separate

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<sup>32</sup> D.Smith, *Architectural Experience: Composition of Viewpoints*, Chapter 3

<sup>33</sup> D.Smith, *ibid*, Chapter 4

from one another if we wish to understand everyday life. Such knowledge challenges the portrayal of our built environment in typical design and architectural photographs or magazine. Cafés and other dining environments are not just about appearance, function, and interaction but are sites of discrimination between groups, individuals, and for the individual self.

This research aims to raise the designers' and other stakeholders' awareness of the environmental relationships that result from their work, and thereby challenge the design process in how it is carried out. It challenges us to look beyond the generic term of enduser when designing such person-environment relationships. By doing so, we avoid the trap of not making distinctions between the people and the social formation, or unconsciously facilitating the operation of environments that discriminate against people when it is inappropriate. This may be especially true in institutional care where the environmental design positions the person in a role that may devalue the person's self and mask what they understand to be their identity.

As posited previously, we need to be aware of how environments are discriminatory rather than ask if they are or not. Associated with discrimination are the constructs of identity of place and of the diner or cafe goer. These processes are operating regardless of the venue being in Paris, Brisbane, or elsewhere—albeit the resultant meanings may differ.

INSERT above

Figure 1 : Boundary Sketches from diaries and analysis<sup>34</sup>

	Barrier Threshold.	Others: <i>in there.</i>	
	Entry clear Penetrations: Window High access	1. Street: interior 2. Large doors → structured entry. 3. Framed social interaction	
	Multiple entry. Dominated (old bank) penetration.	1. Street: interior interior: courtyard 2. point entry controlled 3. difference in level.	
	Entry marked by decorative elements Penetrations high - removed from sitting.	1. Street: interior 2. Entry structured 3. Visibility in controlled.	
1		not visited rejected by all.	
20	Open: patios open but free float.	1. Street & interior merge 2. Entry ill defined as tables come out to be street like 3. High visibility: see of furniture	
	Visual through glass — window removed by bench.	1. Street removed from int 2. Visibility reduced although open 3. Entry clear but little "sense of entry"	
	Windows — no penetration	1. Street removed 2. diners at "add" to open 3. Entry clear — entering predictable layout.	
0	Open verandah with plastic cover Raised platform Removed entry	1. Street removed; int. visual 2. dull, reduced lighting 3. entrance removed.	
105	open outdoor area — "takeaway" model.	1. walk in at the street large sign - part of flow. 2. sit at eat as part 3. entry to counter & can see food.	

<sup>34</sup> D. Smith, *ibid*, Chapter 4