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21st Century Politics: New Faces/ New Spaces

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21st Century Politics: New Faces/New Spaces

Abstract

Politics has been described as a man's game and a man's place. Further, the design of houses of politics also embeds this dominant masculine ethos. Traditional Chambers have been large with only limited seating arrangements ensuring that only privileged elite can participate and both officials and the public are located at some distance and separate from the elected officials. Such a Chamber ensures that Members need to face each other and the dominant interaction is adversarial. Within this system however, women have been able to carve out new spaces, or use existing ones in different ways, to become more involved with the mechanisms of parliament and provide alternative routes to leadership. In doing so, they have introduced elements of the private domain (nurturing, dialogue and inclusion) to the public domain.

The way in which space is used is fundamental and its treatment has consequences for individuals, organizations and societies (Clegg and Kornberger 2006). Dale's (2005) work emphasises the social character of architecture which recognises the impact which it has on the behaviours of individuals and nowhere is this more pertinent than the way the Australian Parliament House operates.

This paper draws on the experiences of Australian parliamentarians to examine the way in which the new Australian Parliament House shapes the way in which the Australian political cultural norms and practices are shaped and maintained. It also seeks to explore the way the Members of Parliament (MPs) experience these spaces and how some MPs have been able to bring new ways of utilising the space to ensure it is more accommodating to the men and women who inhabit this building at the apex of Australia's political life. In doing so, such MPs are seeking to ensure that the practices and processes of Australia's political system are reflective of the men and women who inhabit this national institution in the beginning of the 21st century.

Introduction

While women remain outnumbered by men in the world's parliaments, their level of representation in a range of countries has increased significantly in recent years. This is certainly the case in Australia. When the Howard Liberal National Coalition Government was elected to office in 1996, the number of women members in the 150 member House of Representatives increased from 13 to 23 (increase of 7.5%) and the number of the women in the Senate from 13 to 23 (increase of 13%). With the election of the Rudd Labor Government in 2007 there are now 40 women in the House of Representatives (26.6%) and 27 women Senators (35.5%). This comparatively recent growth in women's representative status in national parliaments has been noted in a range of studies on politics and gender in the European context as well as in research from the United Kingdom, and the United States (IPU 2008).

Historically women entering politics have had to adapt to the practices and processes of the public sphere. Researchers have found that there is an irony in that the insertion of women into the political space makes them visible in a way men are not. This visibility however, does not lead to their being embraced and granted full membership but rather they are seen as deviations from the norm and often feel they have entered an 'alien territory' by becoming politicians (Puwar 2004, 121).

Hacli and Reger (1997) take up this theme in their work which describes the experiences of women politicians in Britain and the USA as 'strangers in a strange land.' They posit that 'woman' and 'politician' are seen as mutually exclusive categories. In contrast, masculine/male/masculinity and politics/politician are analogous categories. They contend that women's role is embedded in the gendered division of labour in the home and that this flows on to the political world. Factors which make women parliamentarians feel alienated include the unspoken rules of behaviour, the design of the buildings and the arrangements of various rooms and furniture (Ross 2001). Thus most women politicians have become anchored in this public sphere and been converted into neither a 'real' politician nor a 'proper' woman. Therefore, in undertaking political life, women politicians have had

to disguise their feminine traits of nurturing, cooperating and working collaboratively by the adoption of the more accepted 'masculine' approach which values aggression and individualism (Puwar 2004).

However, for a small number of women politicians, success has come by understanding and operating within this masculine political space while still drawing on feminine values. They have developed a new crossover space which transcends the conventional.

This paper draws on the work of Goodsell (1988) and his exploration of the way in which political authority is asserted through the use of parliamentary space, and that of Terry Fewtrell (1991) who compared the way in which MPs experienced the different parliamentary spaces of the old and new Australian Parliament Houses. This project, in seeking to discover new ways in which space can be used by the diverse people who inhabit modern political institutions, also progresses the work of Clegg and Kornberger (2006), Dale and Burrell (2007), and Taylor and Spicer (2007). Within this context, the notion of space is added as a further analytical theme with which to examine the links between locale and action. In doing so, it contends that this new political space which is not dominated by masculine values could become a launching pad for a more varied political arena in which both men and women could operate equally and where parliamentary practices and processes are overt and critiqued.

While the move to the new Australian Parliament House in 1988 projected a space for a new and changing political body, those MPs involved in this project do not concur and women especially do not see this space as any more welcoming or validating different behaviours than the old Parliament House. However, this study explores the ways in which this parliamentary space is subtly changing and demanding of different behaviours, yet remaining implacably dominated by practices which are gendered male. Given this context, the main question we pose is, how have these new spaces emerged and what form might they take?

The paper proceeds in four parts. The first section consists of an overview of the literature on space as an organising construct. This literature situates the current study within geographic -

relational context and provides three frames for analysis. The next section describes the study's research setting and data collection methods. In the third section – the methodology – the article's conceptual framework is empirically illustrated with data derived from semi structured interviews of parliamentary representatives. Distilled from the interviews are respondents' experiences and conceptualisations of Parliamentary spaces including the construction of 'new spaces'. The final section discusses the findings, highlighting and analysing the processes and experiences leading to the formation of emergent spaces for dialogue and interaction as well as their implications.

Space as a Social Organising Concept

Once considered a static or neutral construct, space has come to reflect a sense of dynamic interaction between a physical location and people leading to the formation of structures, processes, understandings and actions. That is, how physical and social structures are established and ordered within a location and how these impact on social organising. In this way space is not a neutral setting but rather a processual or relational experience that results in social systems and practices configured and reconfigured by the experiences of the social actors (Soja 1989; Giddens 1984; 1985). As Lefebvre (1974) argued in The Production of Space, space is a social product, or a complex social construction based on values and the social production of meanings, which affects spatial practices and perceptions. Given the diversity of structures and actors colonising any one location, as Massey (1999, 28) points out the term space is well suited to 'express the spheres of juxtaposition and co-existence'.

In recent times, the spatial construct has been drawn upon to explain actions related to both gender and politics. LÖw (2006), for example, examined the gender related responses to public spaces; while the formulation of knowledge sharing spaces to challenge conventional gender-divisions within education was the feature of Leathwood's (2004) work. Along a similar line Moore (1996) used a spatial analysis approach to understand the public and private divisions of tasks and location for the Marakwet women of Kenya.

Although these studies have afforded useful insights into the actions and process emerging from the interaction between women, their roles/behaviours and their locales, they have generally focused on the impact of space in relation to private or domestic behaviours and functioning. Much less attention has been directed toward understanding the influence of formal or public spaces such as parliamentary structures on the ordering of human activities. In this context, Samarasinghe (2000) provides an important exception as she illustrated how seemingly disenfranchised or marginalised female political representatives were able to create alternative locales within the dominant system to gain political visibility.

The renewed application of space as a central organising theme and analytical framework has generated a considerable body of contemporary insights into the social activities of organising and managing work practices (Dale and Burnell 2007; Clegg and Kornberger 2006; Kornberger and Clegg 2004). Despite the increased emphasis on spatiality and its attention to multiple layers of impact and interaction, these studies have generally adopted a singular rather than multiple spatial perspectives, thus limiting the richness of the understandings. To more fully understand the dynamic interaction between social processes and the space in which they occur and are created, this paper adopts a multiple space lens approach, which includes consideration of space as distance, power and experience. Taylor and Spicer (2007) argue that such a tripartite review of organisational spaces would shed more light on how they are practiced, planned and imagined.

Research Setting and Methodology

The new Australian Parliament House provides the research setting for this study of the formation of new spaces in parliament. Established in 1988, Parliament House was purpose designed to accommodate the current and future needs of a contemporary parliamentary system. The revised building, with its expansive surface areas, designated places, modern architecture and revised flows, represents a significant change from the prior facility in terms of its structural design, the role of space as a social connector and the ways in which space is experienced. The building, for the first

time in Australia's parliamentary history, provided a separate wing for the Executive government, as well as all Ministers and MPs enjoying sole use of an office and facilities. It also ensured there were large areas of the building devoted to public use.

Methodology

This research which set out to explore the way in which the space of the Australian Parliament is used by those who inhabit it is, as Kavale (1996, 1) suggests, an attempt to understand the world from the subject's point of view. Hence the qualitative approach was pursued by gathering data through the use of semi-structured interviews with 30 MPs. These politicians were from both the Senate and the House of Representatives, all political parties, married and single, long-term and new MPs and 15 were male and 15 were female.

Interviewing was consistent with the intent of the research, that is, not quantification but to gain a holistic and detailed understanding of lived experiences. As Fontana and Frey (1994) argue, interviewing is one of the most powerful ways to come to an understanding of human beings and their behaviour. Denzin and Lincoln (2003, 16) also contend that when research aims to capture individuals' views, interviewing is a method of choice.

A second, and related reason why interviewing was used in this study is that it is a method which gives voice to multiple perspectives. King (1994, 33) argues that interviews are 'ideally suited to examining topics in which different levels of meaning need to be explored' such as an understanding politicians' views about the way in which they experience the Australian Parliament. The collection of data through interviewing allowed for themes to emerge that were both common and unique (Rhodes et al. 2007). Critical to obtaining insight from multiple perspectives is gaining knowledge of a participant's view of the past and of the future so some of those interviewed were able to make a comparison between the ways in which they had experienced the old Parliament House with that of the current Parliament House to which they moved in 1988. Again, an opportunity to meet this goal is opened up through interviewing (Warren 2001). Mason (1996, 65)

adds to this view writing that interviews give emphasis to complexity and depth and therefore enable a researcher to produce authentic knowledge.

A further rationale for the use of interviewing in this study concerned the literature on elite interviewing. As early as 1970 Lewis Dexter posited that interviews are a key source of insight for researchers focused on the political arena. In a more recent commentary Rhodes and his colleagues (2007, 2) in their work on Observing Government Elites argue that political science researchers need to 'defy the scorn of their traditionalist colleagues and write interview – based accounts of incumbent governments'. In fact, Peabody et al. (1990) argue that interviews are almost always an appropriate research strategy when studying politicians, political institutions and public administration. Like others (e.g., Beamer 2002), they argue that interviews offer a tool for researchers to tap into political constructs that may otherwise be difficult to examine and target people directly involved in the political process. Gray (2004, 214) adds to this view noting that interviewing is useful when people enjoy talking about themselves and their work and are well practised in doing so both in the public and private domains (see also Seidman 2006; Sprague 2005, 143; Jones 2006, 652). Australian politicians in this study certainly provided evidence of this with rich and complex data.

Table 1: Sampling characteristics of interviewees

	Male	Female
House		
Reps	10	7
Senate	5	8
Party		
National/Liberal Coalition	8	5
Labor	7	10
Marital Status		
Married	13	9
Single	2	6
Children		
Yes	15	11
No	0	4
Representation by states		
QLD	3	4
NSW	6	4
VIC	1	4

WA	2	0
SA	0	1
TAS	2	1
ACT	1	0
NT	0	1
Time in Parliament		
0-5 yrs	2	8
5-10yrs	4	6
10-15yrs	3	1
+ 15yrs	6	0
Age		
30-40 yrs	2	7
41-50 yrs	4	6
51-60 yrs	4	1
61 + yrs	5	1

In addition to the data derived from interviews, an array of documentary material was also interrogated, including academic literature, government material, media releases and reports. This material supplemented the qualitative insights in that it afforded detailed accounts of the measures and specifics of the physical context of Parliament House as well as an historical perspective of the locale. As Goodsell (1988, 196) noted the "Durability of buildings gives us 'readings' of the past as well as the future".

Findings and Analysis

Space as Distance

Space as distance is generally concerned with providing a numerical description of how far apart items may be; their physical length or the period of time separating entities (Taylor and Spicer 2007). The examination of physical distance became focused on the architecture or design of an arena and how the layout of a locale such as a workplace encourages certain patterns of behaviour and interaction (Clegg and Kornberger 2006; Burrell 2007). Space as distance can also focus on the flows and/or clustering properties engendered by the arrangement of properties within a specific space or locale, that is the social networks binding people into collective action. The new Parliament House with its expanded floor area (250,000 square meters), architectural separation of the major

functions of parliament, and revised layout and flows, is an ideal venue with which to examine space as distance.

As well as providing a symbol of democracy, the new building had the more prosaic purpose of integrating under one roof functions and people that had spilt over to other buildings. In doing so, it was to provide clarity of function and purpose and adequate space within which to accomplish the business of parliament. Browning, a Clerk of the Australian House of Representatives noted at the time:

> When the Parliament moved into the new building, previously separated elements of the parliamentary departments, which had worked in different locations came together for the first time (1989,: 51).

The layout of the current facility in terms of the key functions of parliament is described as follows:

> The House of Representatives' wing is on the eastern side with the Senate Chamber and offices to the west. The executive wing is at the south end of the structure, behind the ceremonial and public spaces of the central zone (Parliamentary Education Office, 2009).

The new structural format constituted a radical modification of the previous physical layout, particularly in terms of the provision of a suite of rooms for Senators and Members, and the public zones and a corridor separating the Chambers of each House and a separate entrance and wing was provided for the Executive government. The compactness and propinquity of the office space afforded by the old Parliament House structure meant that Members from all parties were in regular and close contact (Browning 1989, 52). However, under the new design each Senator and Member was allocated a suite of rooms comprising the Member's office, a staff room designed for three persons, a reception area, an ensuite and tea making facilities (Barlin 1989, 18). The expanded office space was a greater physical distance between parliamentary representatives and the creation of some sense of personal or professional isolation brought about through loss of regular contact. This was graphically articulated in the following comment by one House of Representative's respondent:

> Over there [previous house] people muddled together ... the Minister in one room, next to the opposition backbencher – all messed up together – there was a lot more intimacy in terms of relationships – here you can walk down a corridor and fire a gun and not be at risk of hurting anybody.

Another respondent commented that the distances between offices has led to a change in social practices with people tending to interact and socialise mostly with co-located others, thus confining the spread of interaction and exchange. It was reflected that the distance between people and their rooms had "created 'different' social dynamics". This distance was thought to work against the collegiality often needed to develop effective coalitions for action.

For a number of respondents the changes in flows of interaction caused by the new layout and the reconfiguration of the office spaces served to disrupt some of the well established 'old boy' networks. For a few male respondents the loss of the 'old camaraderie' facilitated and maintained by the practices and architecture of old Parliament House was something to lament about. However, for others, especially the female Representatives and those representing areas populated by minority groups, the new layout offered the opportunity for new contacts and connections to be fostered and leveraged for mutual action. These emergent interactions or networks were presented as new spaces for dialogue, deeper understanding the exploration of new solutions to entrenched problems.

Using Existing Spaces and Processes

Respondents also identified several existing parliamentary places and processes that facilitated cross-interaction between people and parties. On this point one interviewee noted that the Senate Chamber was a place where: 'You get to know people from other parties'. Similarly, the Committee process and the Committee Rooms, which although formal parliamentary spaces are not used for debating or voting purposes, were perceived as more 'neutral' venues to hear others' opinions and 'discuss across party lines'.

Members and Senators as well as members of the Press Gallery often gather at the coffee shop in the Senate corridor which came to be established in response to MPs' needs and has developed into a networking and meeting site within the parliamentary space which is not openly accessible to the public. Here the Prime Minister and other Ministers as well as journalists, political and parliamentary staff can meet without the gaze of the public but in an open manner with political colleagues and across party lines. Further, as was proposed by the designer, lobbies have become an environment for informal meetings and contact between Members, thus increasing the places for interaction.

The contemporary practice of televising parliament was seen as a change mechanism which reduced the distance between parliament, representatives and the citizenry. It was also described as having a moderating effect on the behaviour within the Chambers. However, this latter view was challenged by many female respondents.

As well as the new networks afforded by the geographical proximity and interactions enabled through the building design, a number (four) of the female MPs and Senators identified their prior work experience within the political system as a vehicle to gain parliamentary experience and knowledge. The following two statements encapsulate this view:

> Need to understand where things are to function properly as Member of Parliament,
>
> and
>
> [I] Worked in office so knew way around, so knew way around the party room.

These knowledge repositories operate outside of those 'handed down' by the political system and provide a chance to challenge the accepted approach to indoctrination. Further, the knowledge connections were perceived as providing a shortcut to parliamentary expertise. In this way, it could be argued that prior political office experience acts to reduce the distance of knowledge required to operate effectively as a parliamentary representative. Importantly, this knowledge and experience was presented as a 'launching space' for female politicians giving them the confidence and capacity/capability to swiftly and competently operate within the relatively closed parliamentary

environment. The new Parliament House was envisioned to meet the needs of current and future Australians. However, it is argued by some that the design and the resulting structures, in re-enforcing the inherently patriarchal disposition of parliament do not reflect a modern and diverse society. The failure of the new building to accommodate growing demands for child care and carers of other types was frequently noted by interviewees of both sexes, but especially the females. One respondent noted that with the lack of child care facilities, parliament is: 'Still seen as a man's domain'. In January 2009 child care facilities were introduced into Parliament House. However, as was recently demonstrated in the case of Senator Sarah Hanson-Young the presence of children within the parliamentary space still remains a highly contested issue (The Australian, June 20:20).

The adversarial set up of the Chambers, with one side pitted against the other, was also identified as better reflecting a masculine rather than feminine orientation. Indeed, one female respondent commented that the Senate is a theatre contest that is verbal and further that the: 'Senate chamber was disadvantageous to women as the [acoustics] make their voices sound shrill.'

As Macintyre (1997, 45) concluded; 'the physical design of the building itself, or the disposition of the seating within it, have clear consequences on the parliamentary procedure and the administrative behaviour of the members operating within it'.

Thus even with the increased number of women and other groups in parliament, as Ramsey and Parker (1992) remind in many ways it remains inherently a masculine precinct characterised by masculine behaviours. The behaviour and processes of parliament it was considered served to embed this masculine emphasis, with a number of respondents commenting on the need to modernise parliament's century old procedures which were seen as inflexible and out of step with a changing representative base and an increasingly diverse constituency.

However, despite the constraints of the embedded masculine and public emphasis within the parliamentary system, its building and structures, it is apparent that some members, especially females have been able to carve out new spaces for genuine dialogue and interaction. Such neutral spaces present as an ideal forum for deeper sharing of information, and the creation of new

understandings. Also within these spaces coalitions and alliances can be formed to pursue areas for further exploration or to mobilise for change.

Also emerging from the interviews was the presence of a knowledge base informed by part political work experience that could be drawn upon to assist new parliamentarians to both acclimatise with the existing system and, on occasion, to work around it to achieve change.

Space as Power

Scholars (Foucault 1991; Jacques 1996; Bauman 1997; Davies 2008) have argued that modern institutions have organized space in such a way as to materialize relations of power and that institutions are shaped by such power relations. They suggest that spatial organization ensures that people must behave in particular ways, and that rules and norms replace spontaneity and unpredictability. Indeed Goodsell (1988) has argued that parliamentary buildings and spaces preserve cultural values, articulate political attitudes and contribute to the formation of political culture. He further suggests that the buildings reflect the underlying patterns of political behaviour. The architect of Australia's new Parliament House, Giurgola, has recognized that his structure is a significant building, not only because it is the ultimate symbol of Australian democracy but also because he considered how the building would function for those who worked in it every day (Cotton 2005). It is in this building that power and architecture are inseparably intermingled, because the overt function of the Australian Parliament is the exercise of power by the government.

There can be no question that once elected to parliament MPs consider they are in a place of power and by entering the Parliament House through the Members' and Senators' separate entrances they enjoy a position which separates them and places them in a more dominant position of power than other Australians. The fact that the Australian Parliament House which prides itself on being an open and public building has such particular arrangements for entry depending on whether one is an elected Member or Senator, or a staffer either of an elected MP or of the Parliament itself reinforces this position of power for MPs. The particular comments (shown below) from MPs (two young government women , one in the House of Representatives and one in the Senate and a young

male opposition MP in the House of Representatives) reinforce this idea that the space in the Australian Parliament House is delineated and creates boundaries not only for all the people working within the Parliament House but even for those outside the House who are most directly affected by the work of the parliament – that is all Australians on whom the legislation discussed and passed in the Chambers will impact. Hence the Parliament House continues to produce knowledge that is in itself an exercise in power (Clegg and Kornberger 2006).Thus there is an overt privileging of elected MPs in the Parliamentary space and within this group, members of the government are further advantaged and would seem to remain unquestioned by those who inhabit this space. What emerges is an exercise of power by defining different kinds of members and strangers, where these various groups may go and how they may interface (Markus 1993). Indeed this power was taken to its ultimate limit with the creation of the Non–Members' Bar in the Parliament House. It is interesting to speculate as to why after almost 20 years this space was closed. However, there would still seem to be some currency in the division of particular inhabitants and strangers:

> Parliament is an institution that has respect for tradition.
>
> Being in Parliament House as an MP is an extraordinarily privileged position, and
>
> I still remember walking into the Chamber for the first time and thinking there are 76 senators in here and 20 million people out there and I'm one of the 76 and that was pretty overwhelming.

This honouring of the government and its power is evidenced in the layout of the building. There is a separate wing for the Ministry and as such the Parliament House continues to be a socially constructed space where the values are embodied and power is visibly conveyed by the size of the space occupied (Joroff 2001) 'In the ministry I have a big office'.

The prerogative of the government to allocate offices to the elected MPs and to ensure they are allotted by hierarchy – that is those who are longest serving are nearest to the Chamber – to facilitate ease of access is also an overt use of space as power (Markus and Cameron 2002). While most MPs become subject to the social and cultural discipline of Parliament House such control of interactions between MPs is sometimes not valued. One older male Coalition MP commented that

Parliament House led to people being unable to socialize within the spaces provided in Parliament House and as such the Parliament remained 'Very cliquey – need to go out to meet people'.

Power is also exercised through the control of behaviours and this has been commented on by a number of women. This legitimization of authority ensures that identity especially for MPs, that is those who are members of this space, is maintained. As McDowell (1997) and Davies (2008) have contended the key focus of institutions is the maintenance of the rules of the game which continue to shape power relationships. The fact that authority is also exercised by groups such as the media within Parliament House is further evidence of the way power and those behaviours which are validated and valorised are entrenched. These comments from three young female MPs, one a Member of the House of Representatives and the other two Senators, demonstrate clearly the way in which power is exerted upon behaviours in the space of Parliament House if they are to legitimize their positions as 'real' elected members:

> Media requires you to dress well to be acknowledged in Parliament House.
>
> In the Senate chamber people comment on others' appearances. In Committee a Minister spoke appallingly to me.
>
> People try to rattle you for a whole variety of reasons.

The most obvious exercise of power within the parliamentary space is in the chamber of the House of Representatives as that is where the Prime Minister answers questions during Question Time. This is civic space being used as both legitimatized governmental authority as well as ceremony (Goodsell 1988). This is where the Prime Minister and the government of the day display their power through dominating the space and the agenda. Since Question Time was televised in 1988 it is also the space that most Australians associate with Parliament House, the performance of the government and the health of Australian democracy. It is the space where the distinction between members and strangers is reinforced on a daily basis and only those who are elected to the parliament are able to sit in the chair specifically designated for each Member or Senator. To further reinforce this domination of space and control MPs may only speak in the Chamber from their

designated seat; otherwise they are regarded as strangers and will be ousted from the particular chamber by the various attendants on the bidding of the Speaker of the House of Representatives or the President of the Senate. The Chambers are designed so that the government and opposition face each other and hence certain behaviours are produced within the confines of the space. MPs recognize the behaviours as being unacceptable in a wider community but continue to operate in such a manner so as to ensure the parliamentary space continues to be used as it has been historically:

> Parliament is an adversarial institution.
>
> The chamber is confrontational and adversarial.
>
> Guys complement each other across the chamber – women carefully placed behind Prime Minister in Question Time to make him look good.
>
> Whole of question time is an adversary blood bath – shouting across the chamber.

However, it would also seem that the chamber space can be used creatively and to the advantage of some MPs. These are people who are able to take the power offered by the space to their own advantage and claim it for their own 'There have been instances where people actively go and do things in the Parliamentary chamber to create a gossip column item'.

Studies of Parliamentary space then offer the possibility of exploring the way in which power controls the way space is used as well as an overt expression of power, and the impact that has on the political and parliamentary life within Australian politics. What is clear is that the space itself is power neutral but it is through its use that power relationships are developed. The entry of numbers of young women and men into the Australian Parliament offers an opportunity for them to develop new ways of using this space without being bound by the prior knowledge of the 'old' Parliament House. The emergent knowledge capital forged through prior work, coupled with the new networks can be drawn upon to create alternative pathways to leadership. In this way, parliamentarians, by interacting with and shaping their physical and social environments have actively created new power-knowledge relations.

Space as Experience

A further way in which space can be explored is to understand space through the experiences of those who inhabit an area such as Parliament House. The move from the so called old Australian Parliament House to the new one in 1988 offers a unique opportunity to examine the experiences of those MPs who had the opportunity to inhabit both places and so be able to make some comparisons. It also presents a rare chance to examine the way in which the architect believed MPs would experience his building and how they actually understand it. This builds on work of Taylor and Hansen (2005) and Dale and Burrell (2007) who argue that it is important to explore the embodied experience of space to make meanings. Further, Dale and Burrell (2007) posit that one person's space of freedom is another person's space of constraint and this is true of the way in which Parliament House seeks to separate elected/unelected, government/opposition, workers/visitors with only certain values being honoured. Embodiment also allows for an exploration of the past through experiences in the old Parliament House as both connected to and separated from the present as understood through working in the new Parliament House.

There is a general consensus between those who have experienced working in both the old and new Parliament Houses as MPs that there was a different atmosphere in the old Parliament House more reminiscent of an English men's clubs where the only women were staff or spouses. Even though there were nine women MPs in the House of Representatives and seven Senators when the parliament moved in 1988 there was no suggestion in the way the space of the building was used that this reflected modern Australian society and the men and women who constituted it. In his work in 1991, Terry Fewtrell identified MPs experiences of the old Parliament House as those of conviviality as well as a sense of working in an environment associated with Australia's past. These experiences are best summed up by a senior male Coalition male who claimed that the way he experienced being an MP:

> ...changed when old Parliament House was moved from old House to new – sense of camaraderie in the old House where everybody was on top of each other in tiny offices, pushed together – old

> chamber was more intimate and a better debating place – new House has spouse's room – back then everyone used the dining room – people even had their own seat – unbelievable to think the Non-Members' Bar has gone.

Other male MPs agreed with this assessment and asserted that the new Parliament House is much less a 'boy's' club atmosphere and that the increased diversity of Members has created a different dynamic. The old comfortable, closed and predictable public face of Parliament has been breached by a new more inclusive model of debate and decision making. The enhanced sense of inclusivity afforded by the expanded interactions and the clustering interest groups that cross party lines was perceived as a new and positive experience for many respondents.

However, this is counteracted by a senior female Coalition MP who stressed her experience of the new Parliament House is very much that 'It's a boys' place – women shouldn't sit together but men can'.

While it is clear there is some gender difference in the way in which the Australian Parliamentary space is experienced, there have been opportunities for MPs to ensure that the alien nature of the environment is less forbidding. There is also a concern amongst all Members and Senators that the Parliament should reflect not only the work of the government and opposition but also be an institutional space that is recognisable as being dominated by the Australian values of equity, fairness and openness.

Discussion and Conclusions

Politics has been aptly described as a man's game which is played out in the inherently masculine Parliamentary domain setting. The insights derived above would indicate that this statement retains a degree of accuracy. That is, despite their increased numbers, the efforts of female Parliamentarians are often constrained by institutions and systems designed and operated by men (Shapiro 1984, 30). It has been demonstrated that the design of Parliament House and its

accouchements have made it difficult for those outside of the 'core groups', especially females to fully engage in the public space of political decision making.

However, this review has revealed that some women have made clever use of the some of the design features of new Parliament House to carve out new spaces of participation, leadership and influence. These new spaces are based in networks and connections resulting from the disruption of old networks and the restructuring of office locations. Through these loose and associations previously disconnected people can become connected and are able to access new sources of information and influence. As Hillier (1996, cited in Kornberger and Clegg (2004, 1005) pointed out, the 'weak ties' or loose connections afforded by place based interactions 'allow people to break the boundaries of existing knowledge and individual political idealism'. The emergent networks allow for deeper dialogue, the dispelling of stereotypes and the development of shared understandings and the solving of wicked issues that defy linear, single mode solutions and potentially mobilisation around issues rather than party lines. Markus and Cameron (2002, 60) have described this as 'triggering openness, creativity and teamwork'. Connections between MPs are also facilitated by some of the design features of the new Parliament House, such the lobby areas and the Committee Rooms. Such 'interaction promotion rooms' have been described by Allen (1977, 269) as ' prime vehicles for transmitting ideas, concepts and other information necessary for ensuring effective work performance'. In this way, these new relational spaces begin to introduce the feminine 'private' characteristics of nurturing and inclusivity to the previous masculine strong hold of public leadership. There is clear evidence that these women are not rejecting Parliament and parliamentary systems, rather they are refining it to better reflect a more 'relational' era. In doing so they are blurring the boundaries of previously clear cut distinctions between public and private. Moreover, through the use of existing spaces differently or creating new spaces for interaction and mobilisation, female parliamentarians are tapping into an alternative source of power. In this context, as Hillier (1996) noted, space provides a setting in which positive power as opposed to controlled power may emerge.

The study has also revealed another avenue or space that is allowing female parliamentarians to break into the system of active political empowerment and influence. This space relates to the prior work experience of many female parliamentarians as political office staffers. It is apparent that the knowledge, skills and networks forged during their 'apprenticeship' can act as a virtual springboard to both entrance to and advanced performance in parliament. Further, when this 'knowledge capital' is coupled with expanded networks it has opened up alternative pathways to influence, decision-making and power.

Drawing on these examples and others distilled from the research data (qualitative and documentary) the following suite of new spaces can be identified.

Spaces	Explanation	Evidence
Nurturing space	Safe space for interaction; deepen thoughts and understanding Opportunities to extend intercommunication and dissemination and encourage initiatives	New Networks Child care centre, Parliamentary Education Office, gym and health centre, exhibitions on parliament, other artworks by Australian artists Parliamentary Library with other major libraries in Australia and around the world
Exchange spaces	Places to exchange ideas, information and goods; joining resources	Committee rooms; lobbies, coffee shops
Mobilising spaces	Used by people engaged in activities to change systems and create public good Create coalitions between and organise around common issues	2020 Summit, budget 'lock-up', youth parliament
Virtual spaces	Non-physical space, such as those created by on-line social networking, communities, knowledge banks	E-mail, knowledge banks, broadcasting of parliament, electronic information sources knowledge brokers
Linking spaces	Places that loosely connect different sites and processes	Lobbies, corridors

Unpacking the emergent spaces now available to MPS and highlighting their forms and functions is an important first step in being better able to understand and leverage from these initiatives. It also demonstrates that structure does not always determine process and that individuals have the capacity to shape their own environment.

The array of spaces identified above suggest that although the design of new Parliament House does lean toward a public domain, people are able to interact with it in different ways, and create their own experiences and processes which improve their experience. That is, by changing the arrangement of distance and proximity and the ways in which people engage with existing and new spaces, it is possible to influence interactions and establish alternative arenas.

To conclude, in order to break into the system of active political empowerment, women found new avenues and created new spaces. However, it is also apparent that women's involvement in political participation is being enhanced via a reconfiguration of the public space of politics through a more overt linkage of the private and public spheres of activities.

In the new Parliament House – although on the surface it does perpetuate public over private – female parliamentarians have been able to identify and use some of the existing space in different ways and create new spaces. These new spaces – physical or virtual – have enabled shifts in power, perception, and experience of parliament.

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