Behind the “Razzle Dazzle”:
Folk Art, Dwelling, and the Broadway Cast of *Chicago*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at George Mason University.

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DEDICATION

For Brian, who opened the door; for Max, who kept it open; and for the cast of *Chicago*, who welcomed me in.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I owe an enormous debt to the cast and crew of the Broadway company of *Chicago*, who welcomed me into their spaces and shared their stories with candor and goodwill. I hope I have done justice to their extraordinary humor, grace, affection, work ethic, and generosity of spirit, all of which made writing this thesis so much more fun than I could have anticipated! I wish to especially thank my brother, Brian Spitulnik. He arranged interviews, introduced me and this project to his colleagues, answered all of my many questions, read drafts of the paper, let me crash on his floor during all of my fieldwork trips to New York (thanks also to his roommates!), got excited about what I was doing, and was a general all around model brother. He even suggested the title for this thesis! And though they are not included in the study, I want to mention Kevin and Jenna, who made me welcome in the Wardrobe Room.

Walt Whitman asks: “Will you seek afar off? You surely come back at last, In things best known to you finding the best or as good as the best, In folks nearest to you finding also the sweetest and strongest and lovingest” (“Song for Occupation, *Leaves of Grass*). And indeed, I am endlessly grateful to have found the best and sweetest and strongest and lovingest in those nearest to me. In no particular order, these are the incredible people gave me the support, encouragement, and fellowship I wouldn’t have even known to ask for: Peggy, a mentor, advisor, and friend who offered the insightful and constructive feedback that guided this thesis, as well as the faith in me and in this project that saw it through; Deb, a professor and friend who, over the course of five classes (including one memorable trip to London), imparted amazingly concrete advice along with the topics at hand; Eric, who heroically stepped in at the last minute, my wonderful parents, who always want to hear whatever I want to tell them about, and who are always proud of me and go out of their way to make sure I know it; Lisa, who helped me erase the old tapes and patiently reminded me that I’ve never written a thesis before; Diane, who went first and shared her experience, strength, hope; Josh, who is maybe the best person I know and who made writing this thesis possible in so many ways, whose love, kindness, humor, and unconditional support are better than Red Bull insofar as they not only give me wings, but also bring me back to earth when I freak myself out; and finally, my brothers, Brian and Max, for whom I will have to start an entirely new sentence. They are my favorite people, they astound me with their awesomeness, and while they are endless sources of inspiration, pride, insight, and good times for me, they also let me know that they are proud of and inspired by their big sister, which means the world to me.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Near and Dear to Our Hearts</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: In the Ambassador Theater</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: In Company with the Rest: In the Dressing Rooms</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: And This Is My Spot: At the Stations</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5: In This Place: Conclusions</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Cast of Chicago the Musical</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B: Dressing Room Assignments</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C: Musical Numbers in Chicago</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D: Guiding Questions</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1: Signs Backstage</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2: A Dressing Room Door</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3: Exterior of the Ambassador Theatre</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4: The Ambassador Theatre in 1958</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5: Brenda Braxton as Velma</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6: The Call Board</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7: Group Photos Backstage</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8: Directional Signage Backstage</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 9: Sixth Floor, Door of J9</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 10: Gabi Garcia at her station in J7</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 11: Shawn Emamjomeh at his station in J9</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 12: The Wall of Men</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 13: Dressing Room J8</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 14: Dressing Room J7 (March 2008)</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 15: Wigs at the Hair Station</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 16: Nili Bassman’s Slippers</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 17: David Kent’s Station in J8</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

BEHIND THE “RAZZLE DAZZLE”:
FOLK ART, DWELLING, AND THE BROADWAY CAST OF CHICAGO

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George Mason University, 2009
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Officially, theatrical dressing rooms are provided as the place for the ontological shift from person to character to occur; actors often speak of “getting into character.” I have found, however, that the transition is less about the onstage role, and more of a shift from person to performer. My thesis considers the aesthetics and sense of place in an occupational folk group by exploring how the actors in the New York cast of Chicago the Musical bring a sense of self and of dwelling into a space that they only occupy impermanently. The use and decoration of the theater, the dressing rooms, and the stations, along with the actors’ stories, indicate how traditional practices allow members of this group to claim space. These same traditions reveal what the actors actually “hold near and dear to their heart,” that is, those values and relationships they wish to make special.
CHAPTER 1
NEAR AND DEAR TO OUR HEARTS

A beautiful girl, scantily clad in vinyl and fishnets, stands in a spotlight on a bare stage and addresses the audience: “Ladies and Gentlemen, you are about see a story of murder, greed, corruption, violence, exploitation, adultery, and treachery. All the things we hold near and dear to our hearts” (Kander and Ebb 1997).

Thus begins Chicago the Musical. Over the next few hours, the action onstage in the world of the performance supports this opening statement with ample evidence of corruption rewarded and innocence lost. Backstage, however, in the world of the actors, a different story unfolds. The way the performers decorate their dressing rooms contrasts markedly with the minimalist aesthetic of the production, and the displays at individuals’ stations expose that “the things we hold near and dear to our heart” directly oppose the values expressed in the musical.

Dressing rooms in Broadway theaters are usually small, cramped spaces, provided by the producing company as a place for performers to change clothes and prepare to perform. While principal actors may have their own room, members of the ensemble share space with up to five other performers. With limited space available, arrangement, display, and organization are central considerations when an individual actor sets up his or her station. Along with the tools required to achieve the appearance of the character,
actors adorn their dressing rooms and their individual stations with decorations and personal objects and images.

My thesis considers the aesthetics and sense of place in an occupational folk group by exploring how the actors in the New York cast of *Chicago the Musical* bring a sense of self and of dwelling into a space that they only occupy impermanently. The use and decoration of the theater, the dressing rooms, and the stations, along with the actors’ stories, indicate how traditional practices allow members of this group to claim space. These same traditions reveal what the actors actually “hold near and dear to their heart,” that is, those values and relationships they wish to make special. The inquiry begins with observing patterns of vernacular use and decoration in the theater building as a whole, followed by those of smaller groups in the dressing room, discussing how the actors establish and transmit aesthetics and boundaries as a group to create shared dwelling places based on these common understandings. Finally, it considers the set up, use, and decoration of individual stations in the dressing rooms, discussing how individuals establish personal space and perform their own identities.

Officially, dressing rooms are provided as the place for the ontological shift from *person* to *character* to occur; actors often speak of “getting into character.” I have found, however, that the transition is less about the onstage role, and more of a shift from *person* to *performer*. The way the chorus of *Chicago* uses and decorates their shared dressing rooms suggests that in order to make this transition, the actor must achieve grounding in his or her self. The actors in this study use material objects and traditional practices to
create a place of dwelling, one that bears the essence of home and reinforces a sense of self, belonging, and a life outside of the theater. In so doing, they are creating places that allow transition, rather than transformation, places which keep the sense of self accessible to the actor throughout the preparation before performing, and again during the post-performance reintegration of self identity.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study draws material together from several disciplines to address questions of occupational folklore expressed through traditional art, material culture, and sense of place. Broadway performers are members of a high context group, having undergone distinct training, and acquired experience in this specialized field. Actors\(^1\) share distinctive speech, narratives, practices, and other traditions that reflect and shape worldview. In addition to formal training, actors share knowledge, codes of behavior, and support for each other through folklore genres such as jokes, personal narratives, anecdotes, and other traditional vernacular expressions.

As with other occupations, the actors spend a great deal of time at work. Like workers who decorate their cubicles and offices, actors personalize their workspace by adorning them with objects and images that express identity and values. The balance of practical considerations and personal expression means that while there are certain commonalities among stations, each person has made his or her station unique with how

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\(^1\) Following the definitions in the Actors’ Equity Rulebook, I use the term “actor” to include both principal actors and chorus members, regardless of the individual’s gender (Actors' Equity Association 2004:38-39). Additionally, I use the terms “performer” and “dancer” interchangeably with “actor.”
he or she organizes these functional tools as well how the remaining space is decorated. This decoration and use is meant to make the room and the station a place to dwell, resonant with a sense of self and a feeling of home.

The primary research questions guiding this study address how the actors use the dressing room space allotted to them, and how the space functions for the actors individually and as an occupational group. The actors’ frequent comments about creating a place “like home” and a “home away from home” indicated further questions of sense of place, specifically regarding dwelling places. How do the performers create a sense of dwelling in a building that is not theirs; what are the “tactics” they use (de Certeau)? Is there a sense of place inherent to the building, to the rooms? Does vernacular practice conform to or oppose official use? How do the actors re-shape a new sense of place to suit their needs as performers? In my exploration of these questions, I have turned to scholars on sense of place, material culture and the meaning of things, and vernacular creative expression.

While actors do not live in the theater, they spend their professional lives in theaters and other spaces of performance. Beyond using the theater simply as an occupational dwelling place, they also imbue the dressing rooms and other backstage areas with activities and objects that bring a sense of home, of personal dwelling places, into their place of employment. When Martin Heidegger asks, “What is it to dwell?” He differentiates between a place where one may be at home, but where one does not dwell, such as places of employment (145). While these buildings and locations may house man,
but “he inhabits them and yet does not dwell in them.” He contends that building (that is, to build) is really dwelling (to dwell), and that “dwelling is the manner in which mortals are on the earth” (148). The fundamental character of dwelling, he asserts, is that it sets at peace: “To dwell, to be set at peace, means to remain at peace within the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its nature. The fundamental character of dwelling is [a] sparing and preserving” (149). The dwelling protects and preserves a person from danger, and so gives the freedom of peace within its walls. As the actors build a sense of home through objects and practices, their place of employment becomes a place endowed with the sheltering and preserving characteristics of dwelling places.

Similarly, the way the actors inhabit their dressing rooms recalls Gaston Bachelard’s seminal work, *The Poetics of Space*, which explores the significance of space and images of space. The spaces throughout the theater have been inhabited, that is, have been invested with experience and imagination. Bachelard suggests that such spaces become part of the landscape of imagination and shape consciousness. These spaces are alive with what he terms the “poetic reverberations” of space: the material expressions of values are “poetic image[s that] will have a sonority of being” (xii). Such space “concentrates being within limits that protect” (xxxii). Because the dressing rooms and the theater as a whole take on the properties of home and of dwelling, Bachelard’s discussion of intimate spaces is particularly relevant. He regards the house as the image that integrates thoughts, feelings, and dreams. Further, he contends, images of the house and other intimate spaces serve to localize memories, to fix them in space and time.
Finally, he perceives that space becomes inhabited through the narratives that give it meaning and memory. Just so, the various spaces in the theater serve as touchstones for material and narrative memories, giving meaning to the quotidian places and reinforcing a sense of dwelling for the actors.

The routines, rituals, and various ways the actors use and inhabit their dressing rooms are among the practices of everyday life. In discussing such practices, Michel de Certeau distinguishes between “strategies” and “tactics.” Strategies, he asserts, are the tools of those in power, whereas tactics are smaller modes of resistance to hegemonic order practiced by those who cannot claim ownership. Tactics are modes of resistance because, he explains, “The place of a tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety” (xix). The decorations and customary practices of the dressing rooms are the tactics the actors use to create a sense of place, of dwelling, that serves their needs in preparing for performance.

The visual environments of the dressing rooms and the stations raise further questions concerning material culture and the meaning of things, specifically how vernacular creative expressions work to claim space and build sense of place. What meanings to the objects themselves imply? What do the things surrounding the actor elevate and make special? How does material behavior, that is, the actors’ interaction with the objects, intensify the symbolic meaning of things? Behavioral scientist Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi and sociologist Eugene Rochberg-Halton conducted an extensive investigation into the use and meaning of material objects in the quotidian context. They
find that “the potential significance of things is realized in a process of actively cultivating a world of meanings, which both reflect and help create” a personal reality, an inhabited space (xi). Like Bachelard’s assertion that space structures and localizes experience, they discuss how objects create a framework for experience. They illuminate the relationship of people to things, and how domestic objects and the tools of trade and the self become charged with the psychic energy of the user and hold meaning and memory. As such, the actors surround their dressing room stations with objects of memory. These objects are invested with meanings that physically and emotionally support the actors as they prepare for performance.

The displays at dressing room stations present a collage of objects that serve as touchstones for memory and meaning. These objects and images are drawn from diverse spheres of the actors’ experience, including both their personal and professional lives. Susan Stewart discusses the meaning of such material things, arguing that these objects are presented in a way that constructs and reconstructs a person’s interior world, bringing that world into an the exterior, corporeal reality. She considers the relation of narrative to its objects: both the self as Object and the objects that comprise the language of the narrative (1984), outlining “the ways in which these discourses of the self and the world mutually define and delimit one another” (xii). As the actors collect objects, and in their presentation of these collections, the objects of memory at their dressing room stations exteriorizes or manifests the thoughts and desires of the actors’ interior, feeling world.
Finally, the context for the actors’ creative expression occurs within an occupational folk group, raising questions of group aesthetics and boundaries, as well as traditional ways of learning. Does a common aesthetic guide the creation of these visual displays? How is a sense of what is appropriate and right transmitted and learned? With what criteria do members of the group read and evaluate decoration and interaction with the building, room, station, and material objects at the station?

By decorating their dressing rooms, these actors practice a traditional art, in that they display individuals’ creative expressions while responding to considerations of the group’s aesthetics and practical needs. “All art is art,” says Barre Toelken, "and all good art persists because of its capacity to express important elements of meaning and design which others can respond to” (221). The evaluative criteria for folk art grow out of the processes and needs of the everyday life of a particular community and its traditions. Creators of folk art respond to the aesthetic judgments of a group, which are based on the style, content, function, and context of both the process of creation and the finished product. A traditional artist’s work expresses an ongoing group aesthetic, with the community’s response shaping both the process and the product. Over time, both the art and the community’s responses to it will change. Toelken reveals that tradition as a dynamic process that, by virtue of a continual process of conservation and variation, is shaped over time as an expression of cultural worldview. As the community’s every day life changes, so do its needs and its values. Because the content, style, and function of its traditional arts responds to those changes, folk art reflects the evolving group aesthetic,
giving access to understanding its worldview. The actors learn from each other and from previous experience how to decorate their own stations, how to interact with communal spaces, where the boundaries of personal expression exist, and how to understand, or “read,” their colleagues’ displays and habits.

Methodologies

I originally came to this project through my brother, Brian Spitulnik. Brian got into Chicago in June 2007, performing on a Broadway stage for the first time the following month. When my family and I came to see his debut, he gave us a brief “backstage tour” of the stage and showed us the Wardrobe Room and the entryway to the theater. When I returned to see him perform again later that summer, Brian took me upstairs to see his dressing room before the performance. “This is my spot!” he told me, and showed me the various things that he did and that belonged to him around the room. Though I previously had been a performer, this was the first time I had been in a dressing room since beginning my studies in folklore. I was struck anew by the pictures hanging on his colleague’s mirrors, and the various items and images and different stations in the room, the ways they were similar and different from each other in set up and display. As a folklore student, I realized for the first time that I was seeing a traditional art being practiced in an occupational context.

Once I formally began work on this project, Brian facilitated my access to the theater and his fellow cast members, as well as helping me select people to interview. When my fieldwork began in the spring of 2008, Brian introduced me to the women in
J7, the most elaborately decorated dressing room. Over the next year, he also gave me a tour of the entire backstage of the theater, answered my numerous questions, and described his own use of the space and his routine in the theater via email and phone calls, and finally, a filmed interview in his dressing room.

The Ambassador Theatre building itself is a frame for the experience of its inhabitants. Expressive forms saturate the building with meaning; nearly every available space in the theater building has images, notices, jokes, or artwork hung on the walls (Figure 1) or adorning flat surfaces (Figure 2). To begin with, I chronicle the history of the building and its current use, focusing on how the structure of the theater, and its layout and designation of space, affect quotidian practices and shape the performers’ experience.
Figure 1. The stage level landing (April 2009).
This study centers on how the actors use and decorate the theater, particularly their dressing rooms. As such, other common areas are not examined or discussed at length. Moreover, the participants in this project are all cast members.\footnote{The “cast” is comprised of the performers in a show (Pallin 148).} Though they decorate their own spaces and contribute to the decorations in the theater and the dressing rooms, other \textit{Chicago} personnel,\footnote{The word “company” is used variously to mean the performers, the performers and stage managers, or more broadly to include all those involved in the production and performance of a show. I use it throughout to encompass the cast and production crews of \textit{Chicago}. The production crews, or “crew,” consist of those}
company management, have not been interviewed as primary informants in this study. Finally, this study focuses on four dressing rooms shared by members of the chorus, as opposed to the private dressing rooms assigned to principal actors.\(^4\)

The participants in this study are in the ensemble of the cast of *Chicago*. These performers are a part of the larger community of Broadway performers, and the even larger community of musical theater performers and the (mostly) commercial theater industry. Nine women and nine men comprise the ensemble; this number includes the fourteen actors who have their own tracks as well as the two male and two female “swings,”\(^5\) understudies who know all of the chorus roles and are able step in for any member of the ensemble (Appendix A). The focus on chorus actors is significant, as preliminary research suggests that practices and decoration in principal actors’ dressing rooms may be different in both intent and execution. Further, this study concerns only the cast of *Chicago*; anecdotal evidence suggests that findings may be different with the cast of a different show.

The performers who inhabit four shared dressing rooms comprise the population of this project. Those interviewed are as follows: Nicole “Nikki” Bridgewater, Dylis Croman, and Carol “Mama” Woods in J4; Donna Marie Asbury, Nili Bassman, Gabriela

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\(^4\) Equity actors may be under a “Chorus Contract” or a “Principal Contract.”

\(^5\) Equity has defined a “swing” as “a non-performing member of the chorus who goes on when a member of the chorus is absent or [is] performing as an understudy in place of a principal. A swing ‘swings’ the chorus, that is, functions as an ‘understudy’ to the chorus” (Gans 2007). Similarly, a regularly performing member of the chorus who understudies a principal is called a “cover,” or is said to “cover” a role.
“Gabi” Garcia, Melissa Rae Mahon, and Michelle “Potty” Potterf in J7; David Kent, James T. Lane, and Brian Spitulnik in J8; and Brian O’Brien, Michael “Mikey” Cusumano, and Shawn Emamjomeh in J9.7

During three trips to New York, I conducted on-site interviews, recording them with a handheld camcorder. Brian introduced me to his colleagues in the cast and crew, and coordinated with the other actors to set up individual interviews around regular calls for rehearsals or performances. My first set of interviews, in March 2008, focused on the women sharing dressing room J7, while the interviews in January and February 2009 included participants from all of the chorus dressing rooms. Most of my interviews were with one person at a time, but my meeting with Nikki Bridgewater serendipitously turned into a team interview among Nikki, Dylis, and Mama, three of the four women who share J4. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions about the setup, decoration, and history of the informant’s own station, as well as questions about his or her interaction with the rest of the room and the performers who share the space. Each interview began with the informant giving his or her name, age, role, and how long they have been in Chicago. I then asked for a tour of the actor’s own station, noting where the informant chose to begin, and the order and length of time spent on each object or section of the station.8

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6 Michelle Potterf was interviewed in March 2008. She has since been released from her contract, and is no longer in the show.
7 Not all chorus members were interviewed; see Appendix A for a complete cast list and Appendix B for the details of dressing room assignments.
8 Specific guiding questions for the interviews are listed in Appendix C.
Participants discussed their space in the communal dressing room and shared their stories about the objects, history, creation, and aesthetics of their stations and the dressing room. In addition to the filmed interviews, I kept written field notes, and took photos of the actors, stations, dressing rooms, doors, and other backstage areas. Dan Micciche, who played “Mary Sunshine” for a few months in the Broadway company, as well as touring with the National company, has allowed me to use photos he took while performing with the Broadway company.

**Summary and Conclusion**

Both everyday objects and quotidian places are imbued with meaning through narrative and artistic expression. The meanings of things and senses of place created from these practices in turn serve as structures for experience. Members of a group such as the cast of *Chicago* share traditions that shape the meanings and structures of their daily lives both personally and professionally. The theater is a site for competing performances of identity; its layers of semiotic meaning juxtapose these performances and enable disparate realms of experience to coexist within the same building. The friction is most evident in the dressing rooms, where performers make the transition between the outside world and the world of the play. The distinction of personal from the professional, that is, the self as *performer* from the self as a *person*, is created and maintained by the various senses of place articulated by the architecture and reinforced by the practices and creative

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9 Copies of the recorded interviews, as well as the transcriptions, can be found in the Northern Virginia Folklife Archive under accession number 2009-020.
expressions of its inhabitants. By focusing on how identity is expressed and performed within the context of creative expression in vernacular forms, this study provides further insight into the dynamic process of group traditions and how they express and shape cultural worldview of a group of people.
CHAPTER 2
IN THE AMBASSADOR THEATER

All architecture is what you do to it when you look upon it;
Did you think it was in the white or gray stone?

(Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass)

The Ambassador Theatre is located at 49th Street and 8th Avenue, placing it in the middle of the “Broadway Campus.” The location is significant: this 1088-seat theater was the first of a fleet of new playhouses built by the Shubert brothers, a team of theater impresarios, in their ultimately successful effort to move the theater district uptown from its original location in lower Manhattan (Morrison 1999:114). Completed in 1921, the Ambassador has been continually used as a theater, and is still owned by the Shubert Organization.

While the theater community has a generally unspoken understanding of what constitutes a “Broadway” theater, it is difficult to find a written definition. There are thirty-nine theaters whose productions the League of American Theaters and Producers considers eligible for Tony Award nomination, and these are the thirty-nine theaters that comprise Broadway. Actors Equity Association, the actors’ union has more explicit criteria: “a Broadway theater has more than 499 seats, and is located either in a box bounded by 34th Street, 56th Street, Fifth Avenue and Ninth Avenue, or a box bounded by 56th Street, 72nd Street, Fifth Avenue and the Hudson River” (Pincus-Roth 2007). However, the majority of those thirty-nine theaters stand within Broadway’s geographical center, often called the “Broadway Campus” by the theater community (Spitulnik 2008a). The Broadway Campus is generally understood to encompass an area approximately twenty-five blocks long, running from the Nederlander Theatre on 41st Street up to the Vivian Beaumont Theatre at 65th Street, and spanning Seventh Avenue, Broadway, and Eighth Avenue (Pincus-Roth 2008).
A long-running Broadway show, the current production of *Chicago* opened in the Richard Rodgers Theatre on November 14, 1996. It was a concert version of the 1975 musical by John Kander and Fred Ebb; a limited engagement that presented the musical using minimal staging, costumes, and scenery. After three months in the Richard Rodgers Theatre, it was moved to the Shubert Theatre to run indefinitely as a full production. As a revival production,\(^\text{11}\) director Walter Bobbie and choreographer Ann Reinking tweaked the original 1975 production as directed by Bob Fosse and reimagined the staging, dancing, scenic design, and costumes. Six years later, when a revival of *Gypsy* was slated to open in the Shubert, *Chicago* moved to the Ambassador in January 2003 (Figure 3).\(^\text{12}\)

\(^{11}\) When an existing play or musical that has been professionally presented on Broadway in prior years is given a new production, it is called a “revival” production. This distinguishes it from “new” or “original” plays and musicals. At the Tony Awards, “Best Revival of a Musical” is a separate category from “Best Original Musical,” and awards are given in both categories (Tony Administration Committee 2009:5).\(^{12}\) I do not have hard evidence on the specific reasons for *Chicago*’s move, but long running shows are often moved from one theater to another, sometimes to make way for another show, sometimes for marketing or financial reasons, or by request of the company that manages the theaters—the Shubert Organization, in this case (Pincus-Roth 2008).
How do the design, the structure, and the physicality of the theater affect the experience for actors, for audiences, for the crew and other staff? Further, how does the design and intent for the building affect the use? Beyond its service as a physical structure, the Ambassador Theatre must also frame the experience of many different groups within a common context. It is the Ambassador’s layers of semiotic meaning that enable disparate realms of experience for actors, production staff, audiences, and theater employees to coexist within the same building. The theater as a building is a site for competing performances of identity, maintained by the various senses of place articulated
by the architecture and reinforced by the practices and creative expressions of its inhabitants.

A theater may ostensibly be seen as a blank canvas, as an uninscribed surface. However, as Marvin Carlson observes, designating an area as a space for “theater” already suggests a set of inherent meanings. Even in the absence of any specific architectural structure, the theater, he asserts, is “a place where one observes” (128). In fact, he argues, the “implied dialectic of the space of the observer and the space of the observed” is a defining condition of theater (128). The theater is already semiotically charged, even before a single person enters the space.

**Appearance and History of the Ambassador Theatre**

Every description of the Ambassador begins with its most distinctive feature: the innovative layout that maximizes the limited space available on the lot. “The Ambassador offers a novelty in construction,” reads *The New York Times*’ announcement of plans for the theater, “in that it runs diagonally upon the plot, so as to gain the benefit of additional space” (18 Nov 1920, in Young 56). “A Shubert-built theater, the façade of the Ambassador is not much to look at,” contends Theatre.com, “except for the unusual angled entrance.” This rounded corner is even more noticeable because it rises slightly higher than the rest of the façade (Chach, Fletcher, Swartz, and Wang 2001:209). William Morrison calls the buff brick façade “unpretentious,” but also points out that the exterior is noteworthy not only for its “rounded east corner,” but also for architect Herbert Krapp’s “manipulation of the patternwork, overlaying the bricks to create a false
cornice and dividing the blank bay by blind arches” (114). In order to maximize the usable space, Krapp situated the auditorium itself diagonally. The auditorium’s unique hexagonal shape results from his placement of the box office vestibule in one corner, the stage in the corner directly opposite, and balcony stairs in the remaining corners (Morrison 114). The Shubert Organization acknowledges that in addition to the distinct auditorium shape, the design also “resulted in a lack of stage-wing space” (2005).

Architect Herbert Krapp, the Shubert brothers’ primary architect, designed both the interior and exterior. Primarily a theater designer, Krapp had made rather a specialty of using building space to its fullest potential and “making theater buildings fit where they shouldn’t” (Theater.com 2008). Morrison notes that Krapp was responsible for dozens of Broadway theaters, which he built “quickly, economically, and with inventiveness and taste.” The Ambassador, for example, was constructed in only ninety days; and, one month later, the new Ritz theater opened after only sixty days of construction (Morrison 1993:10). Many of Krapp’s theaters are still standing and in use as Broadway theaters.

The Ambassador was the forty-ninth Shubert theater built in New York, and as noted above, one of six concurrently under construction at the time. The announcement of plans for the theater in The New York Times of November 18, 1920, demonstrates the extent of the Shuberts’ ambition:

Four of the new Shubert theaters will be on Forty-ninth Street and two on Forty-eighth…Another Shubert house is in process of construction on Seventh Avenue, immediately below Fifty-ninth Street, and still other Shubert houses are
planned for Eighth Avenue and Fifty-fourth Street and
Broadway and Sixty-eighth Street. (in Young 1973:56)]

Only four of the nine theaters planned as the cornerstone of this new “theater
district” were built: the Ritz (now the Walter Kerr), the Forrest (now the Eugene
O’Neill), and the 49th Street, which has since been demolished. Interestingly, though the
Shuberts still own and operate a great many of Broadway’s theaters, the Ambassador is
the only one of those remaining four still under the aegis of the Shubert Organization
(Chach et al.).

Its premiere production was the Anselm Goetzel-William Carey musical *The Rose
Girl*, opening on February 11, 1921, followed by the musical revue, *Biff! Bing! Bang!*
Later that year, the Shuberts premiered one of their most successful productions, the
Sigmund Romberg-Dorothy Donnelly operetta *Blossom Time*. It ran for 592
performances, and remains one of the theater’s all time hits, as well as a particular
favorite of J.J. Shubert (Young; *Playbill*; The Shubert Organization).

Though the Ambassador was built as a theater and has remained a theater, it was
not always used for live performance. When the theater industry was hit by the
Depression during the 1930s and 1940s, the Ambassador was used primarily as a movie
house or for producing radio broadcasts—exclusively so from 1945 to 1950. Finally,
from 1950 to 1956, the Shuberts leased it to the Dumont Television Network. At the end
of that lease period, J.J. Shubert reclaimed the playhouse for “legitimate” theater. He
deplored the condition Dumont had left it in, and the theater was refurbished in 1956
(Figure 4). During that process, he declared that the Ambassador should never be used
again for any purpose besides live performance (Chach et al. 211). In 1980, the theater closed briefly for another, interior renovation. The interior of the theater underwent renovation once more, in 1980. When it reopened, it briefly went under the title of “The New Ambassador Theatre.”

Figure 4. The Ambassador Theatre in 1958. Photo courtesy of The Shubert Organization.

While the Ambassador was primarily used for musical comedies and operettas in the 1920s, it has housed an even balance of plays and musicals over the last few decades. Musicals and operettas tend to have larger casts and more elaborate stagecraft, while plays are usually smaller both in size and in production needs. However, the musicals playing the Ambassador, particularly in the past thirty years, have consistently been shows with small ensembles and relatively simple scenery and decoration. Chicago is a
prime example: while it is in many ways a conventional Broadway musical, the set consists of a bare stage with a bandstand for the orchestra, black chairs along the side, and two ladders that swing in and out of view (Figure 5). This set is suggestive rather than literal, so that these elements are multi-function and shift as signifiers during the course of the play.\footnote{Other recent examples of small ensemble musicals with suggestive, rather than literal or elaborate, sets include It Ain’t Nothin’ But the Blues and You’re a Good Man, Charlie Brown, both in 1999; and Bring in ‘Da Noise, Bring in ‘Da Funk in 1996 (The Broadway League 2008).}

Figure 5. Brenda Braxton as Velma, on the bandstand of the Chicago set. Photo by Paul Kolnik.

Layers of semiotic meaning pervade the architecture, the auditorium, the stage, the exits, the entrances, and the passageways of the theater, signaling to audience and actor where each belongs. Curtains, doors, signs, and stairs signal what can be shown,
and what remains hidden. Because of these and other signs, the Ambassador Theater occurs differently for different users. Sense of place will vary considerably depending on people’s reasons for accessing the theater. The path of travel from the outside to the inside, points of access, and movement within the building are determined by whether one is an actor, a spectator, or simply a passerby. Perception of the building’s metonymic relationship to the body, as philosopher Edward Casey suggests, depends on perspective and use (116). As the principal site of the reciprocal interaction between audience and actor, the theater’s auditorium is perhaps its heart. For the performer, however, the arteries, back, face, and limbs are the backstage area, in spaces inaccessible to the audience.

**Behind the Scenes and Up the Stairs**

The “offstage” area in any theater, regardless of architectural particulars, is essentially an auxiliary space for actors. Located away from the space of performance, its function is to provide a place for actors to change costumes, enter and exit the stage area, and overall, prepare themselves both physically and mentally for their upcoming contact with the audience in the space of performance. However, given the tension in theater between hidden and shown, presence and absence, suggests Carlson, the backstage area takes on a significance beyond its utilitarian function: it becomes for the audience the “tangible sign for the hidden ‘other’ world of the actor, the place of appearance and disappearance,” an exotic realm that the spectator may not enter (131). He compares the audience’s lobby with the actors’ backstage, explaining that both are both are
intermediate spaces, supporting the transition between performance and non-performance. Further, both of these places are off-limits to those who inhabit the other - thus the ubiquitous feeling of transgression when spectators are allowed into backstage areas or when actors breach the lobby (133). Even when all boundaries are intact, however, an awareness of the other pervades each area. Audiences are fully aware of being in a theater lobby, whether before a performance or during intermission, and the audience is continually present backstage by virtue of intercoms that carry the sounds of the auditorium into the offstage areas, not to mention the reason for being in the theater in the first place.

As Casey defines “dwelling,” this offstage area is indeed a dwelling place for the performers, made so by repeated return and familiarity born of body memory and deliberate habitation of the space (116). However, its purpose is to provide a place for actors to move from the world of everyday life to the world of the play and the life of their characters. Thus Casey’s definition of transitional spaces as those that exist “between private and public or between the rigors of the journey and the comforts of inhabitation” also applies (121-122). Finally, he contends, “a truly transitional space is often a place for creative action,” a statement which applies both to the acts of preparing for performance and the creative expressions of identity that decorate the backstage area.

For actors, crew, and theater personnel, there are two stage doors, a Stage Right entrance and a Stage Left entrance. However, only exit is possible through the door at stage right, unless it has been propped open by someone already inside. The stage right
door is at the stage level, in contrast to the stage left entrance, which opens onto an alley that then leads into the basement. Brian Spitulnik describes how he typically approaches the theater: “If it's about 7:28 [pm], a member of the crew is usually smoking a cigarette outside the Stage Right entrance. If I'm running late, this is enormously lucky, as the door is locked otherwise, and I'd have to run all the way around to Stage Left and up through the basement to sign in before Half-Hour [at 7:30pm]”\textsuperscript{14} (Spitulnik 2008b).

Actors sign in on the Call Board,\textsuperscript{15} (Figure 6) located on the wall along the stairs running between the basement and the stage level. While the basement spans the entire length of the building, the stage level, by contrast, only has room for the on- and immediately backstage areas. Because of the fly space\textsuperscript{16} above the stage, and the diagonal placement of the auditorium, the rest of the building is very narrow, expanding vertically rather than horizontally. The vertical axis of the single staircase is thus the theater’s main artery. The walls along the staircase are plastered with photographs of cast and crew, both

\textsuperscript{14}“Half Hour” is the union-regulated call time for actors; that is, actors must be present at the theater and must have made their presence known by “signing in” no later than thirty minutes before “curtain,” that is, the time that the performance begins (Actors’ Equity Association 2004). “Calls” are notifications to cast and crew of rehearsal or performance; an actor is “called” for a rehearsal, the “crew calls” are the times at which the crew is required to be in the theater, etc. The stage manager gives a series of calls (via the backstage intercom system) as a countdown to curtain; these include half-hour, fifteen minutes, five minutes, and finally, “places,” the request for cast and crew to take their places for the start of the performance (Ionazzi 22, 135).

\textsuperscript{15}The “call board” is a bulletin board used by stage and company management to post “any information pertinent to actors and crew, such as rehearsal schedules and costume fittings,” and almost always including a sign-in sheet (Ionazzi 102). The sign-in sheet is the official way for stage management to keep track of who is present in the theater. The Chicago call board also includes the “In/Out List” (or “At This Performance”), which communicates substitutions or other one-time changes in casting and roles (such as when a swing or understudy performs).

\textsuperscript{16}A “fly system” of ropes, counterweights, and pulleys allows technicians to “fly,” or quickly raise and lower, scenery, lighting elements, and microphones on and off the stage. The blocks and pulleys, as well as the scenery and equipment to be flown in and out, are located in an area above the stage known as the “fly space,” “fly loft,” or “fly tower” (Grand Stage Company 2007).
past and present (Figure 7), while the landings feature signs printed on red copy paper that indicate the path to different areas or designate the use of space on that floor (Figure 8). The stairs themselves may be lent to other purposes besides travel. For example, as Brian relates, his dresser\(^{17}\) lays out copies of The New York Times crossword puzzle for that day along the stairs leading up to “Velma’s” dressing room. The dresser makes eight copies and lays one on each stair (Spitalnik 2008b). Other cast members talked about how some colleagues have staked out particular landings for their own use, such as spreading out a yoga mat and going through a brief practice, and I observed a performer who had jammed the dusty mattress from J8 onto the landing and along the stairs to catch a nap between shows one Sunday.

\(^{17}\) A dresser’s responsibilities include assisting actors with costume changes during rehearsals and performances, as well as taking care of or assisting with any difficulties pertaining to the costume or the costume changes. Finally, as part of the Wardrobe staff, dressers maintain the cleanliness, quality, and appearance of the costumes throughout the run of the show (Pallin 19).
Figure 6. The Call Board (April 2009)

Figure 7. Member of the cast of CHICAGO pose backstage, next to a collage of similarly informal photos and news clippings along the wall of the stairway. Photo courtesy of Dan Micciche.
Each narrow landing has enough room only for the doors to the dressing rooms on that level (Figure 9). Working upwards, then, the first floor is the basement, the second is the stage, and the principal actors’ dressing rooms lay along the spine of the staircase in this order: “Velma” (Brenda’s dressing room) and “Roxie” on the third floor; “Mama” and four “Girls”\(^\text{18}\) in J4, and J6 is the shared dressing room of “Amos” and “Mary Sunshine” (played by a man in drag) on the fourth floor. On the fifth floor, five “Girls” share J7; and finally, the “Boys” of the ensemble are located in J8 and J9 on the sixth floor.

\(^{18}\) I use “girls” because that is how the performers refer to themselves and to their female colleagues.
The meaning behind the size and location of dressing rooms are very clearly understood by actors. Similar to the system of audience seating, offstage space is also subdivided to reflect social status. In both areas, those with greater social status are given more impressive spaces that are more centrally or conveniently located (Carlson 134). This system is certainly reflected by the dressing room assignments in the Ambassador. Follow the conventions of Western theater as outlined by Carlson, the principal actors are given private dressing rooms located near the stage, while “performers of lower status move down the spatial scale into smaller and shared spaces, less conveniently situated, and often accessible only by stairs” (134). Indeed, accessing the chorus dressing rooms
means ascending four, five, or six flights of stairs. Due to the amount of time needed to scale the stairs, as well as the physical toll of perpetual climbing, only principal actors are able to return to their dressing rooms during a performance. “I guess you don’t have time to run up and down every time you’re offstage,” I said to Brian. “Yeah, and it would destroy your knees,” he replied (Spitulnik 2008c). These practical considerations demonstrate how the location of dressing rooms along the stairs powerfully reifies the hierarchy of actors, both symbolically and functionally.

Just as it reinforces classification of actors, the verticality of the Ambassador Theater also reaffirms its liminality. Though Yi-Fu Tuan likens space to movement and place to pauses (Cresswell 2004:8), the size and location of the various places in the theater along the vertical axis of the stairs transforms the staircase from a transitional space to a place of meeting and interaction as well as journey. As an example, when Brian’s dresser lays out crossword puzzles on the stairs, the staircase is clearly felt and used as a place.

The photographs on the walls of the stairwells are further evidence of the duality of place and journey inherent in this area. This revolving display of photos taken backstage by cast members includes pictures of current and former cast members, friends, and crew. The individual images are continually updated, but the collage display itself is fixed to those areas. A visual narrative of the people and events belonging to the group, the members of the cast and crew are emplacing their narrative of belonging, of identity, of inclusion along the walls of a transitional, but communal, space. Place itself becomes
the medium of expression, and as such, adds further layers of meaning. The use of the
stairwell and the evolving nature of the display means that like the “official” signs on the
walls and on the mirrors, they are at once both flexible and implacable, demonstrating
and adding to an awareness of the liminality inherent in offstage places.

Nonetheless, the staircase retains the purpose of travel and transition. Continual
meeting on and movement along the stairs both reify the liminality of the backstage area.
The dressing rooms, then, must be more firmly inhabited and less transitory, even as they
serve the function of transformational space. Indeed, the performers speak again and
again of creating places for themselves that look and feel like home.
I have perceived that to be with those I like is enough,
To stop in company with the rest at evening is enough,
To be surrounded by beautiful curious breathing laughing
flesh is enough,
To pass among them . . to touch any one….to rest my arm
ever so lightly round his or her neck for a
moment….what is this then?
I do not ask any more delight….I swim in it as in a sea.

(Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*)

Gabi Garcia reads this quote aloud from a card that she keeps at her station. “A friend of mine when he left the show gave us all this,” she says, adding, “And I just love it, because it’s so Chicago! You know?” (Garcia). Indeed, it captures many of Chicago’s defining features, including both the onstage production’s driving aesthetic, and the backstage relationships and traditions. The show itself is very physical, not only as a dance show, but in its celebration of the human form and movement. The dancers writhe and undulate on the stage, and have a lot of sexually suggestive, physical contact. Gabi’s comment, however, relates more to the affection the cast members feel for one another, evident in their ease of interaction and the respect and comradeship that characterizes the way they inhabit the dressing rooms as a group.
For many actors, social interaction is the most important aspect of preparing for performance. While the entire theater provides a context for work, for play, and for fellowship among the cast and crew, the sense of, and need for, community intensifies within the shared dressing rooms. The intimate acts performed in close proximity to other bodies in the small dressing rooms both demand and reinforce the need for mutual comfort. The actors choose to spend time together in the dressing room for activities that are essential for the actors’ health and readiness to perform, but that do not necessarily need to occur in the theater. These primarily include eating and sleeping in the dressing room before performances, or between shows on the weekend. Informally spending time together in this way strengthens relationships among cast members, as well as reinforcing the echoes of home present in the dressing room.

The actors want to feel at home with their colleagues as well as in their dressing rooms. This group dynamic is important in both preparing for and performing the show. At minimum, mutual respect and basic trust is crucial, both onstage and backstage. However, the actors prefer to be friendly and enjoy social interaction during time offstage. Mama declares, “You know, we get along [in this dressing room], thank god! You know, we love each other! As a matter of fact, the whole company—It’s a great company, because we know we’re in a small space, and we have to get along, and we do—And we’re enjoying ourselves, you know, because we get along” (Bridgewater, Woods, and Croman). The experience of community is thus professionally important, as it improves the quality of performance as it protects the actors’ occupational well-being.
In the Dressing Rooms

“Safe and Sanitary Working Conditions”

Dressing rooms fall under the province of requirements by Actors’ Equity Association, the actors’ union, that producers provide safe, sanitary, and private spaces for actors to change into costumes, put on makeup and otherwise transform from the quotidian, “street” appearance to the character onstage (Actors' Equity Association 2004). The daily use of each room largely defines the layout and objects of the space, along with the content and organization of each station. The physical realities of performing eight shows per week, as well as the specific nature of this job, determines in large part the content and arrangement of the practical aspects of the space. Thus the content of each station, that is, which items are included, is determined by the physical demands of daily performance, and the way each performer’s body, personality, and daily practices intersect with those demands.

In regards to dressing rooms, Actors’ Equity definitions of “safe and sanitary working conditions” include the following specifications:

(1) Assigned dressing rooms shall be maintained for the exclusive use of the Actors…[The] Producer shall use best efforts to ensure that any rooms originally intended to be dressing rooms shall be assigned to the Equity Company, with special consideration for proximity to the stage. Curtained partitions shall not be deemed adequate separation to provide exclusive use of the space with respect to other backstage activities. Adequate table space for each Actor shall be allocated to all members of the Company, including Understudies and Swings, for make-up and dressing purposes.
(2) All dressing rooms shall be properly heated and shall have adequate lights, mirrors, shelves and wardrobe hooks for Actor's make-up and dressing equipment. (Actors' Equity Association 2004)

Equity further requires: “Each dressing room shall contain at least one washstand which shall provide hot and cold running water for each six Actors assigned therein, within the reasonable requirements of dressing room assignments,” and additionally, that toilet facilities be available on each floor (89).

Shared dressing rooms are laid out to best meet the conditions of “adequate table space,” as well as proper lighting. As such, while the dressing rooms of Broadway theaters are often small, each individual occupies a designated space, called a “station.” The basics for each station include a mirror, a ledge or table, and a chair. The Ambassador Theatre dressing rooms also include a shelf above the mirrors. Caged light bulbs surround the mirror, meant to mimic onstage conditions so that actors can properly judge makeup application (Figure 10).
These basic features—table, chair, mirror, shelves, and toilet or shower facilities—provide the surfaces and structures of the room and the stations. In addition, the company managers designate which actor is to use which station by affixing a piece of tape to the mirror with the actor or the character’s name written on it. The performers themselves bring in everything beyond these structural elements, including the tools of their trade as well as personal objects to decorate or otherwise enhance the space.

With six out of seven nights spent in the theater, along with the normally private activities—dressing, undressing, showering, and putting on makeup—that they perform
in the space, the performers reveal that they strive to create a workplace that feels “like home,” one in which they feel comfortable and enjoy spending time. As Michelle says, “You know when you’re in one place every single day except for one day a week, you just kinda want it to be a little homey” (Potterf). Actor James T. Lane agrees: “It’s really important to make your space your own,” by surrounding yourself with “Whatever gives you a sense of peace. And joy and comfort, in this space that’s not your home—is a good direction to go (Lane). The actors achieve a feeling of hominess by collaboratively decorating the room, and by individually embellishing their own stations. Though all four chorus dressing rooms began with bare, white walls and unadorned windows, the actors have created richly inhabited environments, so that all four rooms have distinct appearances and traditions of use. The material culture of the dressing rooms, the actors’ customary activities, and group dynamics work together to create the sense of dwelling, of home, alluded to in these comments.

19 Broadway shows have eight performances each week. In the winter and spring of 2009, Chicago has performances every day except Wednesday, with both matinee and evening performances on Saturdays and Sundays.
20 My goal in transcribing the interviews is to capture how they sounded as well as what was said. Ellipses indicate omitted material, while brackets surround words I have added. The following is a further key to my transcriptions:

**Italics** – emphasis

**Bold** – increased volume

? (question mark) – rising inflection, spoken like a question

, (comma) – slight pause

— (em-dash) – pause or interruption

--- slightly longer pause

While used to signify emphasis, italics also indicate titles of shows, following *Chicago Manual of Style* conventions.
Changing Places

Part of the understanding of community and self within the theater is an awareness of how individuals contribute to the group’s sense of a place. Based on her experience in Chicago and in previous shows, Nili Bassman observes, “Basically, the dressing rooms change depending on the energy in them, the women in them” (Bassman). The movement of even a single person causes widespread ripples. The configuration and placement of people alters an actor’s individual experience of the room as shifts in casting revise the dynamic of the group.

The frequency of changes in casting and the impact of those changes are signaled by the use of tape on the mirrors to assign dressing room stations. Semiotically, the tape is an ambivalent expression of authority from company management. On the one hand, the dark black, blocky capital letters are the same from show to show. A performer would have seen this sign in innumerable dressing rooms and interpret it correctly as an official, authoritative designation. However, its medium, masking tape, is by its nature impermanent. Its use recognizes the frequency of personnel changes and the ensuing reorganization of space.

Using tape not only allows for fluidity and change, it signals the constancy of change in uses of space backstage, particularly in the game of musical chairs played within and among the dressing rooms. When there are shifts in casting, the entire configuration of the dressing room may change. One actor leaving the show is sometimes an opportunity for other actors in the dressing room to move from one station to another, more desirable location. In dressing room J8, for example, David Kent moved out of the
spot that Brian Spitulnik currently occupies to get away from the heating and air conditioning units that Brian, and Nili Bassman, who has the analogous station in J7, referred to as unpleasant.

Due to this flux in casting and personnel, actors generally refer to dressing rooms by role name or by the actor’s name. When Brian Spitulnik listed the locations of the dressing rooms, he called the room by the name of the characters, as opposed the name of the actor. Because it is such a long running show, changes in casting happen frequently; the character name is more stable than the actor’s name, and dressing room assignments are based on role. Moreover, most ensemble members “cover,” or understudy, one or more of the principal roles, and perform those roles frequently. When that happens, the actor moves into the appropriate dressing room for that character, taking along makeup and other essentials. Thus the room is remains in use by the character, if not the actor.

Even putting aside replacements and departures of actors, there may be changes in the dressing rooms’ population on any given day. With even one person absent from the room, the dynamic changes. For example, swings spend much less time in their dressing rooms, as they do not need to prepare for every performance; they only need to prepare

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21 An “understudy” is an actor who has learned and rehearsed a role that he or she does not perform regularly, playing the part onstage when the regularly appearing actor is sick, on vacation, or otherwise unable to appear for the given performance. Though listed as “understudies” in the program, actors use the word “cover” to describe the practice of a current ensemble member understudying a principal role; a chorus member “covers” a principal in the same way that a “swing” covers the chorus roles. The particulars of which actor understudies which role, and in what order they are called on to cover that role, are specified in the actors’ contracts. Donna Marie, for example, is the “first cover” for “Velma,” meaning that she is the first actor called on to perform as “Velma” when Brenda Braxton is out. When she does, Gabi “swings in” to play “June,” which Donna’s regular role. When both Brenda and Donna are unavailable, one of the “second covers” for the role will be asked to perform. The list understudies, as printed in the program, is included in Appendix A.
for those in which they are called on to perform. Since the dressing rooms are so far upstairs, swings often elect to pass the time in the Wardrobe Room, which sees a lot more social traffic than the upstairs areas. “Nobody ever comes in here, really,” says Brian Spitulnik of his dressing room, J8: “[Because] we’re all the way at the top of the stairs…And since it’s the two boys, and the two swings, it’s—Essentially, it’s an empty dressing room, most of the time” (Spitulnik 2009). Gabi Garcia, a swing, explained why she did not mind moving into a spot with less space available: “And I’m like: Alright, I’m the swing, I’m not normally here that much, so I’ll just—I’ll take the center so they have more room” (Garcia).

When the actors change stations within the dressing room, they maintain a respect based on shared understandings of sense of place and ownership of place. Donna Marie Asbury’s explanation of why she had lace hanging around her mirror illustrates this: “Michelle DeJean used to ‘Mona’ and then she got moved to ‘Roxie,’” Donna explains. “So this,” she says, indicating her own station, “was her space. And this,” she continues, indicating another woman’s station, “used to be my space when we started out.” When Michelle DeJean went on tour, Donna decided she would rather use Michelle’s station, and thus moved one place to the left. “I decided I wanted to move, but I didn’t have the heart to remove the lace [Michelle had put around the mirror]” she says, “which is really good, because she’s coming back as ‘Mona,’ so now I’m gonna move back to here” she concludes, pointing to her former station (Asbury).

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22 “Mona” is one of the chorus tracks, whereas “Roxie” is a principal role.
Despite frequent changes in casting, some performers have been in the show for ten years or more, so that there is a great deal of continuity. Some actors have periodically return to the Broadway company for a short time, then depart, and may return at a later date. Frequently, an actor may go on leave for a few months, whether for maternity leave, to perform in a limited engagement, or to rehearse a new company of Chicago. The producers hire “vacation swings” or other temporary replacements; often drawing from the show’s alumni. Finally, as actors depart or join the cast one by one, as opposed to an entirely new cast, a new cast member is the only newcomer to the room at the time. The continuity of personnel over time fosters a sense of group memory, and allows traditions to be passed on to newcomers. Thus, changes to the group dynamic are subtle, even unnoticeable to outsiders, because the newcomer adapts to the practices and aesthetics of the existing group.

The experience of being in a group becomes part of the pre-performance routine. When Donna Marie is called on to perform as “Velma,” moving into that dressing room for the night, she brings along her portable speakers in addition to her makeup. As she explains: “I think that we’re so used to being in a group, that when we get moved downstairs and we’re alone—That’s why I need music. I get lonely! It’s too quiet! Like as much as sometimes you come and you’re in a bad mood, and you’ll want to, like, tune everybody out—But as soon as you have silence it’s like, Aaahhh! It’s too quiet!” (Asbury). Thus she adapts her new space to maintain continuity in her sense of place as she prepares herself for performance.
“The best part is the conversation”

Some of the actors consider social interaction the most important aspect of preparing for performance. For them, the dressing room’s main function is to provide this context. Michael “Mikey” Cusumano reveals, “[That’s] what—being in this room is about for me—is like, the bonding of friendships with guys.” He asserts that this is definitely important in preparing to perform: “Like, if there’s something on my mind, a lot of the times, one of the guys will pick up on it, and they’ll know, and they’ll be like, ‘Ok Mikey, just tell us—just get it out.’ And—and we’ll do that for each other. And it’ll be like a good fifteen minutes of talking, laughing, and then, you know, boom, go do the show. It’s funny—It’s a nice thing to look forward to, actually” (Cusumano). These conversations address the need to unload from the day, shed whatever is going on in the real world in order to focus on performance, the world onstage.

Like Mikey, Shawn Emamjomeh relates to the dressing room more as a context for conversation than as a place to physically prepare for performance. “I sometimes get up here as close as five minutes to Curtain,” he reports, explaining that because he does not wear makeup in this show, he only requires the dressing room to put on his costume and microphone. “The best part is the conversation,” he contends, “So really, it’s about coming up here to talk, get dressed, and go” (Emamjomeh). For both of these men, the dressing room’s main function is to provide a site for the social interaction they require in order to prepare for performance.

Mikey and Shawn are two of the five men who share J9, which does have a distinctly social feel. In fact, this atmosphere has been firmly established through
traditional group practices and self-naming on the part of the actors. Shawn, who has been a member of the company for nearly ten years, pointed out a series of red signs, resembling the official sign on the outside of the door saying who is in the room. These signs, however, replace each man’s first name with “Heather.” Shawn explains: “A few years ago, when it was that top group of people, we decided we were ‘The Heathers!’ A group of really bitchy girls!” We both laughed as he elaborates:

We had great conversations in here, just lots of laughter, lots of fun, so—we decided anything that’s ever said in J9 stays in J9. And any new person has to become a Heather eventually, they have to go through the induction ceremony, and probably be hazed, until which point—until they are added.

He goes on to explain that the two newest members of J9 “are due their Heather status,” which will be conferred by the older members of the group. “When somebody speaks up and says something that, like, goes into the book as, you know, a Heather comment? Or, a Heather personality trait? We’ll be like, ‘Ok, you’re in now.’ Now you’re a Heather” (Emamjomeh).

The girls in J4 also have strong social traditions. “It’s just silly in here. It’s a silly room,” Nikki remarks, which Dylis affirms: “Yeah, we do, we have a lot of fun together” (Bridgewater et al.). They all tend to arrive well before the Half Hour call, usually an hour or more. Nikki, Dylis, and Mama (Sharon Moore, also a member of J4, is a swing, so she is in the dressing room less) use the pre-show time to eat dinner in the dressing room, talk and laugh and tease each other as they style their hair and apply stage makeup.
The dressing room is designated as a place for activities such as dressing and undressing, as well as others that are less ostensibly personal but are generally considered private, such as brushing teeth and putting on deodorant. All of these were cited by cast members as central to their daily preparation for performance. In some rooms, they bring dinner up and eat together before a show. On Saturdays and Sundays, when there are two performances each day, they may have a meal together, and then all spread out mats on the floor and have nap time.

While all four dressing rooms have mattresses or sleeping pads, and actors certainly do avail themselves of these “Equity Cots”\(^\text{23}\) between shows, Nikki asserts that in J4, “This is the dressing room that, that sleeps, that likes their rest. And [we] like to accommodate. We have, like, respect for our spaces—during our sleep time? And we have, like, y’know, pillows, and blankets” (Bridgewater et al. 2009). In addition, the four women in J4 keep sleeping clothes on hand, and they each have their own spot in which to lay out their individual mat. Dylis explains, gesturing to the different areas: “Yeah, we have our angles. Nicole sleeps, this way, I sleep with, with my body going that way—Mama sleeps over there, and Sharon sleeps under [the table].” Nikki adds, “You should see it! It’s quite funny when somebody comes up here!” She laughs, adding, “And we’re zonked out—It’s quite a sight.” “It looks like a slave ship up in here,” Mama quips (Bridgewater et al. 2009).

\(^{23}\) Actors’ Equity requires that a cot be available for use by actors and stage managers in a generally accessible
As the above conversation suggests, a great deal of play occurs among the actors, both necessitated by and facilitated by the close quarters they share. Other traditions have evolved that reinforce these relationships. One tradition, which Dylis jokingly says is “probably the most important part of this interview,” is the “wind-down moment” they share in the dressing room just before the end of the show. The actors remain onstage for the entire show, except during intermission and a few minutes toward the end, during the songs “Nowadays” and “Hot Honey Rag,” which are both sung by “Roxie” and “Velma.” These numbers are immediately followed by the bows. In this “wind-down” moment, the girls all have a small cup of wine together, “just a little nip of something as we’re going out,” Nikki explains. She elaborates:

And it’s our good little social time, you know, when Hot Honey’s going on, we’ll talk and we’ll, like, you know—Sometimes we’ll just read, but—It’s like, you know, we’ll just talk—It’s kind of like the family, like, dinner; you say, ‘What’s going on? What’s your day been?’ [laughs] You know? It’s nice. (Bridgewater et al.)

Sometimes other company members join in. Jill Nicklaus, for example, used to be in J4, but left for a while. When she returned, she was assigned to J7. Still, she comes to J4 each night to partake in this wind-down ritual.

The women in J7 use this time a little differently. They also run upstairs to their dressing rooms, but once there, they lay out what they have termed their “Personal Pre-

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24 Mama, however, does not drink. “That’s just for the young people,” she says.
Sets,\textsuperscript{25} which facilitate speedy departures from the theater. “We all come up and we just sort of like—arrange things,” explains Donna. “My Personal Pre-set is usually—can I say this?—I put my bra and my undies out so I can get into them quickly,” she laughs and continues, “I take off my diamond earrings that I wear during the show, ‘cause I wear a really long wig, so nobody sees that I’m not wearing the diamond earrings for curtain call, and I sort of, blot my eyeliner.” After these small adjustments, she returns to the stage for the bows. “No one has ever noticed, but maybe now that you’re doing this, the jig is up,” she jokes (Asbury). Both Donna and Michelle’s Personal Pre-sets arrange items on the counter in order needed to quickly shed their hair pieces, change back into street clothes, and wipe most of their makeup off so that they can leave as quickly as possible to get home to their families.

After the bows every night, when Mama returns to dressing room J4, she plays a little game with the other girls. Dylis, Mama, and Nikki collaboratively told how it goes:

Dylis: Mama will come in and she’ll say, ‘Where are the girls?’ And we’re all, we’re in here getting our costumes off, like after the show’s over. She’s like—She’s asking Ronnie, the guy that made the curtains, like, ‘Where are the girls? Where are the girls?’ And we’re like, you know—At first, when she started playing this game, we were like, ‘What is she talking about? We’re right here!’ You know? I don’t know, it’s this game she likes to play. Where did that start, Mama?

Mama: I don’t know—[laughing]

\textsuperscript{25}“Pre-set” refers to the lights, props, and scenery that comprise the onstage setting the audience sees before the show begins (Ionazzi 122). The locations of costumes and props set backstage in pre-designated places, facilitating quick changes or making them easy to find, are also said to be “pre-set.”
Dylis: It’s just her being silly!

Nikki: [overlapping] That’s what I mean—it’s just silly in here. It’s a silly room.

Dylis: [overlapping] And we’ll be like, ‘Oh, hey Mama!’ And she’s like, ‘Oh, hey!’

Mama: [overlapping] ‘Oh, there you are!’

[laughter]

Dylis: ‘There you are!’

Mama: [laughing] ‘Didn’t see you all up in here!’

Mama: I get up here, and I say, ‘Where are the girls? You know, I beat ‘em up the stairs again!’ I says, ‘You know, they are so lazy!’ I says, ‘They’re probably down there, lollygagging!’ And I’m just talking about them, and they’s all, they’re in here—And then I look at them, and I say [gaspers], ‘Nicole! Where’d you come from girl? I didn’t know you were in here!’ I say, ‘Oh there you are Dylis! Girl!’ I say, ‘Mm-mm-mm, I’m getting old—!’ [all laugh]

Dylis: Every night! It never fails!

“It’s a lot of laughter in here. A ton of laughter,” Nikki concludes. This kind of game carries over as long as Mama stays in the room. When Mama leaves, the new actor in that role will probably not do that specifically, though she may have her own ways of integrating play into the post-show routine. Traditions such as drinking wine before the curtain call, however, remain more constant as they are not tied to a specific person.

In a group like the J9 Heathers, even though some of the individuals are gone, they have a lasting presence in the traditional practices of the room. This also translates into a material practice in the case of two of the “original” J9 Heathers. Josh and Denny,
who painted the room, also left something of themselves behind when they left the show. As Shawn explains, “It kind of became a tradition, that kind of, when we left the room? We leave something in the room, as kind of a reminder of that person. Being here, still. So Josh left that [stuffed bird], kind of to watch over us. Or spy over us!” he laughs (Emamjomeh). Other dressing rooms and individual stations also hold material reminders of former colleagues, whether gifts and souvenirs, pictures, or cards at individual stations, or a stereo or refrigerator left behind when the actor moved on to a new job.

Other company members who interact with the room often contribute materially to its decoration. Shawn, Donna Marie, Michelle, and Gabi all have small, square mesh boxes at their stations to hold small items. Keisha, a former cleaning lady at the theater, gave these boxes to them. All three of them related that Keisha observed that they had hairpins, false eyelashes, and other objects scattered across the surface of the table, and that she responded to this perceived lack of organization by purchasing small boxes and arranging these items in the boxes. Paula, the dresser for J7, and Ronnie, the dresser for J4, also contributed to the rooms’ decorations. Paula and Gabi together upholstered the chairs and made the placemats in J7, and Ronnie sewed and hung the curtain on the window in J4.

Collaboration and Acculturation

Each room looks and feels strikingly different from the others. Ephemeralities such as “atmosphere” and group dynamic have been shaped by material and behavioral traditions. In most cases, the decoration of the room results from collaboration among all
of the room’s users, including actors and production crew. Nili explains the process:
“Usually, if the girls get along…you make big decisions together, like if you’re going to
paint the room, or if you’re going to have music or not.” Newcomers to the room then
adapt to the way their predecessors had decided to do things. However, if there are strong
objections, then practices may change. Because, as Nili says, “it’s everyone’s space”
(Bassman).

The two men’s dressing rooms look remarkably different from each other. These
contrasts underline, or perhaps shape, divergent atmospheres. J9 (Figure 11) is painted
with a colorful geometric pattern, the door has four signs with different groups of
Heathers on it, former cast members have left behind mementoes for the other men to
remember them by, the individual stations are more decorated, and a collage known as
“The Wall of Men” (Figure 12) covers the bathroom door (Emamjomeh; O’Brien). Shawn
describes how the look of the room was shaped when the company moved from the
Shubert Theatre to the Ambassador Theatre in 2003. “When we first came to the Ambassador
Theatre, this was just all white. And the bathroom was all white,” he relates. The group of
guys as a whole decided that the room was too stark, therefore, as Shawn explains:
“And—then—I painted the inside of the bathroom. And—then—two guys, Josh and
Denny, painted all this. These squares of orange and yellow” (Emamjomeh).
Figure 11. Shawn at his station in J9. The walls are painted with squares of orange, red, and yellow. The Wall of Men is visible in Shawn’s mirror, and the signs bearing the "Heather names" of J9 Heathers, past and present, can be seen over his right shoulder.

Figure 12. A portion of the Wall of Men, a collage of images covering the bathroom door in J9.
J8, on the other hand, is much more minimal (Figure 13), perhaps reflecting the personalities of its inhabitants. “We have the two swings (so often it's only 2 guys up here sometimes), two guys are straight (so, low key), Brian explains. “As [former cast member] Bernard said to me, ‘J8 is a room full of people who are unbelievably boring until you put them in front of a paying audience or get a drink in them.’ He really said that” (Spitulnik). With its stark white walls, simple window curtain, and individual stations that, while they contain personal items and objects of memory, remain mostly undecorated, the room as a whole supports Bernard’s characterization.

Figure 13. Dressing Room J8. Stations pictured: David Kent (with computer) and Brian Spitulnik on the left; Adam Zotovitch in right corner, and James T. Lane on near right side.
There are similar differences in appearance between J4 and J7, the two ensemble women’s dressing rooms. J7 has been very deliberately decorated (Figure 14), while in J4, the decorative accents to the room as a whole were brought in more recently by Ronnie, the dresser for the women in the room. Like the men of J9, the women assigned to J7 collaboratively decorated their dressing room when the production moved from the Shubert to the Ambassador in 2003. They painted the walls a warm mauve, and hung the windows and the showers with orange colored curtains that mask the industrial character of the interior architecture. In addition, the chairs are upholstered with the same orange and blue fabric used to make the matching placemats at each station. Gabi relates the origins of the room’s decorations:
Michelle DeJean and I came in the day before we moved in, painted the room, um—And the curtain and all those little details came later…One of our dressers, Paula, she was doing the Roxie dressing room, and we said, uh, ‘You know, *that* [fabric] could be nice [in our dressing room]!’ And we asked the girls, we all chipped in a little bit of money, and Paula and I actually covered the chairs, she found a curtain for us, [and that curtain right there]…I actually brought in from my house” (Garcia).

The girls in J7 expressed appreciation and approval of the decorations. “It’s nice!” says Donna, “because all of us have our different things, but there’s some uniformity about it, too” (Asbury 2008).
**Discussion**

As this fieldwork indicates, differences in how the room is used and perceived are drawn neither along lines of gender nor of sexual orientation. Rather, the visual environments and group traditions vary widely from room to room. Such differences are then perpetuated within each room by customary example. The women of J4 have as little decoration in their space as the men in J8, while the women in J7 and the men in J9 inhabit elaborately decorated dressing rooms, and in turn, tend towards more embellishment at their station. Though the manifestation varies however, the common goal of the groups’ practices and decorations are to create a place where the actors can feel comfortable, safe, and “at home.”

The dressing room is a physical environment in which common experiences and activities are conducted, and as such, the dressing room “provides a set of places in which certain ranges of behavior and scenes are expected by all who enter there” (Abrahams 129). Folklorist Roger Abrahams points out that “the tacit understandings that undergird privacy, friendship, and community” are supported and formed not only by common expressions and experiences, but also on “an in-common typology of settings more complex than the simple contrast between public and private” (129). His reference to social philosopher Charles Taylor's construct of social imaginaries provides further insight: “A social imaginary is that common understanding which makes possible common practices, and a widely shared sense of legitimacy” (qtd 129). Expectations of
proper behavior and interaction are contingent on the physical location. The dressing room is certainly a location that implies its own set of rules and boundaries.

The rules and boundaries developed by the group persist despite changes in personnel. As the composition of the dressing room group changes, the group’s traditions and practices are altered and refined. However, the differences among the four dressing rooms are preserved and perpetuated because, as members of the same occupational folk group, the actors share a wide range of tacit cultural understandings. Ongoing experience as members of the large community of Broadway performers has taught the actors how to read and respond to the unspoken guidelines conveyed by this smaller group, the cast of Chicago. Even actors who have never worked in the company of Chicago share cultural understandings that allow the actors to adroitly adapt to new work environments.

Sharing space, tools, and resources in the dressing room reshapes the personal into the communal. More than that, however, the individual actors become members of the group as a whole through shared practices offstage, and the experience of performing together. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton refer to Durkheim’s elucidation of “collective effervescence,” that is, the experience people have of belonging to a group, of a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts that results from participating in common activities, especially ritualistic or exhilarating activities (34). The performers are engaged in two such activities. The first is the onstage performance itself, of which the audience is a part, and which is in so many ways a ritual, performed eight times each week with an ever changing group of spectators. The other is the backstage activity surrounding
performance, the social and individual rituals that preface the communal ritual performance. Casey notes: “Place, already cultural as experienced, insinuates itself into a collectivity, altering as well as constituting that collectivity” (31). Sense of place in the theater and the dressing rooms as places add to and result from such shared experiences.
In the dressing rooms, a place of transition, performers construct a place where they may dwell, one that is calming and centering. In addition to the routines and rituals of the group, the objects that the actors surround themselves with in their daily lives in the theater comprise the tools for creating that dwelling.

While the room as a whole is collaboratively decorated, the arrangement and organization of the stations are created by each individual actor. The actors bring in many different objects from their homes, which means that the overall look, as well as the individual items present, varies among stations. Nonetheless, there is a great deal of consistency in the content and arrangement of each station. Because they all perform similar roles, they have similar needs in terms of the content of their stations. In addition, these performers have learned from past experience and customary example what they need around them on a daily basis. Finally, in the limited space available to each individual, and because the actors respect their colleagues’ space in the room,
arrangement, organization, and decoration of the room and the station are central considerations when the actors set up their individual stations.

The routine for preparing for performance is fairly consistent among the actors. The details vary, such as locations of various activities, amount of time spent on different aspects of the preparation, but the basics are the same. Every actor, for example, must sign in on the Call Board when he or she arrives. After that, the routine includes the following: putting on warm-up clothes and warming up (stretching), doing hair and makeup (sometimes in dressing room, or if wearing a wig, downstairs in the Wardrobe Room), brushing teeth and applying deodorant, changing from warm-up clothes into the costume, putting on the mic pack,\(^{26}\) and going down to the stage when Places are called.

Because the actors follow similar basic routines for their pre-performance activity, the set of tools required for these tasks are fairly standard from station to station. Chicago, however, differs from other jobs that many of the actors have held because the men are asked not to wear makeup, and everyone is asked to have a fairly “natural” look. Also, for the men, there are no requirements regarding facial hair; they may be clean-shaven, have a beard, or even just day-old scruff. So the men do not generally have a lot of products at their stations. They all have deodorant, toothbrush and toothpaste, and a variety of vanity products such as hair products, powder, zit cream or concealer, and the like, as well as an assortment of muscle creams, pain relievers, bandages, and cleansers.

\(^{26}\) Each performer in Chicago is “miced” (pronounced miked), that is, they each wear a microphone. The head of the microphone is set into an actor’s hairline or over the ear, and is virtually invisible from the audience’s perspective. The wire runs down the actor’s back and connects to the “mic pack,” that is, the battery and switches for the microphone. The mic pack is compact, and is usually worn at the small of the actor’s back, or just inside the waistband of his or her pants.
Finally, in the context of daily life at the theater, many actors have accumulated miscellaneous detritus such as matchbooks, pens, reading material, and other personal items.

In addition to the items the men keep at their stations, the women’s stations also include the makeup, and in many cases wigs or specific hairstyles, required to achieve the look of the characters they portray (Figure 15). The women all have makeup and makeup applicators, makeup removing wipes, as well as hairpins, hairspray, and the like. In addition, many women keep on hand nail polish and nail polish remover, emery boards, lotions, and other health and beauty products; essentially, an assortment of what Nikki calls “just in case stuff” (Bridgewater et al.). Some girls also have magnifying mirrors at their stations to assist with applying eyeliner and false eyelashes. Many of them also have pads that enhance breast size provided by Wardrobe. Finally, every woman has a set of earrings and at least one set of false eyelashes, also provided by the Wardrobe department.

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27 All wigs and hairpieces are kept in the Wardrobe Room. However, wearing a wig requires the girl to put her hair in pin curls, which she generally does herself in the dressing room.

28 Actors’ Equity requires producers to provide all costumes and clothes, including undergarments, footwear, and accessories. Basically, producers may not ask the actors to provide anything that is worn onstage. In addition, the producers are responsible for the upkeep and condition of the items, including daily laundering of “skin parts” such as undergarments and stockings (29). This maintenance is performed by the Wardrobe department (Pallin 2003:153).

29 The producers are also required to provide any makeup that is not “ordinary and conventional make-up,” such as false eyelashes (Actors' Equity Association 31).
The look of an individual’s station is determined less by its content and more by how the actor has organized the tools, how items are displayed, and what, if any, additional objects and images are kept at the station. For example, all of the women use a cup or mug to hold their makeup brushes and pencils. The women in J7 also use cosmetic organizers, or caddies, to hold their makeup, while the women in J4 lay out their powders, eye shadows, compacts, and the rest directly on the table.

Most of the actors, men and women alike, have a placemat at their station, usually because, as Brian O’Brien said, “It’s a little cleaner, it’s a little nicer, and it, uh, feels
nicer” (O'Brien). In J7, the placemats all match each other, as they were constructed from the same fabric that two of the girls used to upholster the chairs when they first moved in. In the other rooms, each placemat is different.

**Objects of Memory**

For a dancer, the body itself is a medium of expression. Therefore, the resources needed to maintain the health and appearance of the body are paramount. Moreover, as Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton assert, “The tools of one’s trade, perhaps more than any other set of objects, help to define who we are as individuals” because of the amount of psychic energy invested in that trade, pursuant to the basic human intention of producing the necessities for survival (92). Some of these tools of the dancer’s trade carry a history of personal association that gives the item significance beyond its actual use function. Dylis Croman, like other women in the cast, uses a small hand mirror for close up application of her makeup. “I always use it to, you know, hold it up, and do my makeup,” she says, adding, “I’ve used this same Estée Lauder mirror that broke off like a—I don’t know, like a powder compact.” She continues: “It never had any meaning, other than the fact that I just kept using it and using it, and then it became meaningful, because I’ve used it for every show I’ve done! So—So that’s kind of special to me—If I lost that, it would be kind of weird, and I wouldn’t like to lose it” (Bridgewater et al.). Dylis has used this mirror “since I’ve been in the business.” It has accumulated meaning and value as it travels with her over time and from place to place. Material companions such as these, as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett explains, are incorporated into daily life,
and “their continuous and quotidian presence parallels the ongoing life of the owner” (330). Indeed, Dylis explicitly says that she values the mirror for its constancy in her life, rather than for any sentimental value.

Sometimes, an actor’s material companions were given as gifts, and subsequently integrated into the array of tools used to prepare for performance. Among Nili Bassman’s warm up clothes is a pair of well-worn slippers, hand decorated with rhinestones and bearing the letters NGD on each one (Figure 16). “My first Broadway show that I ever did [Never Gonna Dance], one of the girls in the dressing room, on Opening, bedazzled all of these for us,” she relates. “And I’ve taken them with me, across the country, to every show I’ve ever done—I don’t think she’s aware of that, but—So, they’re still here, for warming up” (Bassman). Nili values her slippers for their constancy in her professional life as well as their significance related to the person who gave them to her and the occasion for the gift.
Many of the other actors have also integrated gifts into the tools at their stations. Like Nili’s slippers, some of these gifts have become essential tools, whether because they are used in daily performance preparation, or because the actor has found the items useful to have around. For example, many of the performers were using red aluminum water bottles with the Chicago logo emblazoned on the side in red letters. These water bottles were the holiday gifts from the producers to the company in 2008, and had been distributed only a few weeks prior to these interviews. Like other show related gifts, the water bottles are valued because they both signify that the actor is a part of this production and are also a useful item for a dancer who needs water close by when at the theater.

Gifts like the water bottles that relating both directly to shows and which address the needs of a performer, whether Chicago or one of the actor’s past gigs, are especially likely to be kept at or near the dressing room station. James T. Lane holds up a muscle
roller made from an Ace bandage wrapped around two tennis balls, and explains: “One of the girls in [A] Chorus Line gave everybody, uh, this thing. Because we were broke up”30 (Lane). Whenever he uses it to relieve cramps in his feet or to massage muscles tight from the rigors of performance, he is reminded of his experiences and fellow cast members from A Chorus Line.

Donna Marie and Gabi both have small, decorative boxes at their stations that they use to hold their earrings, eyelashes, and hairpins. These boxes were brought back by a former cast member from a vacation, and were given as gifts. Nili also has one of these boxes, even though she was not in the show at the time. She found the box at her station, as she relates: “And I said, ‘Oh, someone left their little—jewelry box,’ or whatever it is, and the Dance Captain,31 Gabi, said ‘Oh no, that’s kind of always at the spot.’” She decided to incorporate it into her own display because, as she says, “It’s the tradition of the Hunyaks, I guess” (Bassman).

Nili explains that almost everything in her spot is a gift that she’s incorporated into the set up. These things are special to her, because, as she says, “I love that it’s like, a little part of family and home” (Bassman 2009). The mug holding her makeup brushes

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30 A Chorus Line is known among dancers as a show that is punishing to the body. Unlike Chicago, it is not a show that one can stay with for years and keep your knees intact, for example.
31 “Dance captains are required to know the movement and choreography (called a ‘track’) for every single character in the show because they are responsible for teaching the tracks to new cast members and giving notes when current performers aren’t adhering to the original steps. They also work very closely with the stage managers to coordinate brush-up rehearsals; understudy rehearsals; and ‘put-ins,’ rehearsals with the whole company that typically happen shortly before a swing or understudy goes on for the first time” (Wilson 2008).
and pencils, for example, was a gift from her brother. “So that’s a little part of him,” she says.

On the evening of his first performance in *Chicago*, Brian O’Brien arrived early to set up his dressing room station and, as he says “establish a sense of place for myself.” He brought in the essential objects, such as his personal care products, a placemat to keep the table clean, and a caddy to organize his supplies. His kit of essential items includes a mass card from his mother’s funeral, which was in September 2007. “I have this here as a memorial to her. It’s just a nice simple thing, it’s just a way to know that she’s with me, here, all along,” he says (O’Brien). Prominently displayed at the center of his neatly organized station, this memento is intended from the very outset to “serve as a reminder of an ephemeral experience or absent person” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 331). Like other mementoes and souvenirs, the Mass card is imbued with meaning and value because of what it signifies, metonymically bringing his mother into his space.

Objects such as Brian’s mass card, or a photo of a group of friends, may seem simply decorative. However, for the person who has chosen and displayed the object or image, it resonates with personal meaning. There is always a reason that this photo or this card was selected for the station; sometimes simply, as Nikki Bridgewater said of a Christmas card with a picture of a dog on the front she had hung on the mirror, “I like to look at it” (Bridgewater et al.).

Gabi Garcia alluded to how she has deliberately created a meditative dwelling place at her station, using similar methods and objects to those described by the other
actors. In addition to photos and gifts, she has a box with a number of smooth, pretty stones given to her by friends and colleagues on various occasions. She keeps them at her station, she explains, because, “[They’re] just, little things sometimes you want to hold. They just signify,” she pauses, considering, “something special.” She explains that she pulls them out when she needs them: “Like, when I’m a little shaky? Not very often, though—but I know I have them there. Because I know they were given to me” (Garcia). So even just their presence is a comfort, because of their own meaning and the relationships they signify. “They’re just nice to hold, sometimes you just—meditate on them,” she concluded (Garcia).

The objects most often selected to decorate a station are cards, notes, and photographs. These may be hung on the wall to frame the mirror, stuck on the mirror itself, stacked in a corner, or standing on the table or on a ledge. Some performers have taken down old cards and photos to either clear the space or replace them with new ones, but they have not thrown the old ones away. Instead, the photos and cards are tucked in a box with other items not needed on a daily basis, but kept around “just in case.”

Over the course of his or her time in the show, an actor will receive many cards. Because they are given to him or her while at the theater and because they pertain directly to the show, displaying them is the most expedient way to personalize a station. Moreover, in addition to commemorating a person or event, they also enhance the way

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32 Several of the actors either described doing this, or showed me the contents of the box they kept for that purpose, including Donna Marie Asbury, Nili Bassman, Gabi Garcia, David Kent, and Michelle Potterf.
the station looks, as Brian remarks: “They’re kind of colorful so it sort of adds, a
dimension to it” (O’Brien).

The performers interviewed all showed me cards and notes with meaningful
images or words, or those from memorable occasions. Some of these notes frame their
mirror, while many were kept close at hand in a pile or in a box. Like photos of family
and friends, these written souvenirs are important because they can provide a sense of
calm or affirmation of the self, countering the difficult aspects of performing from their
photos of family and friends. More than other mementoes and souvenirs, these cards are
specifically accumulated on a show-by-show basis. Nili’s situation clearly shows this
process at work. Because she came directly from another Broadway theater to the
Ambassador, she simply put all of her “show stuff” in a bag and brought it over the same
day. However, she did not bring cards and photos from that show, explaining, “A lot of
things I acquired at that theater I took home, so I could acquire new ones here”
(Bassman).

Some cards are kept and displayed because of their quotes or messages are
personally meaningful to the actor. The only item actually posted on the wall or mirror of
Brian Spitalnik’s station is a piece of notebook paper with a handwritten note from a
fellow cast member. One of the first roles he covered was that of Harry/Jury, regularly
played by Shawn Emamjomeh. After the first time he went on for Shawn, Brian
remembers, “When I was done with the show, I came up, and [Shawn] had written me
this note, and posted it on the mirror—So, it’s been up there ever since. And I took it
down, when we had to clean it? But then I just put it back up. Um, it’s the only thing on
my wall, and, it’s nice—As you can see, it says ‘You were great!’” (Spitulnik).

James further illuminates the importance of notes like these, with messages of
positive feedback: “If it’s a great note I want to display it!...[Just] to remind me, you
know, because in this business, there’s a lot of criticism. You know, and self-criticism
too! But it’s also—There’s another side of it! You can stay positive, and—What we’re
doing is joy-filled” (Lane).

It is not always pure affirmation that makes a card or note worth keeping within
view. Brian’s favorite card is one given to him by cast member Greg Butler on Brian’s
personal opening night. “It says,” he reads, “Stand in your own space, and know you are
there.” Brian explains: “For a swing, that’s a really good quote...Because, you have to
know where you are!” he laughs, then continues “and just—go to your spot with
confidence. Otherwise, you get ‘Swing Eye,’ which looks like this” he pauses to
demonstrate, his eyes darting warily around the room. “And nobody wants that. So, stand
in your own space, and know you are there! Makes sense to me,” he concludes
(Spitulnik). James also elaborated on his selection of the cards displayed at his station,
explaining, “It warrants being put up in the dressing room if it’s something that I like, as
a reminder, of what I’m doing here in this space—and how I like to feel, when I’m going
into the show? It’ll go up! You know—It’ll be a positive reflection of who I am” (Lane).

Along with cards, photos decorate many of the stations. Michelle Potterf says,
“The pictures I just need, because I want to look at my baby half the time, or at my
husband” (Potterf). Donna Marie Asbury puts them up because, as she says, “I try and have things around me that will make me smile,” as well as to bring her family into the space: “I have so much guilt, sometimes, leaving at night,” she explains, “but the pictures just make me feel like [my daughter is] here all the time” (Asbury).

The only non-health or appearance related objects at Mikey’s station in room J9 are a few family photos, which he has stuck on his mirror with Scotch tape. When I interviewed him, however, the men had recently been instructed to take everything down so that the management could do a “deep cleaning” of the room. Though it was a few weeks later, Mikey was surprised to find that he had not yet put the pictures back up.

“You know what’s funny?” he asked, “Is, this is not how my station usually looks! I had pictures up,” he explained, “and now they’re not up anymore! I’m putting them up right now…Because that’s the most important thing to me.” He looks at them when he’s feeling homesick, he relates, but also as a way of preparing to perform on a day when he is feeling scattered or just tired. “Being able to see my mom’s face is just—calming, and comforting,” which he says is important on difficult days. “Sometimes you’re just like, so tired, and you need that extra—boost of—life, you know, to get through it” Mikey explained (Cusumano).

In addition to a few photos that decorate her station, Nili has also set out objects around her that are meaningful because they remind her of people and events in her life. “Basically everything here is like, a gift, that I incorporated,” she says. It’s just nice to feel—like I’m bringing the history of where I’ve been, with me to every show, and
bringing those *people* with me for support.” She explains that this kind of support and sense of herself is necessary because, “You know, it’s so easy to just get stuck in this world of—*show* biz and *nonsense*, and how silly it all can be, and that kind of reminds me of—who I am...So it’s all, basically, reminding me that people love me, and that I’m doing this for a purpose, when I’m exhausted” (Bassman).

Gabi Garcia has collected photos over her ten years in *Chicago*: “All like, *celebrities*, and people I’ve *worked* with, and fun *memories*” (Garcia). Her explanations of the pictures show the kind of personal significance they hold, as well as how the images are incomplete without the stories they evoke:

And *this* I love, is Greg Mitchell, he used to be in the show—He’s an *angel* now, he passed away about three-four years ago—But he was always—He was one of the first people that I met when I came here, to the Broadway company? And he was so *passionate*...Just one of those great *souls* that—just keeps you *going* when you think about all that he *did*—It’s like, ‘No, I remember you and it makes me keep *going*.’ You know? So I *love* this picture. Dear friends—And another great photo—I *love* this—James Hadley, who’s now the director of the Cirque de Soleil, and *Mark*. Who also passed away unfortunately, about two or three years ago. Uh, *heart* condition. And he’s another person of those that remind you, you know what? Life is so *precious*, just keep it *going*. (Garcia)

Significantly, Gabi’s pictures were in a box at the time of this interview, rather than in their accustomed places on the wall around her mirror. J7 had been recently repainted, and the girls had to take everything down from the walls and clear their stations temporarily. Though she previously clustered a lot of pictures around her mirror, Gabi reveals that she is considering revising her style of decoration: “I like the—
cleanliness of it...I may bring them out, I’m just not sure if I want to stick them, or hang them,” she says, “or if I might want to bring in, like, one of those wire racks, and just put the ones I like the most there? That I might do” (Garcia). Bringing the pictures out, looking at them, and telling the stories behind the photos to another person seemed to remind Gabi of why she enjoyed having them up before: “But it’s like, beautiful people that I have there that I love, so—I may put a couple of these back on there!” (Garcia).

A Process of Accumulation

Usually, the actors who have been in the show for the longest time have more objects and photos at their stations, both decorations and accumulated personal items, than those who have only been with the company for a short time. Donna Marie is an example, and her accumulation is very intentional. Even when she takes things down, she doesn’t throw them away. Rather, she puts them in a box that sits on the shelf above her station (Asbury). Shawn, on the other hand, says that he does not feel like the decorations and objects at his space are necessary. “All of it is actually stuff I don’t use, and should probably throw away,” he begins. He seems to regard most of it as detritus that has accumulated more or less by happenstance. “I came here with barely anything, and then, these are just things that have slowly—evolved” (Emamjomeh). Like other men who use J9, the dressing room primarily functions as a context for social interaction, and a place to change his clothes. Beyond that, he feels that his interaction with the dressing room is “minimal,” and that the only way his station has changed over time is that “it’s gotten messier.” Shawn adds, “I think what I really have to do is, every so many months, is just
purge” the station, because beyond basic hygiene products, “I don’t really need most of this stuff” (Emamjomeh).

Often, the cards, photos, and gifts at a station remain partly because of when and where the actor received them. If given to the actor at the theater or in connection with the production, he or she is more likely to keep it in the dressing room. Shawn reveals that while the pictures framing his mirror are up because they show people who are important to him, mainly his partner and his god-daughter, they ended up in the dressing room because, he says, “I got them while I was here, otherwise I wouldn’t have brought them in” (Emamjomeh).

Many of the objects and images that actors accumulate at their stations are specifically show related. Some of the actors do this intentionally. Brian O’Brien, for example, will put up “anything that’s show related…If it’s show related or show specific,” he explains, “I’ll usually make some sort of space for it” (O’Brien). Careers in the performing arts are volatile; an actor never truly has job security. A show may close at any time, or the actor may be released from his or her contract for any reason. In addition, the actor’s profession is highly competitive, and only a small percent of those who seek a performance career are ever cast in a show on Broadway. Mikey likes to look at his copy of the Playbill from the tenth anniversary performance, a gala event, “to remind myself how lucky I am—to be in this show, and be working,” he says (Cusumano). The actors’ collections of show related items and images serve as daily
reminders of inclusion in the select community of Broadway performers, an affirmation both of personal achievement and pride in the work of the group.

Learning from Others

The actors spoke of learning how to set up their stations by watching others. And there is a similarity, particularly within a single room, in how the stations look. Mikey was the most explicit in why his station is set up the way it is:

I really just got the ideas from just—the other guys’ stations. My first Broadway show was four years ago. And it was a bigger room, it was like, ten guys in there. And I noticed, from all the other guys, that they had all of the pictures of their family, and—that’s—I really just copied them, because I wanted—I wanted to fully experience the Broadway show, and put up all the pictures. So I basically just got the idea from all the other guys. Because I saw that they had—all of their loved ones up here. And my spot was empty. And I was like, “Hmm, I want that too.” So I did definitely copy them.

As Chicago is his first Broadway show, Brian Spitulnik is another who recalls taking his cue from the men who share his dressing room. He clarifies, “If I had been in J9—The boys in J9, things are much more decorated... I think that if I had been in there, I would have been like, “Oh, I want to decorate too.” But as you can see, nobody has anything up here” (Spitulnik 2009).

Even when it is not the first Broadway show, seeing how others use new items also influences use and decoration. Gabi, for one, was inspired to put her earrings in a little box that colleague Michelle DeJean brought back for the girls from a trip because she saw another colleague use it in that way. “And it’s a candle, but it’s like, you can’t
really put a candle there, and I saw Donna had put her earrings in hers, so I was like, ‘Oh, ok! Earrings!’” (Garcia).

In addition to the placemats, another common feature of each station in J7 is the arrangement or storage of makeup in a portable caddy of some sort. In fact, Donna Marie, Michelle Potterf, and Melissa Rae Mahon cited portability of their daily essentials as one of the primary factors that determined how they organized their space. This is because when one of the girls steps in to cover either Roxie or Velma, two of the principal characters, she also moves into the appropriate dressing room, located on a different floor, for that performance. This means that in addition to taking over the role, she inhabits the dressing room of that character and does not share it with anyone else. The actor takes along her makeup and other essentials, and having been moved up in the hierarchy of roles, uses a dressing room next to the stage.

Gabi, however, as a swing, does not cover principal roles. Still, she is in J7, and her makeup is organized in a caddy, an idea she attributes to seeing the other girls’ stations: “No, this I actually got when I came here. I think most of the girls had them? I can’t remember what I had before, I think, you know, just your little cup to put all your pencils, and maybe a little tray for things, but I didn’t start using a caddy until I—until I came here in the Ambassador, I think. I went and got it, was like, ‘Oooh, new dressing room, let’s see what we can do!’” (Garcia).

Surprisingly, given these explanations, not one of the girls in J4 uses a caddy to organize her makeup. Though Nikki and Dylis both cover principal roles (Velma and
Roxie, respectively), they are in the habit of sweeping their makeup off the counter and
into a small shopping bag, setting it up in the dressing room for that night, and then
reversing the process when the show ends. When I mentioned that all of the girls in J7
keep their makeup in caddies for that reason, Nikki and Dylis responded, “Oh, that’s a
good idea!” and then discussed how much easier it would be to not have to reorganize
their makeup every time. Given their reactions, as well as Gabi’s explanation of why she
uses a caddy, these actors are clearly learning how to set up their stations by customary
example from the actors that precede them in the dressing room.

Sometimes, it is a newcomer to the room who inspires changes to others’ stations.
Gabi, for example, said that she may change the way she sets things up: “I was actually
looking at Nili’s, and I saw how neat that was—So I’m actually thinking of re-doing this
because it looks a little messy…So I’m actually thinking of doing it more—a little
simpler” (Garcia). Of course, as she had previously mentioned, Gabi has been enjoying
the “cleaner” look of her station, having taken everything down for the repainting of the
room. Perhaps Nili’s way of organizing speaks to her at this moment in part due to the
most recent changes in the look of her own station.

Career Life-Cycle

Setting up the station in the same way provides a consistency between different
shows, a familiarity despite the new surroundings, which can help an actor feel more
comfortable. “It was important, coming into this show, that I set up something so that I
have a sense of place,” says Brian O’Brien. Therefore, he brought things with him from
the beginning: “When I did come in that first day, I came in a little early, I put some stuff down just to say ok I’m here, this is my little space, I have what I need, it’s familiar to me” (O'Brien). A comment from Dylis illustrates how the collection of objects perceived as essential accumulates over the course of a career. “Different shows I’ve done, I’ve just basically set it up the same way—I’m just used to it,” she relates, adding, “It seems like every show, though, I add more things to it, so it gets more cluttered!” (Bridgewater et al.). Rather than starting the process anew with each job, her collection reflects the trajectory of her career.

Brian O’Brien and Nili consider the objects that decorate and organize their stations part of their “show stuff,” included in the essential items they bring with them on the first day performing. Other actors, however, prefer to let their collections grow over time. James, for example, says, “It’s usually like a building...I don’t have a kit at home, where these things are going into my dressing room...It’s—as I go along—I like to discover it” (Lane).

Over the course of a career, the way an actor uses the station may change, or there may be an event or circumstance that precipitates a change in material behavior. Carol Woods, called “Mama” by her fellow actors,33 has only a few decorative objects at her station. While she used to decorate elaborately, she relates that seven years in the National Tour of Chicago prompted an overhaul:

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33 Carol Woods plays the role of Matron “Mama” Morton in Chicago; this character is always called “Mama” by the other characters. Just so, the actors have adopted this fitting nickname for the actress herself.
You know, I’m such a transient—that’s why they call us “Gypsies”—and I used to plant, you know, when I was doing Broadway?...I would decorate, like the dressing room I had when I was doing The Goodbye Girl, I had it painted, and the dressing table was lavender, and blah blah blah, and the pictures and all this, you know—And then when I started touring, you know, you’re bumping around from city to city! You know, I just lost interest in—planting...I started out with seven suitcases. And I put them all together in one suitcase, [for] the plane. And a trunk, on the Tour Truck...And so now...this is the bare minimum that I need, really... I used to have pictures [of my nine grandchildren] all over, you know—But I just, stopped doing it” (Bridgewater et al.).

Now, besides her makeup and brushes, Mama has a few magnets from her recent vacation to St. Martin, some cards related to the show, and menus “for the Saturday and Sunday brunches that we have, in between shows,” and a few other miscellaneous items. When asked whether she misses having the pictures up, she replies, “I should feel more secure with knowing that I don’t have to leave tomorrow, you know? And put them up? But it’s just, a mindset! It’s just what we’re used to, you know?” (Bridgewater et al.).

Nikki Bridgewater, who shares a dressing room with Mama and Dylis, confirms that initial expectations and mindset directly influence how she sets up her spot for the entire time she is in a show. Nikki has been a member of the Chicago company intermittently for the past ten years. In February 2008, she came in on a temporary. At the time, she thought she would only be in the show for a few weeks, but as of this interview, one year has elapsed since she rejoined the company. Nonetheless, the only things decorating her station are a Christmas card she received a few weeks prior to the interview, and an angel figurine that had been left in her spot by the previous occupant.
Nikki mentions that she had some pictures and other items that have decorated her station when she was on the road with Chicago’s touring company. She did not bring them in with her on the first day back in the Broadway company because, as she relates, “When I got here, I just kind of came here. You know, it was like a transitional thing. I’d started here in one role, and then—thinking it was only going to be temporary. It was really—I thought I was only going to be here for like, four weeks!” Later, when she was asked to stay on in a long-term contract, she says, “So I guess I was still sort of in that temporary mood, for—Maybe I’m still in that temporary mood!” (Bridgewater et al.).

Like the Hunyaks’ earring box at Nili’s station, and the angel left at Nikki’s, sometimes a new actor inherits objects left behind by the previous person in his or her role. Brian Spitulnik, for one, was surprised by what he found at his station when he joined the company. The swing before him had been fired, and Brian relates:

> When I came here, there was a stack of porn this big. And, because when somebody is fired, the company manager will come in and clean out their station? So the company manager, who was this—frail, WASPy woman, at the time—she—took away everything, and left the porn. [pauses] Which is valid. So I was stuck with a stack of porn, which I was terrified of, so I gave it to the boys next door. [pauses] I don’t know what they did with it!

Just as Brian got rid of the “stack of porn” immediately, newcomers to the room can choose whether to use or discard objects that previous users have left behind. In addition to the small jewelry box, for example, Nili also found a placemat, matching all of the other girls’, already at her station when she arrived in J7. However, Nili had brought in her own placemat along with all of her “show stuff,” one she had been using in
previous shows. However, she decided to use the one that matches all the others, as she says: “All the girls kind of have these matching ones, so I wanted to feel a part of the company, so—I kept [my own] underneath, just so I know it’s there. Just for me” (Bassman).

Nili’s story demonstrates how newcomers acculturate to the aesthetics and traditions of the dressing room. Personnel changes usually happen singly, or in small numbers. When a cast member leaves, for one reason or another, he or she is replaced either with someone entirely new, or with someone who has been in the company before. In either case, newcomers to the dressing rooms tend to come one at a time, entering a room with four actors already established at their spots. Moreover, the newcomer also meets the traditional practices and aesthetics of the room. Rather than five new people coming in and establishing an aesthetic and mode of use among themselves, the newcomer adapts to the way the room is used and decorated. Some of these newcomers bring experience in other Broadway or touring productions, and thus practices and ways of aesthetics based on this experience. Because some of the differences in practice and decoration result from the differences between *Chicago* and other shows, the newcomer may adjust his or her personal practices without ever consciously considering that he or she is following customary example. In other cases, the newcomer may find him or herself setting up the station more in accordance with the room he or she has entered than in accordance with how it was done in previous shows. And finally, the newcomer may also make a conscious decision to maintain personal habits based on customary example.
in prior shows rather than shift to the habits and aesthetics displayed in the Chicago dressing room.

After the initial move in and set up, the actors tend to not make many changes aside from adding cards and gifts as they are given. My fieldwork came at an interesting time, however, as the dressing rooms were in the process of being cleaned, and in the case of J7, painted. The cast had been asked to temporarily take down all of their personal belongings, including makeup and decorations, to facilitate this process. This kind of thing is a rare occurrence, but it significantly changed many things. The interviews were conducted both before and after the cleaning. Additionally, I had the opportunity to observe the most dramatic changes to a room, having interviewed two women in J7 in March 2008, and then two other women in J7 in February 2009. Until it was repainted, the walls in J7 had been a warm mauve color, complementing the fabric upholstering the chairs, and skirting the sink, and of which the placemats were made. When I returned in 2009, the walls were white, which Gabi said they were actually enjoying: “We like it now—it’s like, more serene, it’s brighter, and you know, we want to keep it clean.” The new feeling in the room has influenced how she thinks about her own station as well: “Now I think I’m going through a phase of, ‘No—let’s open it up, let’s have it cleaner,’ you know? Not so much clutter! So, yeah, it’s nice that, actually, the painting, gave me an excuse to clean up, and just to see that like that…At least for a little bit, we’ll see how long it lasts” she laughs (Garcia).
From within the daily routine of performance, there is less motivation or awareness of creating a sense of place than there is when an actor moves in initially. Mikey remarked that he had been meaning to put his pictures back up, but that he kept forgetting. The interview, however, gave him a chance to sit down at his spot: “I’m glad that we’re doing this interview so that I can—re-set up my spot…I’m [usually] running late—And then I just, get dressed, do my hair, and go! So I don’t—I mean the spot is like—for me, it’s not that big of a deal? Although, I do like to look at these pictures. If I’m—feeling homesick” (Cusumano).

Occupational role in the company is another factor in shaping the actual use, and therefore decoration, of the dressing room. The “swings” have a different experience of the dressing room than the regularly performing actors. Because they do not perform in every show, they spend less time in the room and at their stations. Though required to be at the theater for every performance, they do not have to prepare or actually perform unless one of the actors they cover is out and they “swing in.”

Of the actors interviewed, Gabi, David Kent, and Brian Spitulnik are all swings. Brian believes that his occupational role as a swing is a large reason why his station is almost entirely bare: “Usually I’m a bit of a decorator, but because I’m not up here that much, I haven’t really done anything…It’s just, like, very functional for me. I don’t like, sit here—When I’m not on, I don’t sit at this spot, because the chair’s not comfortable. I’ll usually sit at that chair, the comfy chair, or down in the Wardrobe Room” (Spitulnik 2009). Like Brian, Gabi usually prefers to stay in the Wardrobe Room instead of going
up to J7 during the Half-Hour call before the show. When asked if she comes up when she is not on, she replies, “No—not unless I have to! Unless I have to come up and give notes, um—Otherwise, I just stay downstairs. I mean,” she laughs, “would you come up four flights of stairs if you didn’t have to?” (Garcia). In fact, some of the male actors also prefer to spend more time in the Wardrobe Room, which is a common area for the entire company, and return to the dressing room just to change costumes. While this is due in part to the six flights of stairs between the basement and dressing rooms J8 and J9, the social interaction available in the Wardrobe Room is another draw. For a swing, Brian and Gabi attest, it is more attractive to remain in the high-traffic area of the Wardrobe Room, as opposed to the dressing rooms, which are empty of people during a performance. For all of those reasons, swings usually hang out in the Wardrobe Room instead of the dressing room during shows in which they do not perform.

David Kent, on the other hand, has created for himself a scenario slightly different from the other swings. He has been in Chicago since 2000, and in the Broadway company for three years, since 2006. Over time, he has filled a variety of roles, including Dance Captain. Currently a swing and a “part-time dance captain,” he has accumulated a lot of material at his station, due both to the length of time he has been in the company, and the amount of time he spends offstage. He keeps a stack of reading material—travel and business magazines, art catalogues, and books—at his spot. His station’s most distinctive feature, however, is the desktop computer that occupies almost the entire space (Figure 17). He has set up a log-in that anyone is welcome to use, and he uses the
computer to get other work done, track his fantasy football scores when in season, and to check his email. Gabi also comes up sometimes to check her email, he relates, and Brian also talked about using the computer sometimes.

Figure 17. David Kent has set up a desktop computer at his station in J8. Brian Spitulnik's station, to the right of the computer, is also pictured (2009).

As part of their responsibilities as Wardrobe staff, the dressers for each room also make sure the performance shoes are neatly arranged in a plastic over-door organizer. In addition, the dresser sets out the skin parts and other laundered costume pieces at each
actor’s station prior to every performance. Likewise, the sound crew puts microphones and mic packs at each station before the actors’ Half-Hour call, and collects the equipment after the performance. This practice has generated an additional material object in J7. A red, heart-shaped box sits on the counter next to the door. The girls in J7 put their mic packs in this box and pass it out the door to Rob, because, Michelle explains, “He doesn’t want to come in here when we’re naked” (Potterf). The shape of the box itself is an inside joke, Michelle reveals. “He’s cute, so we started calling him ‘Heart Throb Rob,’ and because we have this heart box for him” (Potterf).

Though individual actors ascribe different meanings to the objects at their stations and their interaction with these objects, the practices and understanding of boundaries remains consistent among the group. Within a tradition of respecting the shared aspect of the space, the actors create individual oases that assemble the important people, events, and values in their lives. These visual and material collections bring aspects of the whole person, particularly a life outside the theater, into a common context. In this way, the actors may perform their personal identities as well as their occupational roles.
CHAPTER 5
IN THIS PLACE: CONCLUSIONS

Will you seek afar off? You surely come back at last,
In things best known to you finding the best or as good as
the best,
In folks nearest to you finding also the sweetest and
strongest and lovingest,
Happiness not in another place, but this place . . not for
another hour, but this hour,
(Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*)

The practices and decorations described in this study suggest that in order to
prepare for performance, the actors desire places that allow them to physically ready the
body for performance, reinforce a sense of self, and provide a sense of dwelling. The
actors equip their dressing rooms, which are the primary places for preparation, to serve
these three functions. The practices surrounding the use and decoration of the theater, the
dressing rooms, and the stations are the means by which the actors create places that have
these three characteristics. By building on the existing spaces, bringing in objects of
memory, and practicing traditions as a group, the actors thus build places for themselves
that can serve as both the settings and the instruments in preparing for performance, facilitating the ontological shift from *person* to *performer*.

**“Because performing is hard enough.”**

The places for performance preparation need to assist in readying the body for performance, reinforce a sense of self, and provide a sense of dwelling because, as Mikey says, “performing is hard enough!” (Cusumano). He reveals that although he has performed in Chicago “maybe eight hundred times,” he still feels excited and nervous each night. As he explains: “There’s just a lot of *pressure*, in performing,” because, “as a performer, you have to be on *every* time. And,” he relates, “some days are harder than others! You get here, and like—And sometimes it’s just easier, like just, you know, like, “piece of cake tonight.” And then sometimes you’re just like, *so tired*, and you need that extra—boost of,” he gestures expansively, “*life*, you know, to get through it. So it’s—every day is *different*” (Cusumano).

Adding to the challenge of gathering the physical energy to present a fresh performance each night, the actors experience the stress of constantly being judged and evaluated. As James acknowledges, “In *this* business, there’s a lot of criticism. You know, and *self* criticism too!” However, he adds, “There’s another *side* of it! You can stay *positive*, and [remember]—What we’re doing is *joy-filled*” (Lane). Nili also feels, “You know, it’s so easy to just get stuck in this world of—*show* biz and *nonsense*, and how silly it all can be,” but the objects at her station “[remind] me that people love me, and that I’m doing this for a purpose, when I’m exhausted” (Bassman). These comments
suggest that affirming self-worth and personal relationships allows the mental preparation that generates the energy and persona needed for the onstage performance. Having created a dwelling place means that the actor has provided himself or herself with a place to be set at peace in this way.

Painting the walls of their dressing rooms, hanging curtains, surrounding their stations with photos of friends and family, and turning the room to the actors’ needs by laying out sleeping mats or creating a Wall of Men on the door of the bathroom are all practices that reshape the space into one that belongs to the actors; these tactics, as described by de Certeau, are some of the ways the actors take “the constraining order of the place” (de Certeau 30) and then turn it towards their own purposes. Though the space backstage does not legally “belong” to them, the actors’ everyday practices are tactics of implacement within the space of the Other. By superimposing their own values and identities through these practices, the actors manipulate and divert the official nature of the space into a sense of place that works for their own purpose.

The dressing rooms provide the setting for the actors’ change in ontological status from person to performer. In addition, the actors also use their dressing rooms and stations as the instruments of that status change. The actors have transformed bare spaces into places that can serve both of these functions through artistically decorating and using the rooms. Art and music scholar Ellen Dissanayake identifies the intent in making art as “making special”: behavior that deliberately places an activity or object in a realm outside the ordinary (1988:81). The actors’ artful arrangement of their dressing rooms
and stations effectively displays what is being “made special” by symbolically and visually asserting the individuals’ values and those things that they each want to set apart and sanctify. Dissanayake explains that this is a way of converting reality from its unremarkable state to a specially experienced meta-reality (95). A close reading of the actors’ stations thus indicates the values and relationships the actors choose to celebrate by putting them into material form. In addition to, or perhaps as a function of this practice of making special, the actors’ stations can also be read as self-portraits, material representations of the actors’ individual identities and biographies.

Patterns of use and decoration reveal an aesthetic of relationship guiding the actors’ selection and arrangement of objects. This aesthetic is one that enacts, over and over again, a narrative of inclusion. The actors’ oral and visual narratives are enmeshed in a story affirming the worth of the person and his or her life both as a private person and as a public performer. The narratives in turn shape a sense of place that, with this grounding in the self and identity, allows for the performer to be set at peace in a place that allows for dwelling.

Building and Dwelling

Because an actors’ career is so transitory, claiming space and establishing dwelling takes on added importance. Broadway performers call themselves “Gypsies,”

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34 The term “Gypsy” or “Broadway Gypsy” is used by Broadway actors (and aspiring Broadway actors) to refer to a single performer or to the entire group of those who usually reside in the New York metropolitan area and earn their living by performing in musicals and plays both in New York and in regional theaters around the country. Its connotation is of a performer who regularly and consistently works in live theater, as opposed the stunt casting of a film or television actor who performs only sporadically on Broadway.
a tribute, in part, to a performer’s nomadic lifestyle. Like the Roma people, from whom the nickname was derived, Broadway Gypsies are often, if not constantly, on the move, whether from city to city or show to show. Even within the relative stability of a long-running show like *Chicago*, the cast knows how quickly the show can close down or how suddenly an actor might be released from his or her contract. Again, like the Roma, Broadway Gypsies practice traditions that allow dwelling even, or especially, in transitory places.

The actors build on the given spaces to create a sense of dwelling in the dressing rooms. As Heidegger contends that dwelling is the way in which mortals exist on the earth, Casey points out that “we must build places in which to reside” (111). Creating these built places transforms the builders as well as the landscape, as “body subjects become fabricating agents” (111). Building like this means ultimately constructing places which allow dwelling. Such dwelling places offer a midway station between “oriented bodies and the wilderness,” and engender the possibility of gatherings of people (112). Bringing in objects of memory and tools of their occupation, the actors’ building activities construct a sense of dwelling in the transitional space of the dressing rooms.

The dressing room is part of the theater building, and is also a building in the sense of its use and decoration by the actors. A building is a “compromise” or mediating formation: “Thanks to such features as stability and enclosure, it arrests accelerated movement and allows the lived body to rest. If the same body reenters the open world, it

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This term has been reified by annual events such as Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS’ “Gypsy of the Year” concert and traditions such as the Gypsy Robe, among others (Boepple 1990).
often seeks to return to the habitation from which it sent out” (Casey 112). Just as the actors talk about creating a space that feels “homey,” they introduce the elements not just of residing, but also of home into the workspace. Further, says Casey, “A dwelling where we reside comes to exist in our image, but we, the residents, also take on certain of its properties” (120). The actors’ decoration of the space molds it into their images of home.

It is the actors’ building (that is, gathering and assembly) of things and actions which makes the dressing rooms places for them to dwell. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton define the layering and cultivation of things as an activity of building. Taking Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton’s elucidation of the meaning of things together with Heidegger’s reference to the process of “gathering or assembly” as building, suggests that the actors’ use of things and decoration in the dressing rooms is “building” in the active sense. The physical structure of the theater is a location, but not in itself a dwelling place. As a location, however, the theater allows a site for a dwelling place (Heidegger 154). However, every space in the theater, with the exception of the stage, already exists as a place for transition. Because the actors require a place to rest, to dwell, the dressing room, despite its inherent liminality, must serve as that place. By their activities of building, the actors create the dressing room as such a dwelling place.

In its use, the dressing room is a dwelling place. But in more than one sense, it is a transitional space. Casey talks about the transitional places that exist at boundary lines, that is, intermediate places that exist “between private and public or between the rigors of the journey and the comforts of inhabitation” (122). Heidegger’s assertion, “A boundary
is not that at which something stops but…the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing [emphasis in original]” (154), clarifies how the disparate functions of transition and dwelling coexist within the dressing room. Moreover, as Casey suggests, “A truly transitional space is often a place for creative action,” he explains that its location as in between public and private allows it to provide “enough protection to encourage experimentation…without being overly confining” (122). Bringing tools and objects of memory into the “wilderness” of an uninhabited dressing room, the actors manipulate an unbuilt place to create a built place. A built place, Casey clarifies, includes “any place transformed from an unbuilt, pregiven state by the manipulation of natural or artificial materials” (114). Creating dwelling places is an activity of implacement, which Casey describes as “an ongoing cultural process with an experimental edge.” Further, he contends, the process of implacement “acculturates whatever ingredients it borrows from the natural world, whether these ingredients are bodies or landscapes or ordinary ‘things’” (31). The actors implace themselves through the actions of building. By this process, they transform the dressing room into a place that allows for dwelling.

**Boundaries and Group Aesthetics**

The decorations and practices in the dressing rooms and at individual stations reflect the actors’ shared understandings of boundaries, and the group’s ongoing aesthetics. As Casey notes, “We partake of places in common—and reshape them in common” (31). The actors are folk artists using vernacular mediums and forms of expression, partaking of and reshaping the theater and their dressing rooms as a group as
well as individually. The aesthetic that emerges, both collectively and individually, is an “aesthetic of relationship,” as evinced by folklorist Kay Turner. This guiding aesthetic underlines the power of community and inclusion, intensifying the power with which the objects of memory affirm the actors’ sense of self and of self worth.

The actors learn this aesthetic through customary example in an occupational context. When actors decorate their own stations or contribute to the room as a whole, they are fully aware of how their colleagues will respond to their practices, and what is considered good, appropriate, and beautiful. As individuals and as a group of artists, the actors are, as Toelken points out, “guided by a community aesthetic which is usually unspoken because it is functional and not intellectualized” (222). The vernacular creative expressions are based on and understood, Toelken maintains, according to “the aesthetic perception, expression, and appreciation of community values in everyday life” (223). Members of the group can “read” the space fluently because it expresses shared cultural meanings. Further, individual actors, even newcomers to the group, can respond by creating a space of their own that stays within the boundaries of the groups’ aesthetic while still creatively expressing individual identity. As individual actors experiment, as the group is influenced by the divergent past experiences of their colleagues, the group’s aesthetic remains dynamic, integrating new ideas and practices, and discarding those that do not support the sense of place the actors wish to create.

The performers learn what is acceptable and what is unacceptable in this group through customary example, including informal interactions with other actors, formal
training in their art, and observing colleagues at work and at play. The process of learning by customary example, Toelken explains, is guided by an unarticulated cultural logic. Though unspoken, this “cultural logic” allows the actors to appropriately reshape and recompose ideas or images that they have encountered in similar contexts at other times (23). Likewise, existing members of the cast know how to facilitate the newcomer’s acculturation to the smaller group, and in turn adapt practices and traditions in the cast and the dressing room introduced by the new member. The actors are able to “read” each other’s stations and dressing room behavior, and evaluate these for appropriateness and creativity. Such evaluation is “based on a perception of style, or of content or of application and function, that is valued highly by members of a close group precisely because it is shared by many”; an individual’s work is readable because it is created “from and within the familiar ideas and genres of the group” (Toelken 234).

**Sense of Self and Self Worth: Objects of Memory**

The objects and images at the actors’ station, as revealed in interviews, fall into two overlapping material categories: tools and objects of memory. The photographic and material souvenirs serve as physical repositories for memory. Though the original event was intangible and fleeting, the objects of memory are imbued with meaning as containers of memory. As Susan Stewart says, “[The] memory of the body is replaced by the memory of the object” (133). The body’s memories of an unrepeatable event are externalized in the object; the object tangibly holds the memory of an experience.
Events that are experienced as unique, as one-time, as not repeatable, are remembered through an object. Stewart contends, “Souvenir distinguishes experience.” She explains: “We need and desire souvenirs of events that are reportable, events whose materiality has escaped us, events that thereby exist only through the invention of narrative” (135). As a touchstone for the narrative of an event, the souvenir object becomes a container for memory. Itself incomplete, the object is a metonym for a location or experience. The object remains forever fragmented, a sample of its origin or original context. Moreover, it remains partial (fragmented) so that it can be supplemented by a narrative discourse “that both attaches it to its origins and creates a myth with regard to those origins” (136). In a *New York Times* article about dressing room decoration, actor Harvey Fierstein’s accounting for the urge to collect show-related objects augments Stewart’s argument. Fierstein explains: “[With] a play, what we do every night is gone. So I think that ephemeral feeling makes us cling to everything. So we collect crap. The posters. The postcards. The reviews. Anything that has the name of the show on it” (Green). Beyond their value as personal mementoes, show-related cards and pictures endure even after an actor has left the show as tangible evidence of having been a part of a particular production, a particular group of colleagues.

By providing this “narrative of origins,” of interiority and authenticity, the objects of memory at the actors’ stations encapsulate events that offer a “narratives of the possessor,” that is, a life history. When objects of memory are juxtaposed one against the other, as at the stations, these narratives of the possessor present a material self-portrait of
the artist. “The souvenir moves history into a private time,” intimately mapping a souvenir of individual experience against an individual’s life history “as the material sign of an abstract referent” (Stewart 138). Due to this intimate connection to biography “and its place in constituting the notion of the individual life, the object of memory becomes emblematic of the worth of that life and of the self’s capacity to generate worthiness” (Stewart 138). Indeed, when describing the history or significance of photos and mementoes, the actors plainly state that they have included certain objects specifically as reminders of life history and self worth.

The things with which the actors have surrounded themselves simultaneously reflect and actualize personal identity. As James attests, “You really want pieces that reflect who you are” (Lane). Thus, the actors select objects and images that convey aspects of who they believe themselves to be. Moreover, the objects reveal who the actors aspire to be, how they wish to see themselves, and how they would like to be regarded by others. “Without doubt,” assert Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, “things actively change the content of what we think is our self” (28). Just so, Brian Spitzulnik prominently displays a note reminding him, “You were great!” and a card that counsels him to “Stand in your place, and know you are there”; James posts both positive feedback and constructive criticism on his mirror; Brian O’Brien keeps his mother’s funeral mass card in view; Nili keeps pictures of her grandparents, parents, siblings, and childhood friends in view, as she says, for inspiration as a person and grounding as a performer. These and other objects serve as constant input to create and re-create the individual,
functioning as tangible reminders of valued traits and ideals of behavior and relationships. Placing the objects around the mirror reinforces the objects’ dual functions in both representing and shaping identity. While the mirror reflects the actor’s physical self, the actor’s organization, decoration, and interaction with the station reveals the performer’s inner self.

As the actors add new items to the display, remove others, or rearrange current objects, the actors construct ongoing narratives of the self. In other words, by this process, the dressing room stations emerge as the actors’ dynamic self-portraits. Art critic and historian Andrew Small defines self-portraiture as “a rhetoric of the self... [a] text which informs and/or persuades an audience...[through] non-narrative self-description” (9). Whereas biographies and autobiographies narrate a life story, Small contends, portraiture (including self-portraiture) “describes the individual at a given moment.” Though they include narrative elements and reference important events or attributes in the artist’s life, they rarely include sequential narration as the primary trope. He likens the expression of identity through self-portraits more closely to lyric poetry than autobiography because, like lyric poetry, it is a vehicle to “describe the poet's personal view or universe” (5). His discussion of the paradoxes that make expression of coherency and identity problematic point to an interesting difference between the literary and academic works he examines and the folk art of the dressing room: while Rembrandt’s self-portraits, once completed, are static, the content of these performers’ displays change
continuously. Rather than a single, captured moment of existence, their self-portraits are dynamic in their expression of self, identity, and memory.

**Collage: Aesthetic of Relationship**

When creating places that can ready the body for performance, affirm self-worth, and provide a sense of self and home, the actors are guided by a common aesthetic that uses collage as its primary expression. The techniques and visual impact of the actors’ dressing room stations exhibit a similar aesthetic to domestic altars, which, as Kay Turner says, assemble images and objects that create and affirm connections between people, creating an “aesthetic of relationship” (79). Like altars, these displays are set within a concentrated, framed space that creates a powerful and stimulating visual field by “[setting] potent images in relation to each other.” Turner explains that “the accessibility of beloved images evokes the reality of beloved relationships” (98). Photos and objects of memory at the dressing room station are metonymic representations the people, events, and ideas the actors wish to valorize and remember. “These objects,” argues Turner, “both individually and in their arrangement as a group, represent and activate the power of relationship” (95). Bringing them all together intensifies the relationships of these things to each other and to the actor.

By using the techniques of collage, the actors intensify the meanings already present in the objects that comprise their displays. Collage, declares feminist art scholar and critic Lucy Lippard is “the juxtaposition of two unlike realities combined to form an unexpected new reality” (1983:1). Using an iconography that incorporates both public
and private symbols, all pieces of the collage are visible on the surface; no one element is privileged over another. As Mary Schmidt Campbell remarks, assemblage “emphasizes consensus and consolidation, and the affirmation and reinforcement of social values and cultural continuity” (qtd Lippard 1990:81). The process of assemblage gives the collage a cumulative, and accumulating power; it revivifies, as Lippard says, “all these weary objects” (1990:80). The repetition and layering processes of building the collage “taps the life and energies they [the objects] themselves have accumulated...[collage] rescues and restores, unifying parts of personal pasts into a more powerful whole” (81). Thus while each object and image used in the collage is itself meaningful to the actor, the objects’ proximity and juxtaposition intensifies the meanings of the individual objects as well as the significance of the entire display.

The technique of collage, with its layering, accumulation, and embellishment creates this aesthetic of relationship, explains Turner. The ongoing process of building a collage “consecrates and serves [their] understanding of the power of relationship to overcome separation with an emphasis on the values of inclusion and exchange” [emphasis in original] (23-24). The actors assemble the tools of their trade, objects of memory, images and words of personal significance, and artistically arrange these objects so that when the actors sit at their stations, they are surrounded by a world of personal meaning. Bringing all of these things together in one place and juxtaposing them with each other is an activity of making special, thus creating a meta-reality in which all of the people, events, and relationships celebrated in the actors’ displays are present with the
actors in their dressing rooms. As Lippard states, “One of the functions of art is to recall that which is absent” (1983:4). Casey concurs: “The far is not the distant. Things remote in space and time can enter our near sphere” (60). Just so, the actors surround themselves with photos of family and friends, or gifts, or material companions: bringing lives that change across time and space into a common context. Thus juxtaposed, multiple realms of experience exist in relationship with each other. In this way, as the actors ready their bodies and minds for performance, they are surrounded, and implicitly supported, by the significant people and events in their lives.

The aesthetic of relationship prevalent among the actors’ stations suggests that in this group, social and professional integration is one of the most highly valued personal traits. While one purpose in the cultivation of everyday things is differentiation as an individual, the objects that comprise these self-portraits also have meaning as signs of social integration. “The cultivation of individuality serves a larger goal of integration,” explain Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, “because the intention to differentiate oneself still needs other people to give it meaning” (33). In these displays, I would argue, the expression of social integration in turn serves to reinforce individual self-worth.

The things on and around the station are associated with significant occasions or important people, adding a layer of meaning to the theater, the actors’ workplace. Being surrounded by these visual and material reminders brings a level of mindfulness to a routine that might otherwise become automatic. Before performing for an audience, the
actors thus refresh and center themselves with objects and images that reaffirm and recreate their own identity and sense of self.

In order to accomplish the subtle shift from *person* to *performer* and back again, the actors require that the dressing room function as a dwelling place, one that shelters the person, setting him or her at peace. However, as a site for this transition, the dressing room is inherently liminal. The actors therefore actively reshape the space, carving out a dwelling place that allows a grounding in their own identities. Using tactics learned through customary example, and building on traditional practices and aesthetics, the actors deliberately inhabit the space in order to create this dwelling place. The selection and arrangement of objects, the interaction with these objects, and the behavior and traditions of the group; these creative actions are the means of implacement by which the dressing room becomes a place to dwell.

Ultimately, the actors create the dressing room as both a dwelling place and as an intermediary space between the outside world and the place of performance. A dressing room is one of the defined areas in the backstage support space, provided for actors to prepare for performance. Preparing for onstage performance, these interviews suggest, is a process of transition from one ontological state to another. The actors’ oral and material narratives describe what comprises that preparation process, and dressing rooms hold the tools and images and personal objects that serve the process supporting their physical preparation and grounding them in a sense of self. To achieve this readying and grounding, the actors surround themselves with objects that affirm self worth through
tangible reminders of inclusion, of relationships, and of personal accomplishments. As a group, they practice traditions that create and affirm community. By employing the tactics of creative expression and group traditions, the actors create livable, readable, and inhabitable places for themselves. The actors in the cast of Chicago claim space for themselves individually and as a group through their use and decoration of the theater, their dressing rooms, and their stations, preserving and performing personal identity as well as the values and worldview of the group.
APPENDIX A: CAST OF *CHICAGO THE MUSICAL*

At time of fieldwork interviews, January 10 – February 12, 2009
Taken from [www.chicagothemusical.com](http://www.chicagothemusical.com) on February 2, 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Role</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MELORA HARDIN</td>
<td>Roxie Hart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRENDA BRAXTON</td>
<td>Velma Kelly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOM HEWITT</td>
<td>Billy Flynn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCOTT DAVIDSON</td>
<td>Amos Hart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R. LOWE</td>
<td>Mary Sunshine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAROL WOODS</td>
<td>Matron “Mama” Morton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DONNA MARIE ASBURY</td>
<td>June</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NILI BASSMAN</td>
<td>Hunyak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NICOLE BRIDGEWATER</td>
<td>Liz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DYLIS CROMAN</td>
<td>Annie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GABRIELA GARCIA</td>
<td>Swing/Dance Captain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MELISSA RAE MAHON</td>
<td>Go-To-Hell Kitty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHARON MOORE</td>
<td>Swing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JILL NICKLAUS</td>
<td>Mona, Roxie Hart understudy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GREGORY BUTLER</td>
<td>Fred Casely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MICHAEL CUSUMANO</td>
<td>Martin Harrison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHAWN EMAMJOMEH</td>
<td>Harry/The Jury</td>
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<tr>
<td>DAVID KENT</td>
<td>Swing</td>
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<tr>
<td>JAMES T. LANE</td>
<td>Aaron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRIAN O’BRIEN</td>
<td>Bailiff/Court Clerk</td>
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<tr>
<td>JASON PATRICK SANDS</td>
<td>Doctor/The Judge</td>
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<tr>
<td>BRIAN SPITULNIK</td>
<td>Swing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADAM ZOTOVICH</td>
<td>Sergeant Fogarty</td>
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<tr>
<td>J. LOEFFELHOLZ</td>
<td>Standby Mary Sunshine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B: DRESSING ROOM ASSIGNMENTS

At the time of fieldwork interviews, based on personal records.

J2
Velma Kelly (Brenda Braxton)

J3
Roxie Hart (Melora Hardin)

J4
Matron “Mama” Morton (Carol “Mama” Woods)
Liz (Nikki Bridgewater)
Annie (Dylis Croman)
Swing (Sharon Moore)

J5
Billy Flynn (Tom Hewitt)

J6
Mary Sunshine (Ryan Lowe)
Amos Hart (Scott Davidson)

J7
June (Donna Marie Asbury)
Hunyak (Nili Bassman)
Swing/Dance Captain (Gabi Garcia)
Kitty (Melissa Rae Mahon)
Mona (Jill Nicklaus)

J8
Swing (David Kent)
Aaron (James T. Lane)
Swing (Brian Spitulnik)
Fogarty (Adam Zotovich)
Standby For Mary Sunshine (Jeff Loeffelholz)

J9
Bailiff (Brian O’Brien)
Fred Casely (Greg Butler)
Martin (Michael Cusumano)
Harry/Jury (Shawn Emamjomeh)
Doctor/Judge (Jason Patrick Sands)
APPENDIX C: MUSICAL NUMBERS IN CHICAGO

Taken from Playbill.com on February 2, 2009

ACT I
ALL THAT JAZZ........................................... Velma and Company
FUNNY HONEY......................................... Roxie
CELL BLOCK TANGO................................. Velma and the Girls
WHEN YOU'RE GOOD TO MAMA.......... Matron
TAP DANCE................................................ Roxie, Amos and the Boys
ALL I CARE ABOUT.............................. Billy and the Girls
A LITTLE BIT OF GOOD..................... Mary Sunshine
WE BOTH REACHED FOR THE GUN...... Billy, Roxie, Mary Sunshine, and Company
ROXIE.................................................. Roxie and the Boys
I CAN'T DO IT ALONE......................... Velma
MY OWN BEST FRIEND.................... Roxie and Velma

Intermission

ACT II
ENTR'ACTE............................................... The Band
I KNOW A GIRL................................. Velma
ME AND MY BABY.............................. Roxie and the Boys
MISTER CELLOPHANE..................... Amos
WHEN VELMA TAKES THE STAND..... Velma and the Boys
RAZZLE DAZZLE............................. Billy and the Company
CLASS........................................... Velma and Matron
NOWADAYS..................................... Roxie and Velma
HONEY RAG................................. Roxie and Velma
FINALE (bows)............................... Company
APPENDIX D: GUIDING QUESTIONS

• Tell me about the objects in your space. What are they? What is their significance?
• Tell me about how these are arranged, and why these particular objects are included.
• Tell me about why you have arranged your station in this way. Where did you get the idea to set your space up this way? To include these objects?
• How have the objects and the arrangement changed over time? What has stayed the same? Why? Who may make or suggest changes?
• Tell me about how you have set up your station in previous shows. How has it been similar or different? Tell me about your dressing room experience in other shows, and how it has been similar or different from Chicago.
• What are the absolute essentials for this space?
• Tell me about how you make/purchase/assemble these objects and materials? Have other people contributed items or given you things that are included here?
• How do other people interact with the objects in your space? What do other people say about these objects/this space?
• Tell me about how you set things up and take them down. How often do you do this?
• Tell me about how you get ready for a performance. Is there an order in which you do things? Does it change? What objects are involved in that process?
• Tell me about what do you do after a performance, before you leave the theater.
• Tell me about how you have set up your space in other shows. How has it been similar or different?
• What stories are associated with these objects? With this arrangement?
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