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Performing Space in Prepalatial Crete

The role of public ceremony, ritual, and performance has often been considered epiphenomenal in terms of political and social organisation,[1] with the focus of most archaeologists being on administrative and economic systems. However, in the past few years, an interest in the archaeology of performance has begun to emerge. The aim of my research, therefore, is to analyse performance as a subject worthy of investigation in its own right. Performance, uniquely placed within society as it is, offers an alternative method for deducing ideologies and cultural attitudes. Performance, as Richard Schechner put it, is 'an organised human behaviour before witnesses,'[2] but the backdrop to this, the social and physical conditions, also have to be understood in order to contextualise this organised behaviour.[3]

Performance is a form of cultural production. It creates its meaning by working with both material and intellectual resources. In this devised world, set apart from normal quotidian existence, all the elements – such as site, environment, technology, spatial organisation, form and content – are conceived, organised, controlled and ultimately experienced by its participants.[4] Its meaning, both to the participants and also to the archaeologist, is defined by its emotional and communicative impact[5]. Performance functions as an act of transfer – it transmits social knowledge, memory and a sense of identity through reiterated behaviour.[6]

These events have a profound implication for the understanding of any society, particularly in terms of the integration of communities and the establishment and maintenance of asymmetrical power relations.[7] In a pre-modern society without a writing system, or where a large proportion of the population was illiterate,

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[1] Takeshi Inomata and Lawrence Coben. 'Overture: An Invitation to the Archaeological Theater', in *Archaeology of Performance: Theatres of Power, Community and Politics*. Eds. Takeshi Inomata and Lawrence S. Coben. (Oxford: Altamira Press, 2006): 11-46 (p.11).

[2] Richard Schechner, cited in Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks. *Theatre/archaeology: Disciplinary Dialogues*. (London: Routledge, 2001), p. xiii.

[3] Quentin Letesson and Klaas Vansteenhuyse. 'Towards an Archaeology of Perception. "Looking" at the Minoan Palaces', *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology* 19:1 (2006): 91-119 (p.95).

[4] Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks. *Theatre/archaeology: Disciplinary Dialogues*, p. 27.

[5] Lawrence S. Coben. 'Other Cuzcos: Replicated Theatres of Inka Power', in *Archaeology of Performance: Theatres of Power, Community, and Politics.* eds. Takeshi Inomata and Lawrence Coben. (Oxford: Altamira Press, 2006): 223-260 (p.223).

[6] Diana Taylor. 'Translating Performance', *Profession* 7 (2002): 44-50 (p.45).

[7] Takeshi Inomata and Lawrence Coben. 'Overture: An Invitation to the Archaeological Theater', p.12.

performances may have had even greater social effects, acting as non-verbal communication vehicles for prevailing ideologies.

In the context of space, place and landscape, research on the archaeology of performance is most explicitly related to the area of performance space. The basis of this paper is that it is possible to use performative space to unpack the behaviour of performers and thus deduce something of the social realities. It follows then that arrangements of space and of objects and structures within space can provide us with a separate category of data from which to draw conclusions about social structures within a society. The purpose of this paper is therefore to use the mortuary space of Minoan Crete as a form of data within itself which can tell us just as much about the society which created it as the material evidence which is the common basis of our knowledge.

In an analysis of archaeological performance, an examination of space is vital for several reasons. Firstly, there is the paucity of remains of actual performance. While we do have iconographical evidence for some forms of performance in Minoan Crete, these are quite rare and often only date to later periods in Minoan prehistory. My research also focuses on how this material develops over time, to give us further insight into the development of performance and its socio-political connotations. This is an area in which archaeology with its long temporal perspective can potentially make a unique contribution. Secondly, and more appropriately within the context of space, place and landscape, performative settings are cultural spaces which obtain their meaning through the performance that takes place there and evokes the memory of past events and prior experiences, ideological messages and power relations.

From a theoretical perspective, the works of Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens and Henri Lefebvre have proved most valuable for an analysis of space. Pierre Bourdieu looked at spatialisation of everyday behaviour and examined how socio-spatial order is translated into bodily experience and practice. His term *habitus* is defined several times throughout his work, but, most simply, it defines an internalised structure or set of structures that determines how an individual acts in and reacts to the world, which serves to generate practices, perceptions and attitudes which are regular without being consciously co-ordinated or governed by any rule.[8] *Habitus* is a system of dispositions that includes a way of being – a predisposition or

[8] Jason C. Throop and Keith M. Murphy. 'Bourdieu and Phenomenology: A Critical Assessment', *Anthropological Theory* 2:2 (2002): 185-207 (p.186).

inclination - and also the result of organising action. *Habitus* reproduces the conditions that give rise to it initially, being thus a product and a producer of history.[9] Using the example of a Kabyle house,[10] which is the setting in which body space and cosmic space are integrated through practice, Bourdieu reconnects social theory with space and also with time[11]. Through *habitus*, Bourdieu determines how a building is to be experienced and performed and thus how meaning is derived from it.[12] In contrast to structuralist approaches, the concept of *habitus* spatially links social structure with the human body and bodily movement.

Anthony Giddens and his theory of structuration also presented a dynamic theory of space. His 'duality of structure' argues that social structures make social action possible, and at the same time social action creates these very structures.[13] In terms of space, architecture is part of the structure of social systems, and architectural space contributes to continuous process of creating society through social practice. Architecture is a resource through which rules are inscribed, a medium in which social relations not only take place but through which they are created, reproduced and altered.[14]

Henri Lefebvre also rejected previous structuralist and semiotic approaches to space, which argued that a disembodied ego could read or decode space without actually being part of it. He defined three different ways of relating to space – *spatial practices* of a society; *representations of space*; and *representational space*, which embodies complex symbolisms.[15] In these forms, space is produced or performed through the interactions of bodies, objects and environments. To Lefebvre, space is not something to be 'read', but can only be experienced through means of the body, which walks, smells, tastes, and ultimately lives in a space.[16]

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[9] Denise L. Lawrence and Setha M. Low. 'The Built Environment and Spatial Form', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19 (1990): 453-505 (p.469).
[10] The Kabyle are Berbers from North-Eastern Algeria.
[11] Denise L. Lawrence and Setha M. Low. 'The Built Environment and Spatial Form', p.470.
[12] Jennifer F. Ahlfeldt. 'On Reconstructuring and Performing Ancient Maya Architecture: Structure 22, Copan, Honduras (AD 715)'. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 2004), p. 205.
[13] Anthony Giddens. *Central Problems in Social Theory*: *Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis* (London: MacMillan, 1979) p. 69-70.
[14] Thomas F. Gieryn. 'What Buildings Do', *Theory and Society* 31:1 (2002): 35-74 (p. 37).
[15] Henri Lefebvre. *The Production of Space*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) p. 33.
[16] David Wiles. *A Short History of Western Performance Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) p. 10.

The key aspect here is the focus on action and the sentiment that space can only exist within a bodily sphere – it has to be experienced and is centred around the concept of 'the body'. Pierre Bourdieu stresses this when he writes that the body 'does not memorise represent what it performs, it does not memorise the past, it enacts the past, bringing it to life'.[17] The idea of space represented here is active as opposed to static, and involves a 'thinking through the body' which stresses the interaction between the material and the mental.[18] In comparison with previous, typological approaches to space that likened space to a container, filled with objects and people, and which formed the background of any action, the more dynamic approach to concepts of space emphasise that space is not interdependent on action, but is constituted through observation of continuously changing arrangements of social goods and living beings in places.[19] Thus space structures action, but is in itself realised through actions and patterns of perception, and it does not form a fixed entity but is continuously constituted and altered through social practice.[20]

The importance of the built environment as a factor in the explanation of space is vital for the archaeologist who no longer has the 'body' with which to recreate the space of interaction. The reconstruction of space archaeologically is essentially one-sided as the ancient body is missing, but using the environmental factors which remain and a phenomenological approach to the setting, clues to the dynamic behind the space may be deciphered. The setting is the context of the performance, and context is vital in the act of interpreting performance.[21] As such, architecture receives its meaning through practice, through the medium of human activity.[22] This biological experience of space can be supplemented or restrained by the built environment; for example, some of the most basic meanings conveyed by architecture

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[17] Pierre Bourdieu, cited in David Turnbull, 'Performance and Narrative, Bodies and Movement in the Construction of Places and Objects, Spaces and Knowledges: The Case of the Maltese Megaliths', *Theory, Culture and Society* 19:5/6 (2002: 125-143 (p. 131).

[18] David Turnbull, 'Performance and Narrative, Bodies and Movement in the Construction of Places and Objects, Spaces and Knowledges: The Case of the Maltese Megaliths', *Theory, Culture and Society* 19:5/6. (2002): 125-143 (p. 131).

[19] Joseph Maran. 'Mycenaean Citadels as Performative Space', in *Constructing Power: Architecture, Ideology and Social Practice*. Eds. Joseph Maran, Carsten Juwig, Hermann Schwengel and Ulrich Thaler. (Hamburg: LIT Verlag, 2006): 75-91 (p. 77).

[20] Ibid, p. 10.

[21] Paul Connerton. *How Societies Remember*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) p. 52.

[22] Mike Parker Pearson and Colin Richards. 'Ordering the World: Perceptions of Architecture, Space and Time', in *Architecture and Order: Approaches to Social Space*. eds. Michael Parker Pearson and Colin Richards (London: Routledge, 1994): 1-37 (p. 5).

involve how to enter and move through a building.[23] The layout of architectural settings and furnishings guides movement and arrangement of people, and imposes certain patterns of meaning on the structure of interaction.[24]

From a methodological perspective, we have to view the performative space not only from the position of 'God's eyes'[25] (i.e., a plan view) but also from those of the performers and the spectators. We can consider the uses made of these spaces by two quite different perspectives: those of the audience observing what is taking place and the experience of the participants within the spatial setting. These spatial settings, particularly the distance between the performers and the audience, define what kind of communicative acts – e.g. verbal and musical performance, body movements and so on – were within the capability of human perception.

The Minoan civilisation flourished on Crete from the beginning of the Early Bronze Age, around 3000BC, until the end of the Late Bronze Age, c. 1200 BC. The chronology is traditionally classified by two systems of relative chronology. The first, created by Arthur Evans and modified by later archaeologists, is based on pottery styles. It divides the Minoan period into three main eras—Early Minoan (EM), Middle Minoan (MM), and Late Minoan (LM). These eras are further subdivided, e.g. Early Minoan I, II, III (EMI, EMII, EMIII). Another dating system, proposed by the Greek archaeologist Nicolas Platon, is based on the development of the architectural complexes known as "palaces" at Knossos, Phaistos, Malia and Kato Zakros, and divides the Minoan period into Prepalatial, Protopalatial, Neopalatial, and Post-palatial periods. The focus of this paper is the earliest phase, the Prepalatial.

The Prepalatial period of Minoan Crete lasted roughly from 3100 BC to 1900 BC, and encompassed the Early Minoan (EM) I, II, III and Middle Minoan (MM) Ia periods. The settings of these performances are the Prepalatial cemetery sites of Crete, specifically the House Tomb sites. House tombs are the form of burial architecture commonly found at sites in eastern and northern Crete, the cemetery on Mochlos being a classic example. These are rectangular built tombs, which can either

[23] Jerry Moore. 'Pattern and Meaning in Prehistoric Peruvian Architecture: The Architecture of Social Control in the Chimu State', *Latin American* Antiquity 3:2 (1992) p. 96.
[24] Joseph Maran. . 'Architecture, Power and Social Practice: An Introduction', p. 11.
[25] Takeshi Inomata and Lawrence Coben. 'Overture: An Invitation to the Archaeological Theater', p. 30.

be free-standing buildings or burial complexes.[26] Unlike the other forms of burials elsewhere on Crete during this period,[27] no representations of performance have been found here. Thus it is through the architecture itself that we must discern if performance took place, and what form it would have taken. More specific analysis of spatial configurations, including stages, lighting and acoustics, for example, help us to understand the theatrical effects and actual communicative potential of certain performances. The size and configuration of space provide a basis for estimating the number of performers and audience, which is a critical parameter in examining the political implications of performative events.

Tomb Complex IV/V/VI from the West Terrace of the Mochlos cemetery provides the earliest such evidence for possible performance. This tomb stands at the upper northern end of the West Terrace, and consists of three separate compartments, which should be considered one building.[28] The date for the construction of the tomb and the tomb architecture is estimated to be EM IIa, approximately 2900 BC, to which the original burial deposit in Compartment VI belongs.

Here, a small court complex was discovered outside the tomb. Four steps led to a paved area, a walkway or pavement, which lay along the façade of the tomb. This paved avenue ends at a corner stand, a small rectangular platform, on which fragments of stone vases were found. This platform is situated directly outside the entrance to the tomb, and has been interpreted as an altar.[29] A raised terrace, perhaps intended to accommodate spectators, overlooked this small court. Thus what we appear to have at this tomb is a paved avenue of approach, possibly a ceremonial entrance, leading to the tombs. There is an ascending ramp, a raised terrace for spectators and an altar, which may have been the objective of those following the path.

The paved area which lies alongside the façade of the tomb is between 1.40 and 1.64 m in width, while the terrace which overlooks the tomb is 1.80 – 2.00m wide. This suggests that a slightly larger group could assemble on the terrace at any

[26] For a full discussion of House Tombs, see Jeffrey Soles. *The Prepalatial Cemeteries at Mochlos and Gournia and the House Tombs of Bronze Age Crete* (Princeton: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1992).
[27] Specifically, the tholos (circular) tombs of the Mesara region in south-central Crete.
[28] Jeffrey S. Soles. *The Prepalatial Cemeteries at Mochlos and Gournia and the House Tombs of Bronze Age Crete*, p. 51.
[29] Ibid p. 57.

one time than could approach the tomb along the pavements. This evidence indicates that processions were the form of performance which occurred here.

Similar architectural structures and layouts have been found at other House Tomb sites. At Myrtos Pyrgos,[30] a flight of steps descends from the top of a hill to the end of a paved road, which culminates in a small courtyard in front of an EM III/MM Ia tomb. Inside the courtyard were found a bench and kernoi[31] (ritual vessels with small vases attached in a ring, presumably for libations). Similar architectural features – a paved way, culminating at a specific spot or feature – appear at Archanes-Phourni[32], Chrysolakkos[33] and Gournia[34]. The majority of these sites belong to the mid- to late Prepalatial, with two built in EM II, two in EM III, and three more built in MM Ia. None of the cemetery sites with evidence for processional ways can be dated after the beginning of the protopalatial period (c.1900BC-1700BC). The areas which are set aside or built specifically for performance are not standard features of all the tombs. The architectural features of the house tomb sites of eastern Crete – narrow paved ways which culminated in specific locations, often with ritual connotations, and sometimes overlooked - thus suggest that the form of performance which occurred there would most likely have been processions.

According to Richard Schechner, processions are a kind of 'natural theatre', wherein an event moves along a prescribed path, spectators gather along the route, and which stops at appointed places where performances are played.[35] While this is certainly a valid interpretation of processions, they are more than this, especially in a performative sense. Although Schechner describes performances as occurring as and when the procession halts, a more holistic view would be to see performance within the act of procession itself as well. On a basic level, procession is simply an act of proceeding,[36] but it is more than simply a means of getting from A to B. It is an act of proceeding embedded with ceremonial or symbolic importance, and it is this

[30] Gerald Cadogan. 'Pyrgos, Crete, 1970-7', *Archaeological Reports* 24. (1977): 70-84 (p. 71).
[31] Jeffrey S. Soles. *The Prepalatial Cemeteries at Mochlos and Gournia and the House Tombs of Bronze Age Crete*, p. 221.
[32] J. Sakellarakis & E. Sapouna-Sakellarakis. *Crete: Archanes* (Athens: Ekdotike Athenon, 1991),p.98.
[33] O. Pelon, E.Anderson & M. Schmidt. *Guide de Malia. Le palais et la nécropole de Chrysolakkos* (Athens : École Française d'Athènes, 1992), p. 82.
[34] Jeffrey S. Soles. 'The Early Gournia Town', *American Journal of Archaeology* 83:2 (1979): 149-167 (p. 161).
[35] Richard Schechner. *Performance Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1988) pp. 159-60
[36] Robert Johnston. 'An Empty Path? Processions, Memories and the Dorset Cursus', in *Pathways and Ceremonies: The Cursus Monuments of Britain and Ireland*. Eds. Alistair Barclay & Jan Harding. (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1999): 39-48 (p. 39).

importance that distinguishes it from everyday movement through space. Because procession involves specific numbers of participants, normally in some orderly manner, the processional way usually moves through a restricted physical space. In keeping with the idea of restriction and accessibility, a procession can be naturally hierarchical by its very nature and arrangement, rather than a mere succession of figures.[37] Processions transform the participants into a unidirectional entity, which in turn establishes a sense of order and thus acts as a representation in which the varying levels of social and political importance are located in a hierarchy.[38] Procession thus acts as a representation of political ideology.

A further point to be stressed is not only the elite setting of processions but also elite participation. Only a minority of society took part in processions – if we look at later Minoan art this can be borne out iconographically by the representations of elites in processional art. It is also discernible in the archaeological record, where processional ways are elevated to mark them off, such as the causeways which transverse the Central Courts of the palaces of Knossos and Phaistos; narrow as to hold only a few people; or situated in positions where they are overlooked by platforms or terraces, for example the Royal Road West at the palace of Knossos. It seems possible that more people participated at the beginning, but only a select few would complete the route. Thus, participants can ascertain their position within their society by taking up an assigned place in procession,[39] and the procession becomes a representation of political ideology and a program of power.[40] Processions would have acted as a physical and symbolic vehicle for elite propaganda, neatly circumscribing those who took part from those who merely watched. Procession thus represents a ceremonial demarcation of specific space, an identification of individuals and local groups with a certain territory who had powers to exercise authority over that particular territory.[41]

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[37] Peter J. Holliday. 'Processional Imagery in Late Etruscan Funerary Art', *American Journal of Archaeology* 94:1 (1990): 73-93 (p. 73).

[38] Peter J. Holliday. 'Processional Imagery in Late Etruscan Funerary Art', p. 73.

[39] Fritz Graf. 'Pompai in Greece. Some Considerations about Space and Ritual in the Greek Polis', in *The Role of Religion in the Early Greek Polis: Proceedings of the Third International Seminar on Ancient Greek Cult, Organized by the Swedish Institute at Athens*. Ed. Robin Hägg. (Stockholm: Paul Åströms Förlag, 1996): 55-65 (p. 58).

[40] Peter J. Holliday. 'Processional Imagery in Late Etruscan Funerary Art', *American Journal of Archaeology* 94:1 (1990): 73-93 (p. 73).

[41] Charles Zika 'Hosts, Processions and Pilgrimages: Controlling the Sacred in Fifteenth-Century Germany', *Past and Present* 118, (1988): 25-64 (p. 44).

As stated at the beginning of this paper, previous analyses of Prepalatial social relationships and structures have focused upon empirical evidence to ascertain dynamics of power relations. Evidence such as burial deposits found within the tombs themselves, the architecture of the tombs and the skeletal remains have all pointed towards the conclusion that the Prepalatial societies which utilised the house tomb cemeteries of eastern and northern Crete were hierarchical in their structure, due to differential nature of this evidence which led to the conclusion that burials were employed to underline and emphasise social distinctions. An analysis of the performative space of these Prepalatial cemetery sites adds a separate form of data to these conclusions. Using the theoretical notion that space is the medium through which social relations are produced and reproduced over time, an analysis of the physical layout of the house tombs of Prepalatial Crete allows us to develop an understanding of the relationship and interaction between the human body and architectural space, and as a result what forms the human body would have taken within that space. In the case of the house tombs, the human body would have been prescribed by the spatial arrangements into the form of a procession. From this, we can ascribe an ideological backdrop to the societies which would have performed them.

What an analysis of space and performance can provide is a narrative sensitised to movement and assemblage in space. This can offer a new perspective on the study of ideologies and socio-political organisation, which can bring a more subtle dynamic to the ideas derived from traditional empirical evidence.

Figure 1: Entrance to Tomb IV/V/VI at Mochlos (on right)

Figure 2: Approach to tomb complex IV/V/VI at Mochlos

Figure 3: Paved way approaching tomb at Myrtos Pyrgos

Figure 4: Paved way beside Burial Building 6 at Archanes-Phourni