# The Production and Consumption of "Experiencescapes" in Eslite Bookstores, Taiwan

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A thesis submitted to Cardiff University in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in School of Planning and Geography

Cardiff University

V          2014

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# Abstract

In the era of online business, digital devices, and electric books, bricks-and-mortar bookshops are in decline. Although the future of physical bookstores has received much anecdotal attention, little examination has occurred in the academic context. With a specific focus on the development of a comprehensive understanding of bookstore experiences, this research employs more-than-representational theory in order to conceptualise the 'operational logics' of bookstore experience.

Through an ethnographic investigation of Eslite, one of the leading bookstore chains in Taiwan, this thesis argues that in order to thrive and sustain its bookselling business Eslite bookstores are produced as experiencescapes through performance. In these experiencescapes, consumers act as creative artisans who are able to re-configure any given situation, enacting countless possibilities through their embodied practices. Likewise, I suggest that cultural meanings, values, and ideological thoughts are connected to these embodied practices, spaces, identities and lifestyle through consumers' book experiences. In addressing how practice constantly engages with corporate plans, cultural meanings, identities, and personal ways of life, this thesis contributes to wider debates on the processes of how the (more than) representational is presented and performed, and therefore invites researchers to develop a greater sensitivity to 'doing' geographies of consumption and spatial practices.

# Acknowledgements

A deep gratitude to all the people and events who and which I have encountered along the process of doing the PhD.

I am heartily thankful to my extremely patient supervisor Dr Jon Anderson for his academic insights. Thanks also go to the academic and administrative support from the staff of Cardiff School of Planning and Geography.

I hugely appreciate the time and knowledge that all the individuals/respondents and staff of Eslite Corporation offer to me.

Further, I owe a very special thank you to my husband, Duarte, for his encouragement and friendship.

Finally, this thesis would not have been possible without the support from my family. A deep gratitude to my parents.

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# Chapter One: Introduction

## 1.1 Eslite bookstores in Taiwan



Photo 1.1 In Eslite Xin-Yi store (Source: Eslite)

*Musical notes are dancing in the air with classical rhythms to wash away city noises and ease the mood. From the corner, an aroma of coffee pervades the air; the smell is refreshing and alluring. Some people are standing by the bookcases; some are relaxing in the aisles, and a lot of readers are just sitting at the corners from which they got their books. The bookstore looks like a painting, with people captured, deeply immersed in reading. At the same time, there are other groups of people lingering around bookcases. They are not anchored in certain spots but moving in random patterns, browsing the books or just glancing at their covers. The bookstore now is more like an ongoing film, presenting lots of events… Being in an Eslite bookstore is a unique experience: sensational, emotional, and corporeal. It may even change your perceptions of the notion of a bookstore.*

Extract from field notes.

Selected by Time Magazine in 2004 as the best bookstore in Asia, Eslite bookstores provide "wonderfully hospitable space" to their visitors (Shemper, 2004: 3, 41, 67). The general features across all Eslite bookstores include a rich collection of books on a wide range of subjects, together with domestic and international magazines, housed in solid-wood bookcases and bookshelves, complemented by warm lighting for reading and decoration purposes, armchairs or benches in the aisles, classical music played throughout the stores, and corner coffee shops. In most of the branches, there are performance stages/rooms and galleries, and there are audio-visual centres for various events and exhibitions.



Photo 1.2 An exhibition of calligraphy (Source: Eslite)

The store environments are sophisticated and designed to encourage visitors to stay longer. Thus, it is common to see visitors reading books or magazines in Eslite bookstores; even if the seats are fully occupied, visitors seem not to be concerned about standing, or sitting on the floor and stairs, to read the books they have selected.

In addition, Eslite bookstores are open every day until late in the evening[1]. People are welcome to visit after work or dinner. Even the night-owls are catered for: it is possible to visit either the Eslite Dun-Nan store, which is open twenty-four hours a day, or Eslite Xin-Yi store, which closes at 2am, throughout the year.



Photo 1.3 Eslite Dun-Nan store is open 24 hours every day (Source: Eslite)

As a consequence of the reader-friendly environments, Eslite has successfully attracted people to visit its bookstores despite the convenience of and discounts offered by online bookstores. While the population of Taiwan is approximately 23 million people, the total footfall in Eslite bookstores in 2011 was over 120 million (Xu, 2012). In Taiwan, Eslite is considered to be a reformer of the bookstore industry (Jie, 2005, Yu, 2004), as an incitement to reading amongst the public (Ho, 2001, Zhou, 2000a), and has become one of the most important models for other bricks-and-mortar bookstores and government-owned libraries (Chen, 2004b, Yu and Yang, 2005). Eslite bookstores are not only popular in Taiwan but also in other Chinese-speaking areas/countries. The

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[1]  Most of the branches close at about 10pm but this may vary according the scale and the location of the bookstores.

number of overseas tourists visiting these stores in 2011 was 12 million which is approximately 10 percent of total visitor numbers, and most of the tourists are from Hong-Kong, Singapore and China (Xu, 2012). The founder of Eslite, Wu Ching-Yu, has been planning to expand his book empire abroad and, with such good business results, Mr Wu launched a store in Causeway Bay, Hong Kong in 2012. The opening seemed to be successful (see photos 1.4) and attracted the attention of the local media with regard to the reading culture in Hong-Kong (Lin, 2012, Meng, 2012, Yang, 2012).



Photo 1.4 Eslite Causeway Bay store, Hong Kong (Source: Eslite)

Eslite is now one of the leading booksellers on the high streets in Taiwan, and is highly competitive. Nevertheless, this success was not built overnight, and the chain has been experiencing difficult economic circumstances. Particularly in the last two decades, there has been a significant change in the bookselling industry. Large bookstore chains have actively expanded while the number of small independent bookstores has declined (Berreby, 1992, Bosman, 2011, Brenner, 1998). In addition, with technological

development and Internet business accelerating vigorously, online bookstores and electronic reading devices, such as Kindle, have also joined the battle of the bookselling business. As electronic books and e-readers became ubiquitous, probably no-one is surprised to see the rapid decline of physical bookstores (Allen, 2009, Peng, 2012, Teather, 2010). Physical bookstores, from big chains to small independent ones, all face difficult times, from which no-one seems to be exempt. For example, Taipei's famous 'book street' – Chong-Qing S. Road – used to be home to about 100 independent bookstores and publishing houses, but nowadays that number has dropped sharply to around 20 (Peng, 2012). The troubles facing bookstores in Taiwan is far from exceptional in this industry in recent times. The difficulties which Taiwan's bookstores have experienced have been affecting Western bookstores too. One of the most well-known cases is Borders Group. Borders began its business in America and later operated stores across the US, the UK, Australia, New Zealand and Singapore. The bookselling empire of Borders was once huge and international, but the company ceased to do business in 2011 (Ovide, 2011). In the United Kingdom, the number of physical bookstores has reduced by more than half in only seven years (Hall, 2012). According to the research conducted by Experian, there were 1,878 High Street bookstores in the UK in 2012 while the number of bookstores in 2005 was 4,000, as reported by James Hall, the consumer affairs editor of The Telegraph (Hall, 2012). The bricks-and-mortar bookstores are closing at a rapid rate, independent bookstores and members of big chains alike. In other words, it seems that online bookstores are taking over the bookselling markets and traditional physical bookstores are struggling to stay alive. In order to survive in these difficult circumstances, those bookstores which stand firm in the markets have either to join the e-business battle[2] or to develop distinct

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[2] The big chain booksellers, such as Eslite in Taiwan, Waterstone's in the UK, and Barnes & Noble in the US, have launched online electronic bookstores to compete with Amazon and other websites.

characteristics. Small independent bookstores may specialise in certain subjects and normally have friendly and knowledgeable staff. For example, London-based bookstore *Gosh!* specialises in a wide range of comics, manga, and illustrated books, from mainstream comics (e.g. X-man) to artistic illustrated works and graphic novels. Some bookstore chains, such as Barnes & Noble in the US, attract consumers with their super bookstores, which normally stock a vast range of books, magazines, and CDs/DVDs. Moreover, comfortable couches, coffee bars and book-related events are provided. Consumers are welcome to gather and spend their leisure time in these stores. In short, physical bookstores have been making changes to fight for their lives. Although bricks-and-mortar bookstores are often praised for their 'human touches', such as kind and knowledgeable members of staff, or are recognised as one of the community hubs, Amazon announced that readers nowadays consume more e-books than printed books (Hickman, 2012). What Amazon claims may only reflect the orders on its website but not necessarily represent what is happening across the country as a whole. Nevertheless, the current bookselling situation in the digital age is clearly set out in an article entitled 'Goodbye to bricks and mortar' in *The Economist*, which says that "[b]ookstores may be great places to browse and linger, but online is where the deals are" (The Economist, 2011). It is perhaps not surprising that many people are starting to worry whether bricks-and-mortar bookstores will be supplanted by online ones and then vanish from our streets (Cartwright, 2011, New, 2011, Spavlik, 2011).

Are bookstores a dying breed? A definitive answer would probably require the passage of a little more time, but instead of asking 'Is this the end for bookstores?', we might ask rather 'why do people still go to physical bookstores?', 'what do people do in physical bookstores', 'what does the bookstore experience mean to people?', and finally 'how can physical bookstores be sustained?'. To find out the answers, this thesis

turns to the case of Eslite bookstores, which may offer a different angle with regard to today's physical bookstores. This thesis therefore aims to develop an understanding of the contemporary bookstore experience through exploring the production and the consumption of Eslite bookstores. What this research seeks to do is threefold. The first aim is to examine how Eslite bookstores are produced by Eslite. Second, it explores what the consumers do in Eslite bookstores and how they use and interact with the bookstores. Finally, this research seeks to understand the ways in which Eslite bookstores become meaningful through the practice of visiting Eslite bookstores and how this practice matters to the consumers' identities and ways of life. The analysis is aided by engaging with the academic literatures relating to geographies of consumption, cultural and more-than-non-representational geographies, and concepts of identification. The research was conducted in Eslite bookstores in Taiwan with a view to investigating the retail practice of Eslite executive staffs and the consumption practices of Eslite consumers.

In what follows, I will explore the reasons that physical bookstores are significant to us. The next section sets out to understand the dimensions of the bookstores apart from their merchandising role. Bookstores, especially the physical ones, are significant entities, with cultural, political, social, emotional and experiential meanings. These are the reasons physical bookstores deserve our attention and investigation. Section 1.3 offers a brief history of bookselling in Taiwan, and the social background as well as the cultural and economic circumstances with which the booksellers in Taiwan have been engaged is outlined. This examination allows us to recognise the changes which have taken place in bookselling culture, the characteristics of bookstores in different time periods, and how Eslite evolved its current operational practices. Section 1.4 points out the relevant literature areas upon which this thesis draws and to which it contributes.

These areas include: concepts of consumers, consumption and identity, the production and consumption of retail spaces and spatial experience and sociality. The chapter then offers an iteration of the research aims and questions. In the final section of this chapter, an outline of the overall thesis is presented.

## 1.2 Physical bookstore matters

I have depicted the current bookselling circumstances in terms of how physical bookstores struggle to survive when one-click purchases online offer a convenient way to access books and can be done at anytime, anywhere. I also explained that Eslite, a Taiwanese bookselling chain, has been running its bookstores successfully for some time, and started to expand its book empire overseas in 2012. The case of Eslite bookstores shows that the future of bricks-and-mortar bookstores may seem doomed but this may be changed by taking a different approach to running bookselling businesses. Without changes, the notion of a 'physical bookstore' may become a dinosaur. However, should we care if physical bookstores are a dying breed? It is easy to search for and to purchase the book you want on the Internet with a few simple clicks; all that is required subsequently is to wait for the book to appear in the mailbox the next day. In that sense, do we really need physical bookstores? It is my intention to answer these questions through understanding the significances of bookshops in this section; I will argue that going to bookshops is an important part of the complicated fabric of our daily lives.

As merchandising locales, bookstores are places to sell and to buy publications. Transactions are carried out between storeowners and patrons, exchanging books for money. Bookstores are commercial. However, the main commodities in bookstores, i.e.

books, have distinct natures from other goods because they play an important role in our cultural lives (Manguel, 1996). Books convey knowledge, thoughts, and certain social and cultural messages. Books may offer readers explanations, inspirations, instructions, happiness, dreams, encouragements, and hopes. Books may change readers' visions, perceptions of the world, and then even change their lives. In other words, books have the potential to influence the way we think, to pass on our cultures to subsequent generations, and to crystallise our cultural capitals. Bookstores can therefore operate as nodes for exchanging thoughts, as bastions of freedom of expression, and as activators for shaping public discourse (Buzbee, 2006).
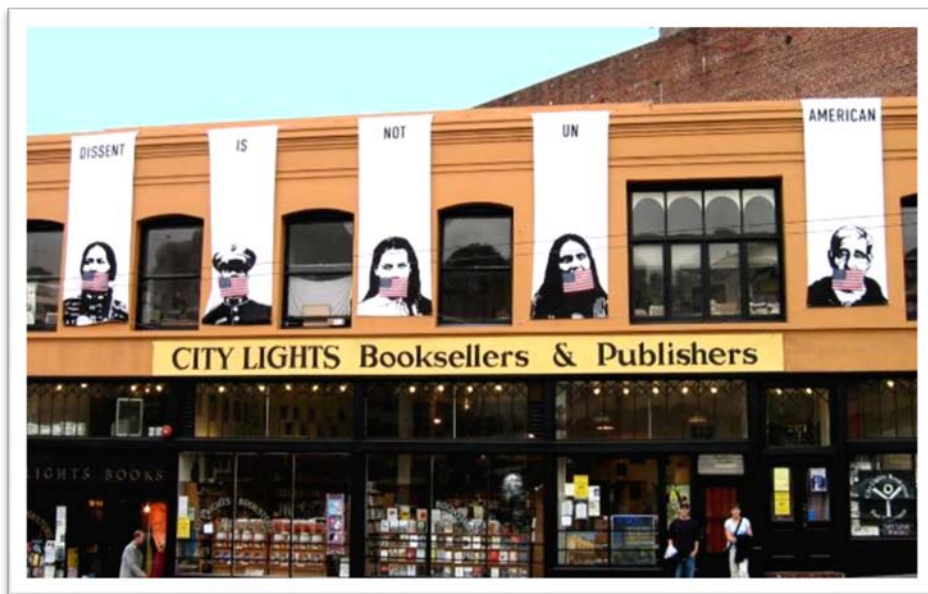


Photo 1.5 'Dissent Is Not Un-American' on City Lights Books (Source: City Lights Books)

One of the best examples (see photo 1.5) is the giant banner 'Dissent Is Not Un-American' hung up over City Lights Books, a bookstore in San Francisco, to express their opinion against the military campaign by the United States after the 911 attacks. Bookstores, then, are cultural and political.

Bookstores are social, too. Nowadays with a few simple taps of a finger we are able to

purchase books from dot-com bookstores at promotional prices which may far undercut prices on offer in physical stores. The technology saves us the trouble of going out to bookstores, of searching for books, of processing transactions, and of waiting in long queues. However, there is something missing in buying books at dot-com bookstores, and that is human contact. Unlike online bookstores, physical stores allow their customers to present there in person, to meet and interact with real people. We may be given good recommendations by shop owners or staff while wandering around the bookstores. Interesting conversations might be had with other shoppers, perhaps about the book in our hands at that moment. In other words, bookstores offer people the chance to connect. Moreover, physical bookstores incite people to get involved in social happenings. There are various events in bookstores. We can bring children to storytelling sessions. We can meet authors at in-store book signings and ask them for their signatures. We can explore a book more deeply with other readers at book-readings, or simply visit bookstores with friends, families, and partners as weekend dates. Bookstores encourage participation. It is because of the human contact that physical bookstores offer that bookstores used to be considered social hubs of the neighbourhood.

In his book *The Great Good Place,* urban sociologist Oldenburg (1997) argues that cities need bookstores and other 'third places', such as coffee houses and pubs, for inhabitants to hang out because these places are beneficial to people's life and well-being (see also Oldenburg (2001) for various examples of third places) . The third places are what Oldenburg called great good places "that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work" (Oldenburg, 1997: 16). In the sphere of home (identified as first place by Oldenburg) and work (as second place) we have the responsibility to attend all sorts of

occasions and events and play specific roles. But social status and identities in third places do not matter as third places welcome all types of people and people are free to come and go as they want. The third places offer space for people to meet, to talk, to connect, to hang out and to hear local news. The homey and comfortable atmosphere provided by good third places allow people to leave behind home and work related concerns and stress, while exchanging them for good company and lively conversation. Third places strengthen community networks and help people to locate themselves within the local community while closely interacting with other individuals. Therefore, the existence of third places is vital to people as they need somewhere to go outside the home and work spheres where people know your name. That is the reason why Oldenburg believes they are good for people's life and well-being. Despite Eslite bookstores seem to become third places for Taiwanese people to hang out and meet other people, as commercial places, Eslite bookstores have qualities that Oldenburg overlooks. For Oldenburg, the actions that people do are what make third places 'great good places'. The physical space is not considered as important as what people do there. But in the case of Eslite bookstores, the spatial design of its physical space plays a crucial role in attracting people to visit the stores and stay there. The design of the physical space is crucial to Eslite bookstores. Moreover, the store staff in Eslite bookstores may not know consumers' names even if the consumers are loyal patrons. But for Oldenburg, a third place is normally a place where everybody knows your name (see the story of Robert, who is known to all the staff in Horizon Books by name, in Oldenburg (2001: 50-52)). In the case of Eslite bookstores, consumers are allowed to be anonymous in its environment. Finally, Oldenburg does not mention the requirement of money expense (if there is any) to visit third places. However, in Eslite bookstores, visitors are expected and encouraged to spend money there and to turn their identity from visitors to consumers.

Finally, bookstores are emotional and experiential. While e-books, e-readers and online bookstores continue to establish their position in the current bookselling market, there are still people who have yet to accept the 'e' form because they think of bookstores as 'magical places' (Lundin, 2011). One of the things missing in online bookstores is the corporeal environment. While online purchases are limited to visual offerings through graphics and other uploaded images together with the simple mouse-click experience of Internet shopping, the consumption offered in physical bookstores is much more complicated. Consumers in physical bookstores normally engage themselves in a comprehensive sensory experience. For example, searching for a book is more than typing in a key word. You are invited to walk along aisles, to read titles in different font types and on different coloured covers. You are encouraged to ask staff to show you the way to the book. Either of these experiences requires more than eyes, fingers and screens. Browsing a book is more than zooming in and out on a few pages offered via the 'Look Inside' option available on Amazon, for example. You are free to pick up books and flip through actual pages. The browsing enables you not to judge a book by its cover. In addition, in a physical bookstore you have opportunities to fill your lungs with the aroma of fresh ink on publications or with the musty smell of yellowed pages. The smell may be not pleasant but it may remind you of your bookstore trips with your parents or grandparents when you were little. Bookstore experiences may arouse the excitement of finding new treasures, the surprise of discovering unexpected books or reconnecting with once-lost friends. As evidenced by business studies (Akehurst and Nicholas, 1995), the sensory engagements of physical retailers offers a competitive advantage when compared to online stores. Bookstore experiences are more important than ever in the era of e-commerce. Emotional and experiential dimensions may be able to explain why some people have strong emotional attachments toward bookstores and why bricks-and-mortar bookstores still exist despite facing significant

threats from online bookstores and electronic books.

It is clear that bookstores matter because they are connected with our lives in various perspectives; they are cultural, political, social, emotional and experiential. Going to physical bookstores itself is therefore a significant human experience. However, the existing academic work about bookstores and bookselling is scarce. While studies on other type of retailers, such as shopping malls, and on the relevant fields, such as retail marketing and consumer behaviours, can offer useful ideas, very little significant academic research has focused specifically on booksellers and the bookstore experience. The majority of existing investigations on bookselling has been done by the publishing industry in order to obtain sales data with a view to maximising profits (for instance, Baverstock, 1990). Moreover, attention to the current difficulty that physical bookstores face has been paid by bookstores owners, the publication industry, book-lovers, writers, and culture/business commentators. Areas for research on this topic, such as the changes of bookselling culture and the ways contemporary consumers visit/use bookstores, have yet to undergo academic exploration. Hence, this thesis aims to provide insights to the interactions between physical bookstores and today's consumers. To understand why people still visit physical bookstores, we need to move away from simple sales numbers of books. As bookstore experiences are part of the intricate fabric of our daily lives, it is better to place the focus on the spaces of bookstores and what people do in those spaces. In the next section, I will take a close look at the context of bookselling in Taiwan.

## 1.3 Recent Bookselling history in Taiwan
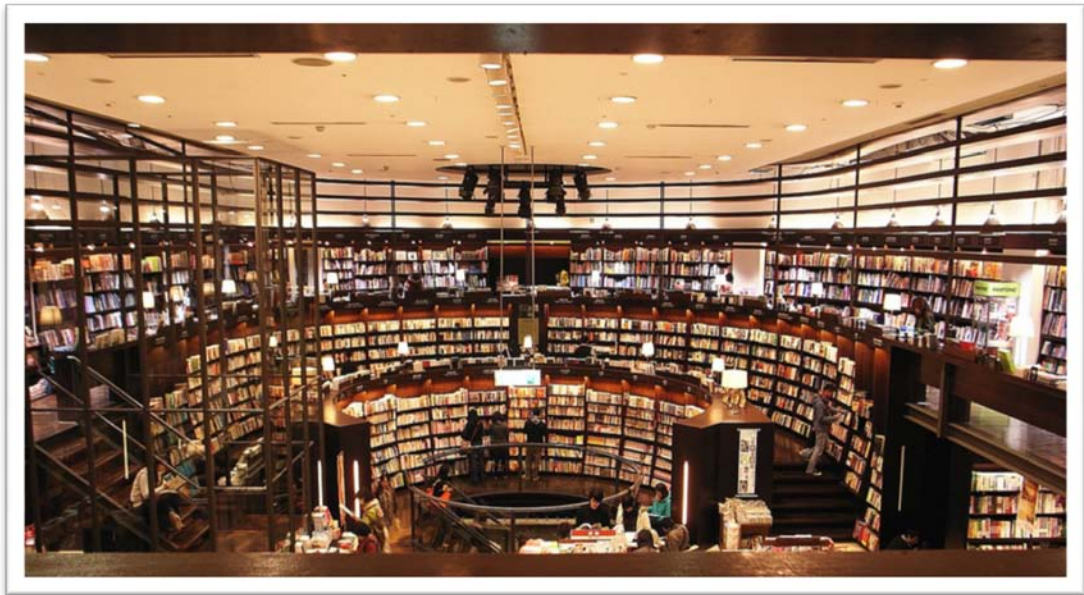


Photo 1.6 Eslite Chung-Yu store (Source: YANG Rui-Bing)

While Eslite today is a bookselling giant, it started on a much smaller scale, selling books on specific subjects such as art and the humanities. The corporation claims that what successfully led Eslite from its existence as a small bookstore to becoming "a conglomerate with the cultural and creative industries at its core" are the business strategies and the business model it follows (Chen, 2007b). Despite the fact that the business strategy a bookseller uses is one of the key factors which determines whether or not it thrives in bookselling battles, the context in which the bookseller exists is crucial because it is "a necessary constitutive element of interaction, something active, differentially extensive and able to problematise and work on the bounds of subjectivity" (Thrift, 1996: 3). Therefore, in this section I want to look at Taiwanese society and the development of Taiwanese bookshops to rethink how the emergence of Eslite bookstores was possible and why they are the way they are. However, since this research is a geographical study, rather than a historical one, the development of bookshops will not be traced back to its initial stage; rather, I will focus on the current

century. Special attention will be paid to the ways in which bookshops were established and how they were run, along with their specific historical backgrounds. As will be shown, the nature of bookshops has shifted from that of being suppliers of textbooks on the subject of official languages to a position of being diverse retailers employing sophisticated marketing and managerial techniques to operate their enterprises. This discussion does not intend to offer information about these as being 'the first' in terms of bookshops or booksellers in Taiwan's history; instead, it seeks to highlight the social, cultural, and economic conditions which affect the spatiality of bookstores as well as creating possibilities for new bookselling models of which Eslite is perhaps the foremost example.

**Five stages in the development of bookshops**

Figure 1. 1 The development of bookshops in Taiwan (Source: the researcher)
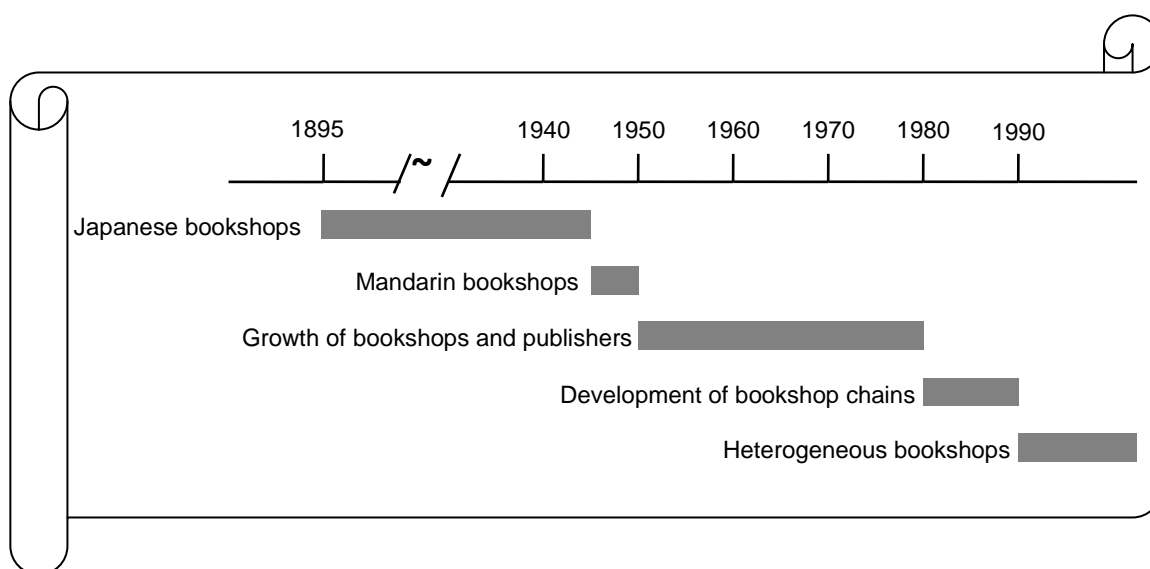


The development of Taiwanese bookshops during the twentieth century can be divided into five stages, namely, Japanese colonisation, the post-war period, the 1950s to the 1970s, the 1980s, and the 1990s and beyond (see Figure 1.1 on the next page). The

ways of operating bookshops were different according to the socio-economic circumstances at each stage.

## Japanese colonisation: Japanese bookshops

Taiwan was ruled by Japan between 1895 and 1945, and during this time, bookshops flourished because of the compulsory education launched by the colonial government. Most bookshops were run by the Japanese, providing textbooks for schools and universities. Most of the books were printed in Japanese and then imported into Taiwan (Tanaka and Lee, 1998). The use of bookshops was very politically instrumental; in this case, the books were a specific educational tool for the coloniser's culture.

## Post-war period: Mandarin bookshops

The Japanese colonisation of Taiwan was terminated at the end of the Second World War when Japan was defeated. In October 1945, Taiwan was taken over by Republic of China [3] as part of an arrangement made by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. In order to eradicate all traces of the Japanese colonial era, the government implemented a language policy which prohibited the use of Japanese, and decreed that Mandarin should be the official language of Taiwan. The first publisher-cum-bookshop, Eastern Publishing, was established in Chong-Qing S. Road, Taipei[4], with support from the government. Its mission was to offer textbooks and readings in Mandarin, especially for school education. Then, in 1949, the KMT lost the Chinese Civil War to the Chinese Communist Party, and when the Chinese Communist Party established the People's Republic of China (PRC) in Mainland China, the KMT government retreated to Taiwan and retained ROC as the country's name. At

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[3] The government was originally established in the Chinese mainland and ruled Mainland China and Outer Mongolia.

[4] Later, with the other bookshops assembled in Chong-Qing S. Road, this road became a 'book street'.

that time, the language policy became even stricter, and a severe ban was put on other languages/dialects such as Taiwanese. Furthermore, pupils and students who spoke other languages were punished, and more than this, only Mandarin was allowed in all mass media such as radio channels and television programmes. The turbulent political situation not only propagated publishing in Taiwan, but also influenced publishing in Mainland China. Many reputable bookshops in China, such as The Commercial Press, which had been founded in 1897 in Shanghai, moved to Taipei one after another, and located themselves near Eastern Publishing (see Xin, 2000). Aside from Eastern Publishing starting its business in Taiwan, other bookshops focused only on selling books, locating their publishing departments in Hong Kong. At this stage, the establishment and function of bookshops was strongly relevant to the political relationship between China and Taiwan. Similar to the previous stage, bookshops were mainly employed as textbook providers; books, then, served as instruments for the learning of a specific language. The operation of bookshops was less about business, and more about being involved in the political system.

## 1950s to 1970s: Growth of bookshops and publishers

During this period, the Chinese Communist Party gradually consolidated its authority in Mainland China, despite facing confrontation from the KMT government. The proprietors of bookshops originally from China which subsequently reopened in Taiwan after 1949 decided to shift the base of their enterprises to Taiwan, and embarked on publishing. Unfortunately, the publishing business did not provide a good living because of the economic conditions of Taiwanese society. Nevertheless, bookshops began to withdraw from extreme political roles and to move towards establishing themselves as profit-seeking companies (Liao, 1998). Moreover, the distribution of these bookshops formed a geographical feature, since almost all of them were located

in the Chong-Qing S. Road, which gradually became "book street" (Chen, 1983). Although the original "book street" still flourishes today, bookshops today are much more widely distributed across the whole of Taiwan, and hence, Chong-Qing S. Road has lost its paramount position in terms of book publishing and selling.

## 1980s: High development of bookshop chains

The fourth stage took place in the 1980s following the industrialisation and significantly rapid economic growth of Taiwan between the 1960s and 1980s[5]. Accumulated capital contributed to production as well as consumption, and the percentage of expenditure of every household in terms of education, entertainment, and other cultural services noticeably increased (See Figure 1.2).

Figure 1. 2 Percentage of expenditure on education, entertainment, and cultural services (Source: this research[6])



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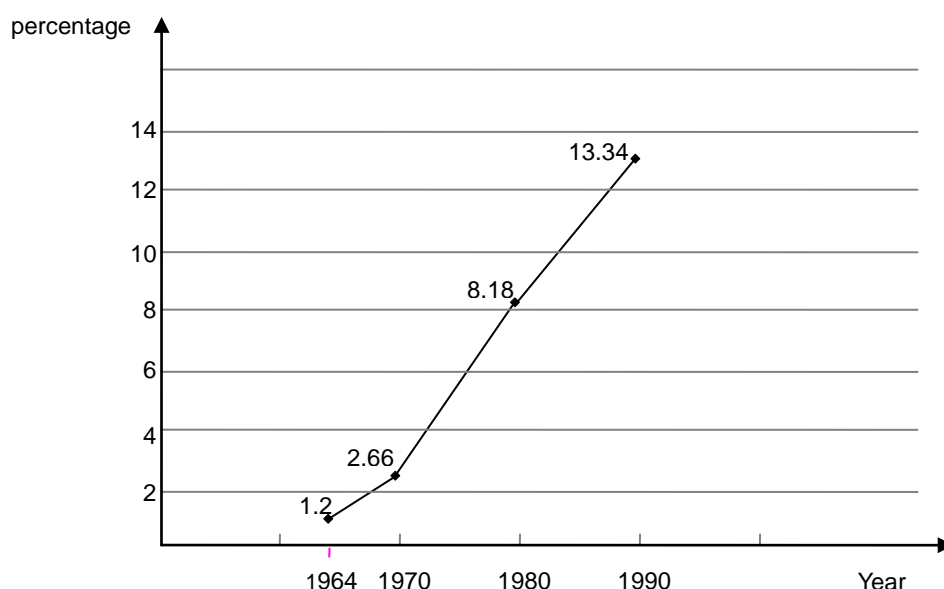
[5] See '*The Statistics of Gross Domestic Product*', Directorate General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics, Executive Yuan, TAIWAN, Available at: http://www.stat.gov.tw/public/Attachment/511171894671.xls [Accessed on 30.01.2009]
[6] The figure is made according to the data extracted from the 'Percentage of Distribution of Total Expenditure in a Household', Report on the survey of family income and expenditure in Taiwan 1994, Executive Yuan, TAIWAN, p29.

Not only was there a proliferation of art and cultural activities, but the publishing and bookselling business also became prosperous with well-transmitted pop-cultures (Su, 1995). At this stage, some bookshop proprietors changed their ways of operation. For example, in 1982, Senseio opened a new branch which provided bright lighting, in-store music, armchairs and comfortable sofas for consumers. Moreover, a café, entitled Book Aroma, was set up in the bookshop. This was the first bookstore in Taiwan to open a coffee shop, and it also offered free newspapers and magazines to customers. Senseio not only introduced the concept of chain stores to the bookselling market, but also pioneered a new spatial format (offering customers reading space), a new function (Book Aroma, in which customers could rest and gather) and thus a whole new bookshop experience for consumers. Another significant example is Kingstone, which became a bookstore chain when it opened its second branch in 1984. The amazing thing about Kingstone was that clothes were sold in the bookshop, along with various other commodities, such as cards for every occasion, movie-posters, and stationery (Lu, 2004: 292-297). Besides, Kingstone actively provided book-related information to its customers. Kingstone's pioneering work in the Taiwanese bookselling business included inventing billboards to advertise bestsellers in different subjects to its customers. Kingstone's most significant message to the Taiwanese bookshop business was to get them to ask themselves, 'what can a bookshop offer its consumers?', and the answer to this question was definitely 'more than books'. This challenged the traditional basic nature of bookshops as being shops which sell books (Kingstone obviously did not sell only books). Senseio and Kingstone created the foundation of bookshop chains in Taiwan, which was a milestone in the history of Taiwanese bookshops. Indeed, researchers in Taiwan have suggested that "the emergence of bookshop chains is the first revolution of the bookshop industry" (Liao, 1998: 57).

**1990s and beyond: Heterogeneous bookshops**

Following the rapid and stable economic development of the last few decades, Taiwan's society was relatively modernised and it has been argued that it was during this era that it shifted into a more "mature consumer society" (Chen, 2002: 247-248) in which consumption of leisure activities and tourism rapidly increased, international companies moved into big cities in Taiwan, and spaces of consumption were expanded. Bookshops and chain bookshops become widespread from the end of 1980s and into the beginning of the 1990s. According to the statistics at that time, there were over a thousand bookshops in Taiwan, and over four thousand publishers. More than ten thousand new books were being printed each year (see Su, 1995), and in this competitive market, three kinds of bookshops stood out, one of which was the specialist bookshop which offered books devoted to particular subjects. By offering books on a narrow range of subjects, these bookshops aimed to provide a better service for their target customers because of their knowledge of specific subjects. For example, Taiouan was established in 1993 to sell books related to Taiwan's history and culture, Fembooks was launched in 1994 to sell books about women's issues, and Gingin was founded in 1999 to sell books on the subject of homosexuality. Among all the specialist bookshops, Eslite is an interesting case. Having opened its first bookshop in 1989 in Dun-Nan South Road, Eslite was a bookstore selling books on the subjects of Art and Humanity. But Eslite later developed into a bookstore chain and gradually become one of the leading booksellers in Taiwan. The transformations of Eslite, Chen (2002) argues, were attributable to the social change of Taiwan. On the one hand, people sought more information and publication after the lifting of the martial law in 1987 gave freedom to mass media and to the press industry. "To respond to the need of readers at the time when Taiwan changed into a free and multicultural society"

Eslite increased its book collections to multiple subjects, imported books translated into English, as well as starting to host talks and exhibitions, and opening further branches, said LIAO Mei-Li, a senior manager of Eslite (Ho, 2001). On the other hand, the "high taste" style of the spaces of Eslite bookstores was embraced due to "the globalisation and internationalisation of retailing since mid-1990 in Taiwan" (Chen, 2002: 248). Transforming it from a specialist bookshop along with the social changes, Eslite has become a conglomerate.



Photo 1.7 A talk in Eslite Dun-Nan store (Source: Eslite)

The second kind of bookshop which stood out in this newly competitive bookshop market was the online bookshop. In 1995, books.com was established as the first domestic online bookshop in Taiwan. Unlike bricks-and-mortar bookshops, books.com did not have concrete sale spaces for customers to visit, nor did it provide paper books for browsing. However, it offered an abundance of book titles, easy ways for buyers to search for books, unlimited opening hours, and a home delivery service. All of these advantages were distinctive from those of brick-and-mortar bookshops and became competitive features. Following books.com, other online bookshops opened in Taiwan,

most of which belonged to national companies. Furthermore, bookshops such as Senseio, Kingstone, and Eslite joined the market of online businesses, and opened departments to handle online sales in order to serve their customers. The success of books.com and other online bookshops indicated the potentiality of e-commence in books market, and online bookshops created a new channel for book sales.



Photo 1.8 Bookstalls in a convenient store (Source: the researcher)
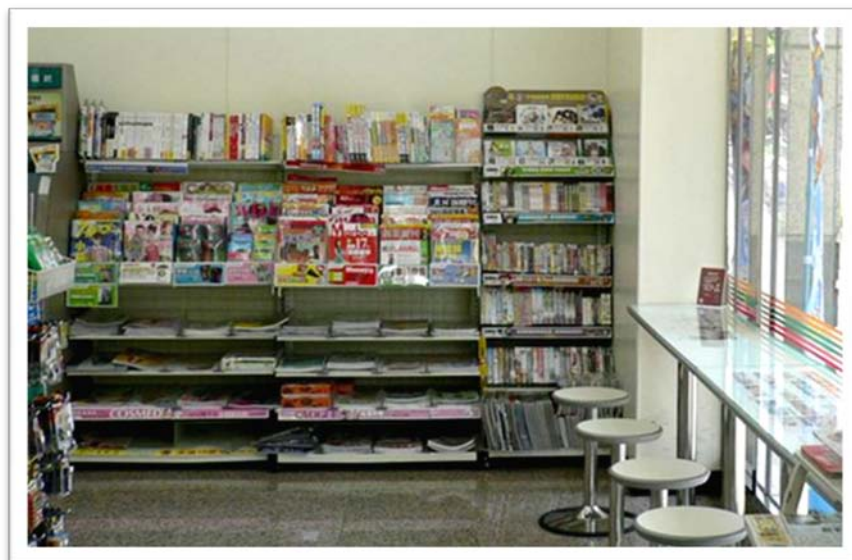


Photo 1.9 Bookstalls in a convenient store (Source: the researcher)

The last type of bookshops which revolutionised the bookselling market was bookstalls, especially those in convenience stores (see photo 1.8 and 1.9 on the last page). To be

precise, bookstalls are not bookshops, but merely shelves, stands, or cases inside stores. Compared to bookshops, the scale of the sale space is much smaller, there are fewer book titles on offer, and the subjects of the books are normally limited to fiction, manga, romance, and weekly magazines. In spite of these defects, bookstalls produce respectable profits for convenience stores. Because of the extremely high density of convenience stores in Taiwan[7], these stalls are able to provide customers with something to read while they are doing their daily food shopping. Bookstalls may not provide specialist books, but the convenience they offer seems to be their strongest selling point, especially for urban inhabitants.



Photo 1.10 Bookstall in a healthy-and-beauty store (Source: the researcher)

On the one hand, bookshops have become more and more diverse in the last stage in terms of the way in which books are sold and the formats of their sales space. On the other hand, the relationship between books and bookshops has become unstable. In other words, books are not necessarily displayed and sold in bookshops; they can be purchased in convenience stores. Another interesting example is that books can be

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[7] According to the latest 2006 ACNielsen | Shopper Trends report, Taiwan has the highest density of convenience stores across Asian countries, with one store per 2,600 people.
Available at: http://tw.en.acnielsen.com/site/news20061011.shtml [accessed on 20 Jan 2008].

bought in health-and-beauty shops in Taiwan, and although the available books only relate to the subject of health and beauty, this challenges the traditional concept that where books are sold is a bookshop.

## Bookshops' chrono-characteristics

The previous discussion about the development of bookshops in Taiwan indicates that 'time' was important to the development of the characteristics of bookshops, meaning that the historical background is relevant to the role played by books and bookshops in Taiwanese society at each stage. In the earlier stages, the establishment of bookshops was highly relevant to the political circumstances of Taiwanese society at that time. Bookshops played a role in the organised educational system by providing school books for pupils to learn the official language. In the Japanese colonial period, Japanese-founded bookshops sold textbooks in Japanese, and later, when the KMT government took control, bookshops were set up to provide textbooks in Mandarin. Books were seen as being educational tools, more especially as tools for learning one single specific language. The existence and operation of bookshops tended to be a political-cum-educational issue rather than an economic one; in other words, books and bookshops were instruments of domination. It was not until the 1950s that the role of bookshops changed, when the KMT government firmly settled its power in Taiwan. At that time, both bookshops and books were withdrawn from political use, and the number of bookshops expanded and they gradually became business-orientated. At the same time, books became carriers of knowledge of diverse subjects. In the 1980s, chain bookshops emerged in Taiwan and generated the first revolution of the bookshop industry. At that time, Taiwanese society was experiencing steady growth in terms of economic and cultural activity. The production and consumption of every profession were much more dynamic compared to the previous

stages, and this encouraged consumers, as well as bookshop-proprietors, to be vigorous. Moreover, bookshop chains stimulated the bookselling market with the new skills of running their businesses. Consumers were able to participate in a new experience of bookshop tours, with specially designed reading spaces, and cafés were opened inside bookshops. Moreover, new sources of information were provided, such as bookselling billboards, and cards, gifts and stationery began to be sold in bookshops. In other words, what was sold in bookshops was a lot more than books. The nature of bookshops, as sellers of books, began to slip, and this was a remarkable stage in the history of Taiwan's bookshops. The prolific sweep of bookshop chains across the entire bookselling market brought a very real threat to traditional local small bookshops, and as bookshop chains became stronger and stronger, local bookshops became a dying breed. However, independent bookshops were not completely annihilated, nor did bookshop chains completely monopolise the bookselling marketplaces. Instead, different kinds of bookshops appeared in the bookselling battle, well-prepared to fight bookshop chains with their competitive superiority, and specialist bookshops, online bookshops, and bookstalls have held their places in the bookselling market. Since the 1990s, bookshops have become divergent and heterogeneous.

This section has shown how the development of bookshops has been related to the social, economic, and even political conditions in different periods of time in Taiwan's history. We have learned from this section that there is a strong link between types of bookshops and social conditions. The social background in which Eslite and its bookstores are embedded is the condition that enables and constrains the performance of Eslite bookstores. Although it is not the intention of this thesis to investigate the social structural factors that might have contributed to the geographies of Eslite bookstores, it is very important for us to remember there are differences

between each society and therefore not to discard the social, economical and political background that Eslite bookstores stand within.

## 1.4 Situating Eslite bookstores in Taiwan

In section 1.1 I mentioned a social phenomenon occurring in our society nowadays: physical bookstores are experiencing difficult times in facing competition posed by online bookstores and electronic books and book readers. Nevertheless, I also introduced an exceptional physical bookseller— Eslite — which thrives in the current fierce bookselling battle. Figure 1.3 shows the annual turnover of three leading booksellers in Taiwan: Eslite bookstore, Books.com.tw (the biggest online bookseller in Taiwan), and Kingstone (the second biggest bookstore chain in Taiwan). From the graph, it is clear that Eslite bookstores sales have been thriving in the past ten tears.

Figure 1. 3 Comparison of annual turnover in three leading booksellers in Taiwan
(Source: the researcher[8])



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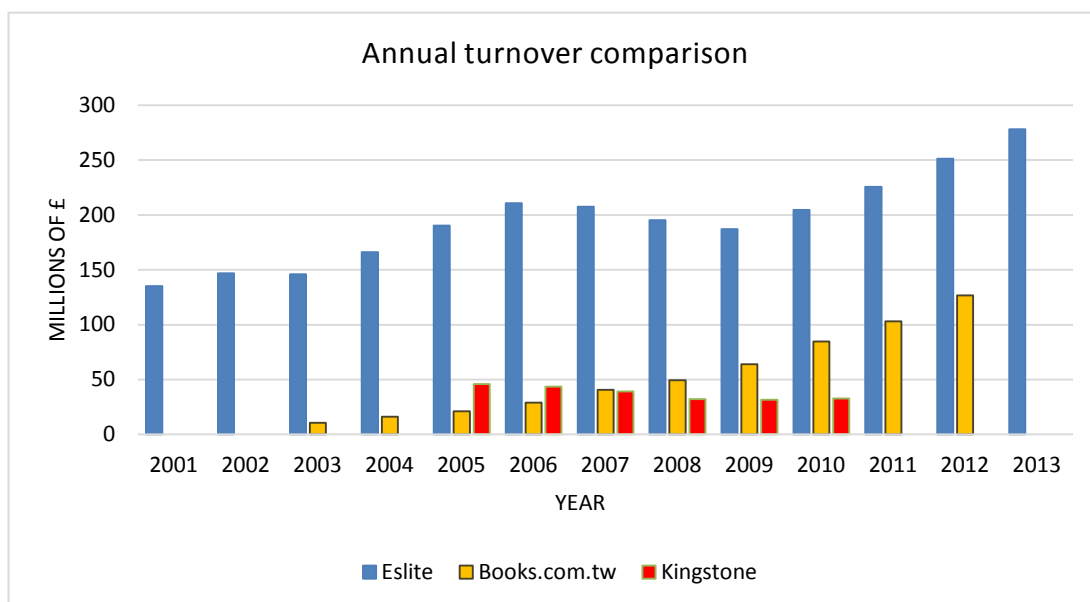
[8] The graph is made according to the data extracted from 'Financial Reports' offered by The Taiwan Stock Exchange Inc. & Gre Tai Securities Market, Available at http://mops.twse.com.tw/mops/web/t57sb01_q1# [Accessed on 30 October 2014]. A table of the exact numbers of the annual turnover in three leading booksellers is provided in appendix A.

With the understanding that bricks-and-mortar bookstores are important to us in various perspectives of our lives, this research aims to find out what spaces Eslite provides to its consumers, why people like to visit Eslite bookstores and what they do while they are there. In order to fully comprehend the case of Eslite bookstores in Taiwan, the social background in which Eslite is embedded is examined. In this section I want to zoom in on Eslite, focussing on its bookstores in order to contextualise the production of bookstores and the practice of visiting physical bookstores. I take as a starting point the news of a famous British chain of bookshops, Foyles (W & G Foyle Ltd.), which opened a new bookshop in spring 2014. In order to generate ideas for the new bookshop, professionals from different lines of work — authors, sales directors, and booksellers — were invited to a meeting where each of the professionals contributed opinions on which form future bookstores should take. The architect Alex Lifschutz believes the "experience of buying books" is the key for bookstores to remain successful in the current highly competitive market (G.D., 2013). In practical terms, Lifschutz seems right, especially if we look carefully at what Eslite has been doing. It seems clear that consumer experience is very important to physical bookstores. Consumers in Eslite bookstores are able to enjoy reading in a comfortable environment in which armchairs, lights, air conditioning and classical music are provided. Moreover, diverse events are planned and hosted in the bookstores in order to offer consumers inspiring and memorable experiences. Similar to Eslite bookstores, super bookstores such as Barnes & Noble in the US have become familiar to book readers in metropolises around the world in the last two decades. Compared with existing chain bookstores, these super bookstores are normally distinctively large, with numerous book titles available in every possible subject. What is more, the variety of offered magazines is also amazing — from more intellectual topics such as *Nature* and *The Times Literary Supplement* to more lightweight and entertaining ones such as *People*

and *Soaplife*. Besides, the super bookstores usually offer comfortable reading spaces, good-quality lighting, background music and cafés, and often host events. While customers can read some books on a comfortable sofa for many hours, there are also events to join if customers wish to explore other book-related avenues for entertainment. Book-signings, talks and storytelling activities are held regularly. The events are available for adults, for youths, and for children/families. The super bookstores are, then, not just places for book-business transactions. Rather, they are places "to meet, eat, drink, romance, discuss, dream, read, write or just hang out" (Roberts, 1997 quoted in Ritzer, 1999: 112). These appealing spaces of consumption, in Ritzer's terms, are "cathedrals of consumption" because "they have an enchanted, sometimes even sacred, religious character for some people" (1999: 8). These spaces of consumption are produced through calculated arrangements of spaces; they work not only as attractive environments but also as spaces which may help consumers to achieve the ideal experience of consumption.

This notion advanced by Lifschutz is fascinating, but it is not a watershed in relation to consumption as consumer experiences has been one of the central topics in a number of disciplines for some time. According to Hirschman and Holbrook (1982: 92) consumption is about the "multi-sensory, fantasy, and emotive aspects of one's experience" within the shopping settings. The multi-sensory aspects of consumption experience can explain why architect Lifschutz believes the "experience of buying books" is able to bring profit to Foyles. Nevertheless, there is a major difference between what Eslite has been doing and Lifschutz's plan. Whilst Lifschutz places emphasis on 'the experience of buying books', Eslite focuses instead on 'the experience of visiting bookstores'. The former attempts to encourage enjoyable purchase experiences by providing sophisticated designed spaces; the latter, meanwhile,

endeavours to tempt consumers to 'experience the beauty of reading and fun of life' (Xie, 2007, Yu and Yang, 2005) by making Eslite bookstores a 'platform of cultural and creative Industry' (Chuang, 2006: 141-142, Dai, 2005).

Table 1. 1 Sales breakdowns between books and the total annual turnover in Eslite bookstores (Source: the researcher[9])

| (unit: millions of £) | 0.21093 exchange rate as in November 5th 2014 | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Eslite** | | |
| Year | Annual turnover | Sales of books |
| 2001 | 135 | - |
| 2002 | 147 | 63 |
| 2003 | 146 | 60 |
| 2004 | 166 | 59 |
| 2005 | 190 | 63 |
| 2006 | 211 | 68 |
| 2007 | 207 | 70 |
| 2008 | 195 | 70 |
| 2009 | 187 | 72 |
| 2010 | 204 | 81 |
| 2011 | 226 | 69 |
| 2012 | 251 | 70 |
| 2013 | 278 | - |

Products and services are not the main offer in the bookstore business of Eslite. Rather, experiences are what Eslite offers to its customers: various events and sensual settings, in which diversified products and services are offered, are orchestrated for the consumers/visitors of Eslite bookstores in order to construct a unique bookstore experience. The enjoyable uniqueness of these experiences, then, becomes the product. Lifschutz's idea may make the process of buying books extraordinary and

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[9] The graph is made according to the data extracted from 'Financial Reports' offered by The Taiwan Stock Exchange Inc. & Gre Tai Securities Market, Available at http://doc.twse.com.tw/server-java/t57sb01?step=1&colorchg=1&co_id=8958&year=100&seamon=&mtype=A& [Accessed on 30 October 2014].

enjoyable, but Eslite has already taken the process of visiting bookstores beyond buying books, shifting the focus from the 'orthodox' products of bookstores, e.g. books, on to the practices of book-buyers. Eslite bookstores are more than the 'bookstores' defined in the Oxford Dictionary as 'shops where books are sold'; they are spaces to offer consumers unforgettable experiences (Pine and Gilmore, 1999, Schmitt, 1999). Or, using the term coined by O'Dell (2005), Eslite bookstores are 'experiencescapes' which are designed, arranged, and made by professionals, such as producers, designers and planners, to deliver a particular consumption/shopping experiences.

Despite the difference between the future Foyles bookshop and present day Eslite bookstores, looking at both cases it is clear that this emphasis on the consumer 'experience' is without doubt one of the key preoccupations regarding the future of all physical bookstores. Having said that, I do not suggest this notion of the 'experience' is singular in the sense of it being an experience experienced in the same manner in every physical bookstore. While big bookstore chains place stress on the book-shopping experience, small independent ones may emphasise their charm or the connection to local culture. But, all in all, bricks-and-mortar bookstores are more about experience than ever. To appreciate bookstores as spaces planned and produced with consumer attractiveness in mind may explain why Eslite bookstores have so many local and overseas visitors. But how exactly Eslite makes itself as "a legend in bookselling industry in Taiwan" (Sun, 2009), offering its consumers distinct bookstore experiences in each branch, has to do with more than mere spatial arrangements and the environment created in each of its stores.

It is on this point of experiential matter and spaces that we return to our case study — the experiencescapes of Eslite bookstore in Taiwan. Indeed, Lifschutz's idea of "making

bookstores as spaces that offer people good experience of buying books" makes a great departure angle for us to understand the production and the consumption of bookstore spaces. Nevertheless, the role of the consumer seems quite singular and vague because they are portrayed as mere experience-receivers. This makes the idea of how affective and multi-sensuous the 'experience' should be become lifeless. As I intend to give the same weight to the consumer and the producer in this research, I prefer to take a different viewpoint on the producer, the consumer and space. More precisely, I want to rethink all of them as the 'subject' of Eslite bookstores. This requires me to engage in several key areas of the literature. The first one is about the consumer. The attention is placed on the ways through which we can conceptualise consumers differently: the consumer who is able to negotiate with the given situation they engaged in. In so doing, we may come to understand the actual consumption practices that the consumers have in Eslite bookstores. The second one is about the geographies of retail spaces with particular concerns on how spaces are produced and consumed. This survey will link spaces to a wider dimension of our society; that help us to consider retail spaces beyond their economic and the commercial dimension and towards to the social, cultural, affectual, emotional and experiential aspects. Another point in the literature I want to engage with is consumption and identity. While some people visit Eslite bookstores for books and book-related activities, others like to hang out there, shop non-book products or attend various events. Eslite bookstores seem becoming part of the everyday life to the consumers. Paying attention to the connection between consumption and the formation of identity (the process of identification) will give inspiration on how retail spaces influence consumers' sense of self and their relationships to others. Therefore that might offer the explanations to how Eslite bookstores become significant to the consumers' lives. All in all, what I am attempting is to find ways for us to reject seeing retail spaces as merely

representations. I so doing, experiencescapes can be understood as lived spaces rather than another (one of many) 'scapes'. And that will make us recognise the much more complicated inter-relations between retail spaces and society. As Goss (1999: 75) cleverly said:

"The critic's task is not to rudely wake up the consumer [tourist] to the reality outside consumption, but to ourselves awaken to the potential of the dream inside of which we shop [tour] and so to reveal the traces of ideals of collectively meaningful life that are so vulnerable to forgetting".

## 1.5 Research aims, objectives and questions

To respond to the calls for research, as detailed above, the research aim is: **to develop an understanding of the production and the consumption of physical bookstores and to investigate the impacts of bookstore experiences on consumers' lives.** In light of the theoretical influences, the main research questions of this thesis can be articulated:

1) In light of the recognition that consumption spaces can be planned and produced as "experiencescapes" (O'Dell and Billing, 2005), the thesis asks:

    What are the bookstore experiences that Eslite plans to offer its consumers and how are the spaces of Eslite bookstores made to deliver the business purpose?

    Objective: through interviews with Eslite staff, including managers in the head office, store managers and supervisors together with staff in marketing and planning departments, to investigate the creation of Eslite and the production of the spaces of Eslite bookstores.

2) Recognising that consumption spaces may be subverted by consumers through their "ways of using" (de Certeau, 1984: xiii) despite them being situated within manipulated spaces, the thesis asks:

What is it that consumers actually do in Eslite bookstores and how are these things experienced?

Objective: through in-store observations of consumers' actions, accompanying consumers as they shop in the bookstores, and interviews with consumers in order to understand their bookstore experiences, including their intentions to go there, the amount of time they spend there, the things they do there, the interactions they have between themselves and other people and so on.

3) Through answering the above two questions, the thesis asks:

How do bookstore experiences matter to consumers?

Objective: through in-depth interviews, to collect the data from consumers, both members of Eslite and non-members, to explore their thoughts and opinions on, and their feelings about Eslite bookstores; and to understand how consumer talk about their shopping experiences influences their daily lives, and especially the lifestyle they prefer.

In order to find out the answers for the above questions, this thesis seeks to move beyond the spectacular part of the marketing and business world by exploring Eslite bookstores with particular reference to the practices and experiences of both the Eslite staffs and the visitors of Eslite bookstores. To conduct the research, ethnography is employed. I will provide a full and clear explanation of the research methods in Chapter 3.

## 1.6 Outline of the thesis

The thesis contributes to the geographical account of the bookstore battle in the very late twentieth century and into the beginning of the twenty-first century, with special focus on the bricks-and-mortar bookstores. Chapter Two sets out a conceptual framework that helps to conceptualise the spatial formation and the lived experience without excluding meaningful representations. A number of theoretical notions in terms of retail and consumption practice, experience and experiencescapes, and the concept of 'neo-tribes' and identity are discussed. Chapter Three addresses the methodology used to conduct this thesis. The chapter explains the reason and operations of the chosen methods. The chapter also illustrates the ways of dealing with, exploring and understanding data. In addition, the chapter explores the problems which occur during the period of generating and analysing data. The chapter is separated into three parts: research design, collecting data and analysing data, and reflexion. In the following three chapters, Chapter Four to Chapter Six, the data from the empirical cases are explored. Chapter Four explores the ways in which Eslite bookstores are made into experiencescapes. Chapter Five shifts the focus to the bookstore experiences that the visitors of Eslite have. Chapter Six explores the ways in which the bookstore experiences matter to consumers, their identities, and their ways of living. The final chapter, Chapter Seven, demonstrates the contributions of the thesis followed by a condensed review of the research. The chapter also provides a number of suggestions as to future studies in terms of bookselling retailers, geographies of consumption, and micro-politics within the geographies of consumption.

# Chapter Two: Conceptualising the geographies of Eslite bookstores

## 2.1 Introduction

In his study on the British retail book industry, Stallard (1999, 2000) examines the role of the book to the store's personnel in their workplace and to the store's customers in their everyday lives. Stallard (1999, 2000) shows how Waterstones uses a reader-centred strategy as a means to promote bookselling. Within this company, given the relatively high degree of autonomy given from the central company to the local shop, the store personnel take charge in stock management and some of the marketing decisions. There are two main benefits with this act of empowerment. Firstly, it encourages the store staff to provide a good quality of customer service as they are more aware of their "enterprising" position. Secondly, it is "a means of heightened response to consumer reflexivity" as the store staff is considered to able to understand consumer demand (Stallard, 2000: 177). Despite books being merely the commodity in the bookshop, the bookseller well understands that books and reading carry cultural meanings and that they play important roles to readers in some social relations. Therefore, the store managers emphasise that the bookstore is about "a celebration of literature" instead of focusing on the commercial characteristic of bookshops (Stallard, 1999: 135). Moreover, shop spaces are produced/ created in a specific form to bring the kind of sociality required for reflexivity. Through shop design, customer service, activities and related discourse and practices the image "a shop that is not a shop" was

created by the bookstore to its customers (Stallard, 1999: 125). The reader-centred strategy helps a certain group of customers to perform their self-identities. The bookshop, in Stallard's analysis, is enhanced from a commercial entity to a responsiveness sector for consumer subjectivities and reflexivity.

With a similar interest on studying bookshops, the studies of Stallard provide some implications to the present work. Firstly, Stallard points out that both producers (the employees of the bookshop) and consumers (the customers) are "relationally connected to (and help constitute) a wider network of discourses and practices relating to shopping, reading and the book" (Stallard, 1999: 194). Thus 'production' and 'consumption' are not two separated entities in linear relation; rather, they are profoundly linked to each other in dynamic flows. Secondly, Stallard argues, "[a]n identity rooted in the 'spatial logic' of the everyday" because the ways of using spaces are the trajectories of identities (Stallard, 1999: 199). Finally, the book is profoundly engaged with us, with our biographies, practices, the relationship with others and our competences such as emotion and memory. Accordingly, the object is not purely functional or technological but "[a]s a mediator it has a decidedly human form" (Stallard, 1999: 199).

While Stallard investigates the subjectivity, reflexivity and identity in the world of the book, this thesis places the focus on bookstore experiences with a specific concern of the latest changes in the contemporary bookselling industry. As described in the previous chapter, from the last decade, the steady increase of the numbers of online booksellers, e-readers and e-books seems to herald death for bricks-and-mortar bookstores. The turbulence in the bookselling industry is not an isolated situation happening only in the United Kingdom or in the United States of America; it is also

happening in Taiwan. Whilst some people enjoy the convenience of buying books online, a number of people still like to visit physical bookshops because the bookstore experience simply cannot be supplanted. This thesis is, therefore, grounded in empirical exploration of the bookstore experiences and the spaces which provide the experiences. More precisely, this thesis provides an empirical account of both production and consumption of experiencescapes in the bookshops.

In order to explore how Eslite experiencescapes are produced and to understand the consumers and their practices, the chapter suggests more-than-representational theory as an organising conceptual framework which helps to contextualise the spatial formation and the lived experience without excluding meaningful representations. The chapter also draws upon relevant literature including experiencescapes, consumption, identity, concepts of 'strategies and tactics' and 'neo-tribes'. As such, the chapter will unfold as follows. Firstly, I will outline more-than-representational theory in general, and then discuss some specific tenets which are advantageous for the research. Following this, I will explore ideas of experience economy and experiencescape to focus the experiential part of doing consumption. I will then consider what kind of concept of consumption is the most appropriate for understanding how consumers interact with the physical stores, and for considering the importance of shopping experiences. Michel de Certeau's idea of 'strategies and tactics' will be then explored in order to understand how consumers get involved actively in the spaces and practices of consumption. Finally, Michel Maffesoli's idea of 'neo-tribes' will be examined with concerns of consumption and identity to understand how retail spaces generate experience of neo-tribal affiliation. Throughout this assessment of the literature I want to illustrate the understandings, the appreciation, and the (creative) use of spaces within consumers' shopping experiences imply influences/contributions to the shops

and also, significantly, to the retailers.

## 2.2 More-than-representational theory

The thesis is about physical bookstores and bookstore experiences. More precisely, I am interested in the ways in which the experience is shaped by and is a component of the complicated experiencescapes of physical bookstores where the experience takes place, and I am equally interested in what kind of consumers we are becoming in experiencing being-in-a-bookstore. Interests in sites/spaces of consumption and consumption experiences/practices are not completely new in geographical studies (Jackson and Thrift, 1995: 13). For instance, studies of geographies of retailing have been working on understanding spaces of consumption through exploring both economic and cultural dimensions of retailing (Wrigley and Lowe, 1996, 2002), work in geographies of consumption has examined the reasons and the means through which consumption is connected to geographies in our daily life (Mansvelt, 2005), and research on geographies of food has made efforts to understand how we think about places and identities through our experiences of food consumption in different spatial scales (Bell and Valentine, 1997). However, there has been a noticeable move in social and cultural geography recently to position consumption as an everyday practice of embodied experience in such a way that ambivalence, ephemerality, materiality, and performativity are embraced (Paterson, 2005). Most noteworthy work amongst the concerns on embodied experiences is more-than-representational theory (Lorimer, 2005) which, alongside non-representational theory (Thrift, 1996, 1997, 2000c, 2007), recognises the corporeal, experiential, and sensual dispositions of everyday practice in geographies (Cresswell, 2003). However, more-than-representational theory, as I will argue below, also acknowledges the limit of its political thoughts that

non-representational theory holds (Rose, 2010)**.** More-than-representational theory is therefore a promising approach for thinking about the formation of consumption spaces, consumption experiences, and the materiality of spaces.

## 2.2.1 More-than-representational theory and non-representational theory

"More-than-representational theory" is a phrase initially used by geographer Hayden Lorimer (2005: 83), referring to a style of thinking which "seeks better to cope with our self-evidently more-than-human, more-than-textual, multi-sensual worlds". Or in an explicit way, it is a term to describe work that focuses on:

> how life takes shape and gains expression in shared experiences, everyday routines, fleeting encounters, embodied movements, precognitive triggers, practical skills, affective intensities, enduring urges, unexceptional interactions and sensuous dispositions (ibid.: 84).

The concept of more-than-representational theory is very much based on non-representational theory although it replaced the "unfortunate" title of the original "non-" to "more-than" (Lorimer, 2005: 84). For that reason, I will now discuss non-representational theory, and offer the reasons why I prefer more-than-representational theory to non-representational theory later in the section 2.2.2.

Non-representational theory was initially pioneered and developed by geographer Nigel Thrift, who has been working on the development of the theory since mid 1990s (see Thrift, 1996, 1997, 2000a, 2000c, 2007). The theory has been employed and applied by Thrift's research students (see Dewsbury, 2000, 2003, Harrison, 2000) and has been further expanded by other researchers (see Crouch, 2003, Laurier and Philo, 2006, Lorimer, 2005, 2008). With criticisms about representations, which have played

an important role in the studies of cultural geography, Thrift (2007: 2) attempts to build up a theory about "the geography of what happens" that takes "human life [a]s based on and in movement" and "takes the leitmotif of movement and works with it as a means of going beyond constructivism" (*ibid.*: 5). That is to say, reality is not something pre-existing out there waiting for us to find it out and explain. Rather, it is something constantly constructed through/in the process of our social actions. Non-representational theory is, therefore, "a work of description of the bare bones of actual occasions" (*ibid.*: 2). Although the term 'theory' is used in the name of non-representational theory, I prefer to take non-representational theory as a style of thinking rather than a theory. As Thrift explains, non-representational theory is as "a 'third kind' of knowledge which gives up modern assumptions about knowledge" (Thrift, 2000a: 223) and "no longer exhibits an epistemological bias but is a practice and is a part of practice" (*ibid.*: 222). According to Thrift, what we need to do is to stop finding something already there but to "grasp something new, as yet unseen, that can be sensed in the emerging articulation of the appearances unfolding before our very eyes (or ears)" (Shotter, 1998: 46–47 quoted in Thrift, 2000a: 223). Nevertheless, it is not my ambition in this thesis to make arguments about the ontology and epistemology of non-representational theory. Instead, what I want to do is to take more-than-representational/non-representational theory as a style of thinking, and adopting it into the research project. Now I will draw on three of the main principles of non-representational theory delineated by Thrift and others researchers in order to articulate the tenets which are important to the thesis and its interest in the spatial formation of the bookstores, bookstore experiences, and the practice of leisure consumption outlined in the introduction.

Firstly, and central to this thesis, non-representational theory is interested in lived

experiences. It is argued by non-representational theory that the world is not built up by our minds through a group of mental process and then worked out according to our ideas and plans. Rather, "we come to know and enact a world from inhabiting it, from becoming attuned to its differences, positions and juxtapositions, from a training of our senses, dispositions and expectations and from being able to initiate, imitate and elaborate skilled lines of action" (Anderson and Harrison, 2010a: 9). In other words, the world is always unstable and unsettled and we can only encounter the very ephemeral immediacy through our practical doings. The concept of "knowing the world through doings" works as the base for non-representational theory from which to turn down the representational thinking that is considered merely mimicking the world through description explanation and which therefore is not able to come across the actual world. With that in mind, non-representational theory looks at our lived experiences within the contexts in which we are involved because they are considered the most direct and immediate clutches of the actual world (Thrift, 1996, 2007). This emphasis on the lived experiences and practical doing and knowing is strongly connected with the idea of 'body' in non-representational theory. Unlike a consideration of the body as subordinate to mind in the Cartesian dualism between mind and body, non-representational theory stresses the importance of the human body and claims our perceptions, thoughts, and understandings are actualised through our bodies (Harrison, 2000). Bodies are not places where minds live, but "dynamic trajector[ies] by which we learn to register and become sensitive to what the world is made of" (Latour, 2004: 206). Bodies, in this sense, are not just passive tools for mind to use. That is, bodies are not representations of the perceptions and intentions in our minds, or sites for the constructions or discourses to operate upon. Our bodies are constantly engaged in immediate experience and act in the present. In short, our bodies are being-in-the-world (Merleau-Ponty, 1992, Thrift, 2007). Through focusing on what

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bodies can do, Thrift (2007: 10) takes the active bodies further to argue for the "unparalleled ability to co-evolve with things" that bodies have. In this sense, bodies are not "done": work simply finishes there and is waiting to be worn off. Rather, bodies are capable of interacting with other things and together with them to "produce something which, if we could but see it, would resemble a constantly evolving distribution of different hybrids with different reaches" (Thrift, 2007: 10).

Secondly, non-representational theory focuses on practices. It is believed that the world is not planned and constructed but continuously being reconstructed by its living inhabitants (Thrift, 2004). Our lives, as our engagements with the world, are therefore processual. This concept is particularly important to the notion of practices, which might be recognised as stable customary behaviours formed and confirmed through routine actions in particular sites over a long time**.** But as we have learnt that the world is not pre-given but is engaged in various happenings, the way we behave in our ever-changing lives cannot always stay the same. In this sense, practices are no longer stable patterned behaviours of actors; rather, they are "continually in meltdown, that is continually bringing forth new hybrids" (Thrift, 2007: 8). It is, then, better to understand these practices as something that "shape the conduct of human beings towards others and themselves in particular sites" (Thrift, 1997: 127). Or to put it more artistically, the practices is not "the propert[y] of actors" (Thrift, 2007: 8), but "is a living of life itself" (Rose, 2002: 461). This non-representational style of conceptualising practices has linked practices with five orientations (Cadman, 2009). First, non-representationalists prioritise non-cognitive or pre-cognitive practices. Second, practices are not based on prior intentions but are open to unpredictable results. Third, practices are related to the concept of performative. Fourth, practices are closely tied to corporeality and materiality (I will come back to materiality in the next paragraph as

it is specifically important to this thesis). Fifth, there has been more attention paid to the production of knowledge while geographers identify the production of knowledge as a type of practice to build up theories.

Finally, non-representational theory is interested in materiality. Rather than taking human beings as the centre of concerns, non-representational theory "has always given equal weight to the vast spillage of *things"* (Thrift, 2007: 9 [emphasis in original]). As there is no single thing existing alone and being separated from one another; "everything takes-part and in taking-part, takes-place: everything happens, everything acts". (Anderson and Harrison, 2010a: 14). In other words, the social is more like a network where everything contained within it is related to each other. In such relational network, one thing can influence another. For example, Hinchliffe (2007: 309) studied community gardens and then realised that "the more a garden takes shape, the more entangled it becomes with gardeners, who are of course not only human (in the simplest of lists, insects, micro-organisms, wind, plant catalogues, fertilisers and so on, garden the garden)".

In a similar vein, as Bennett suggests, we need to recognise "the extent to which the human being and thinghood overlap, the extent to which the us and the it slip into each other" (Bennett, 2010: 4). The gardens might be seen inert and dead but they still influence the gardeners. The gardeners are inspired, encouraged and constituted. The gardens and the gardeners are engaged in an intricate, inter-related, and more-than-human world in which what seem to be inert (*e.g.* gardens) is to come alive. What is articulated here is not only the connection between human and material, but also the agency of non-human others— the vitality of objects that energise living beings. As Thrift notes, non-representational theory of materiality indicates that "the

boundaries between alive and not alive and material and immaterial have become increasingly blurred, so that what was considered as alive can become thing-like and what was considered as dead is able to show signs of life" (Thrift, 2008: 13).

To articulate the liveliness of materiality, Anderson and Wylie (2009: 332) suggests a different material imagination to think "materiality is always already scored across states (solid, liquid, gaseous) and elements (air, fire, water, earth)", and, therefore, beyond any kind of physical attributes. For Anderson and Wylie, matter is beyond the dichotomy between materialism and idealism, and the liveliness is not contrary to matter, rather, it is part of it. Through re-conceptualising the notions of perception and sensibility, it is suggested that our corporeal sensibilities and the senses of ourselves and the world are activated through the entangled matter and sense. As such, what often is related to the immateriality is now related to materiality. This different material imagination connects the material to the perceptual, the affectual, and the discursive rather than merely associate the material with the quality of solid or physical. This imagination is what Anderson (2004: 741) calls 'affective materialisms'— a materialism "that thinks through how a quasi-idealist/ quasicorporeal dimension of affect is internal, rather than in supplement or opposition, to materiality". A good example to illustrate the liveliness of materiality is the essay *Understanding the Material Practices of Glamour* by Nigel Thrift (year here?). By using the case of glamour, Thrift (2008) explicates how allure, in human-nonhuman fields of captivation, stimulates the operation of capitalism. It is within that affective field, linking affect to the aesthetic qualities of everyday life and ethics, the goods glamourise consumers and make the cultural economy thrive.

Non-representational theory therefore helps us to move beyond the conventional

concepts of materiality and towards an understanding that materiality is relational and affective and co-constitutive with the practice, the lived body, the mind, the senses, the discursive, the virtual, the immaterial, and the human world. That is the reason why non-representational theory is considered as "being *thoroughly* materialist" (Anderson and Harrison, 2010a: 14 [emphasis in original]).

## 2.2.2 Critiques of non-representational theory

Non-representational theory has gained much attention, including academic interest and critique (see Cadman, 2009, Cresswell, 2012), since it has became one of the most significant theoretical approaches in human geography. I want to spend some time here in discussing two of the critiques that are more relevant to the thesis. Taking this discussion of the critiques into account, I also want to explain the reasons why I prefer more-than-representational theory than non-representational theory. I will then suggest the ways in which critiques influence the application of non-representational theory in this research project.

The first critique comes from the concerns of representations. Non-representational theory has been making efforts to challenge representations and the representational way of thinking. That is, researchers are encouraged to stop reducing the lived, busy, noisy and sensuous world to social and cultural representations. But how can we do that? Is it possible for us to escape from representations in our daily life and in the production, delivery and modification of knowledge? Most likely the answer is 'no', because in our everyday experiences and interactions we rely on representations to share our happiness or sadness and to explain our viewpoints on all kinds of issues. We present our gratitude to others through language by saying 'thank you', through cards,

or a pack of home-made biscuits. Words, cards, and biscuits are not the gratitude itself, but are representations. As Anderson (2009: 33) rightly points out "[a]s soon as the language of the world is uttered or then heard by others, the forces of representation have taken hold". Hence, representations cannot be excluded from our daily life. In the case of the production, delivery and modification of knowledge, representations cannot be avoided either. Indeed, there is a kind of knowledge which cannot be written down and packaged; for example, music and sports. Nevertheless, in order to communicate and exchange our thoughts, concepts and viewpoints to others about this kind of 'practical knowledge', we still have to try to use representations. Just like a father teaches his daughter to ride a bike, verbal instructions cannot be absent on such occasions. In fact, Nigel Thrift and other principal instigators of non-representational theory use texts, too, to describe and explain what non-representational theory is. Perhaps Thrift and those principal instigators even rely on the representations too much, leading Cresswell (2012: 100) to raise the following question: "Given its suspicion of representation, why is work based in nonrepresentational theory so texty?". What Cresswell argues is that non-representationalists often quote obscure sentences from some of the heavyweight names of philosophy; Spinoza and Wittgenstein, for example. The researchers then work on the philosophical notions and take on the notions as inspirations for attempts to conceptualise theoretical ideas in non-representational works. But the "system of reverential referencing to texts upon texts upon texts" just makes some of the non-representational works difficult to follow (Cresswell, 2012: 100). What is more, despite the inspirations from philosophical notions which have been introduced through ingenious writings, what has been argued in those non-representational works is rather abstract and conceptual, as if they have nothing to do with the lived, busy, noisy and sensuous world which non-representationalists claim. For researchers who are interested in

non-representational theory and who are tempted to employ it, notions of how we might use the theory in research projects or when collecting and presenting data to readers are crucial. So far, there is still no 'non-representational methodology', nor has there been enough academic work thus far to offer an explanation of the ways in which non-representational theory builds up an empirical toolkit, i.e. methods and techniques, in terms of data collections in geographical fieldwork. In short, despite the theoretical contribution it has made to date, the manner in which it might be possible to use non-representational theory in fieldwork has not been explained by its principal proponents. However, there are some existing qualitative research methods, such as ethnography and observation, which have been tested and adopted. For instance, "observant participation" (Thrift, 2000d) and "performative ethnography" (Laurier, 2010) have been used in non-representational research projects. The quality of the methods used in those projects is a refusal of the notion that collection and evaluation of data can be 'pure', but rather to recognise that the real world is complicated and unpredictable; therefore, the process of undertaking research is conceived as a performance (Thrift, 1999).

Another concern in non-representational theory is how to recognise representations. After moving away from representational thinking and having adopted the name of 'non-representational', does that mean that what we face with now is the theory 'against' representations? What do representations mean to non-representational theory? Can we still use texts in conducting and presenting studies if it is accepted that the word 'bookstore' represents the image in our minds of a store wherein books are sold and the word 'bookstore' is thus a representation? According to Lorimer (2005) what non-representational thinking really censures is 'representationalism' that in the majority of cases is used by academic researchers merely to "uncover meanings and

values that apparently await our discovery, interpretation, judgement and ultimate representation" (2005: 84). In order to avoid the potential misunderstanding of representations in non-representational thoughts, Lorimer (2005) proposes the term 'more-than-representational' to replace 'non-representational'. In this thesis, I prefer to embrace "a third option, that breaks down the closed logic of either doing representational or non-representational study favours" (Anderson, 2009: 34). One of the key ideas of non-representational theory is to see the world as being in the process of constant evolution, and therefore everything, including representations, we perceive is not determined and has not already taken place. Representations should be "apprehended as performative in themselves; as doings" (Dewsbury et al., 2002: 438). Therefore, there is no problem with using any forms of representation, for instance, texts, languages, and pictures, but the enacting of representations is something to be aware of. In the case of this thesis, the discourse from Eslite excusive staff is part of the discussion. Although it is easy to assume discourses are a form of representation, by using the idea of 'representations as doings', what I am more interested in is how the discourse is produced and how it works on the Eslite staff, on the experiencescapes of bookstores, on consumers, and on the consumption practice of Eslite patrons.

The second critique of non-representational theory concerns power relations. It has been argued that non-representational theory does not pay enough attention to certain groups of people who are situated in specific power dimensions, for example, gender, race, and sexuality. This is because non-representational theory has a different viewpoint of 'subject'; instead of conceptualising 'subject' as fixed and consistent, Thrift argues for subjects within practices and performances. This new kind of subjects "desire to do more than simply squeeze meaning from the world' and 'escapes a consciousness-centred core of self-reference" (Thrift, 2007: 5). In other words, this kind

of subject actively "become[s] more involved, more complex and less certain of their boundaries and themselves" (Anderson and Harrison, 2010a: 11). As a result, no matter how stable the circumstance one is in, he/she is always able to change through practices and performances. In his review of a recent non-representational work, Cresswell (2012) notes one of his biggest worries about non-representational theory: this kind of new subject. He argues non-representational theory over-emphasises the individual scale of subjects and ignores a group subject such as identity. The "[g]roup identities appear to be thought of as either products of representational or of structural thinking (and, therefore, too fixed and pregiven)" (Cresswell, 2012: 102). In this sense, power relations are omitted in non-representational theory. Rose (2010) also outlines similar problems. He argues that it is problematic to assume we can choose a change of political terrain and move to non-representational politics. The choosing becomes a limit for non-representational theory because "it marks the threshold at which non-representational theory, as a political choice, must become representational" (Rose, 2010: 357). That is fundamentally contrary to the spirit of non-representational theory.

I agree with what Cresswell and Rose have pointed out. The awareness of power issues and political concerns is always present in my mind when I read non-representational theory. As a Taiwanese female and a student in the UK, I have had opportunities to experience a number of circumstances, including daily life and the life of studying abroad, in which I often felt I could not do more. I tried to get "more involved and less certain of the boundaries" but my efforts did not always lead me to the results for which I hoped. Although that is also fitting because of the idea that worlds cannot be expected and predicted which non-representational theory argues, my experiences showed that openness may not be as optimistic as non-representational theory implies.

Hence, I prefer to use the terminology 'more-than-representational' rather than 'non-representational'. I prefer to think a subject is as creative and energetic as Thrift portrays, but, at the same time, to recognise the 'traditional' type of group subjects. My experience suggests that in some circumstances we do not have as many choices as we like and we may not be able to escape from the political terrain we are engaging in. But, instead of focusing on oppressive structures, I will pay attention to the contexts in which those oppressive structures are able to operate, their manner of operation, and how a sense of the group subjects is generated in the doing and in the contexts of the oppressive structures. In the case of this thesis, I perceived the experiencescapes of Eslite bookstores as being built with a commercial purpose to draw consumers, and the experiencescapes create tensions. But rather than seeing the experiencescapes as static webs where power relations (company v.s. consumers) function, I took them as dynamic processes which are constantly shifting and reforming through the practices and performances of Eslite staff and of the consumers who bring with themselves a certain sense of who they are and what they should do.

## 2.2.3 More-than-representational theory and bookstore experiences

Experiencescapes, and the majority of experience spaces, have normally been understood in terms of representations. The related research has tended to focus on deciphering the meanings and constructions of the experiencescapes. For example, in his book *The Theming of America*, Gottdiener (2001) depicts the rise of themed retail environments in the United States of America. Those consumption spaces are exquisitely designed and produced through using symbolic themes to create the image of dream worlds of fantasy and pleasure. Examples of this are the Disneyland and theme hotels in Las Vegas. The reason why the themed spaces work is "because they

offer the consumer a spatial experience that is an attraction by itself, that is they promote the consumption of space" (Gottdiener, 2000: 284). In Gottdiener's work, the themed spaces are semiotic and are held to be reflections of other times and spaces. Under such circumstances, there is much to be gained from more-than-representational theory that gives priority to the ephemeral, the embodied, and the sensuous dispositions (Lorimer, 2005). That is to say, a more-than-representational style of thinking enables us to focus on how people interact with experiencescapes along with related embodied practices. In this thesis, more-than-representational theory (together with the tenets of non-representational theory stated previously) plays a significant role in inspiring discussion of bookstore experiences. For example, I am interested in the processes through which consumers are linked to the environments of bookstores thorough their corporeal experiences (Chapter 5); I am interested in how consumers' feelings and perceptions of Eslite occur and how that influences the bookstore experiences (Chapter 5); I am interested in the ways in which bookstore experience shapes consumer identities and the ways in which what bookstores do is affected by such identities (Chapter 6); I am interested in how a sense of being a certain type of consumer emerges from the bookstore experience (Chapter 6); and I am interested in how Eslite and its staff produce the designed experiencescapes (Chapter 4). In terms of the empirical investigations of this study, how can I practically capture the ongoing practices of consumer experiences and understand "what is done not what is represented" (Crang, 2003: 499)? Ethnography is considered as a profitable way to approach this because it helps to understand the world-views and ways of life of actual people from the "inside", in the contexts of their everyday, lived experiences (Cook, 2005: 167). I will discuss ethnography in detail in the next chapter. For now, I want to shift the focus to some relevant concepts from the academic literature in this field, in order to continue the conceptualisation of the

experiential geographies of Eslite bookstores.

## 2.3 It is all about experience

The first chapter presented initial thoughts relating to bricks-and-mortar bookstores as a general preoccupation in contemporary societies. It highlighted that physical bookstores do not merely carry intangible meanings but also are places which enable corporeal encounters. Unlike buying books online or downloading e-books online, physical bookstores allow their visitors to have 'real' experiences. That is, 'experience' plays an important role in contemporary bookselling culture. This offers a point of departure for the following discussions. I will begin this section by reviewing the literature related to experiences and experiencescapes. Taking the management idea of the 'experience economy' as a starting point, this section seeks to consider the shopping experience as a commodity and spaces of consumption as performance arenas for events as well as elements of events. In other words, the ways in which an experience works as a memorable event offered by retailers will be explored.

In 1982 Holbrook and Hirschman published two journal articles discussing issues relating to consumption experience and experiential consumption. The main concept in the works of Holbrook and Hirschman (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982, Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982) is that consumers do not make buying decisions based only on their rational estimates of products, but also according to their emotions, feelings, and sensuous responses to both the products and the process of their consumption. Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) point out that previous studies of consumer behaviour tended to focus on the principles which consumers think about, examine, and then use to decide whether or not to purchase a particular product. In this type of study, the

experiential, emotional and aesthetic aspects are neglected. In other words, questions like 'how do consumers feel about the product?', 'do consumers think the product is pretty?', 'does the product help consumers to dream?', and 'do consumers enjoy shopping in stores?' were not considered. Yet, in many situations, emotions are vital to consumption. For example, when taking a family holiday in the summer, people often want to visit a beautiful beach in sunny weather, and enjoy activities such as diving, sun-bathing, and surfing, so that a happy, fun, and memorable family holiday can be experienced. Concerns for a family holiday in summer centre on "various playful activities, sensory pleasures, daydreams, aesthetic enjoyment, and emotional responses", which is exactly what Holbrook and Hirschman (1982: 132) call an "experiential view" of consumption. Consumption experience, according to Holbrook (1995: 419) is "a gestalt that results from a complex system of mutually overlapping interrelationships in constant reciprocal interaction with personal, environmental, and situational inputs". Other than the utilisation of products, the stress on experiences inspires us to acknowledge consumption as "involving a steady flow of fantasies, feelings, and fun" (ibid.: 132).

Holbrook and Hirschman's studies are generally regarded as the origin of experiential marketing (Frow and Payne, 2007). The experiential aspects of consumption, introduced by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), has been explored in order to give insights to studies related to consumption such as consumer behaviour (Holbrook, 1999, Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982), business and management (Pine and Gilmore, 1999), and marketing (Schmitt, 1999, Schmitt et al., 2008). However, Holbrook (2006) declares that the concept of consumption experience is not an extremely new one in the subject of consumer studies, management, and marketing. Arguably, some researchers have studied issues of consumption experiences since the 1950s. For

example, Abbott (1955) argues that consumption experiences are the foundation for increasing customer value, and Lebergott (1993) claims that the concept of consumption experience dates from studies by Keynes, Marshall, and Adam Smith. In spite of Holbrook's modesty, most current researchers investigate consumption experiences across a wide range, taking as a starting point Holbrook and Hirschman's concept of hedonic consumption and the experiential aspect of consumption, and have published many works with a special concern for managing customer experiences. It is suggested that, in the studies of consumption experiences, Holbrook and Hirschman indeed play a significant role.

Similarly, Pine and Gilmore (1999) propose that "experience economy" is a new type of economic offering, and argue that consumer experience is the core value in the process of consumption. Pine and Gilmore (1999: 5) divide the human economic progression into four periods, the first of which was the agriculture-based economy, when earnings came from raw materials such as wheat. The second period was the industrial economy, in which commodities were tangible products, and the third was the service economy in which customised activities were offered. Finally, the fourth, also advocated by Pine and Gilmore, was the experience economy, where the things for which consumers pay are no longer commodities, or even services they require, but memorable events which are sophisticatedly provided by enterprises. The 'Experience Economy' as proposed by Pine and Gilmore, is a new type of economic offering. For example, in terms of the Disney Company, Pine and Gilmore (1999: 3, 41, 67) explain that the success of Disney World has come about because consumers are invited to explore every facility in the park by means of various well-designed events. Disney World provides consumers with a unique experience, and they enjoy themselves because they are engaging in all sorts of sensory experiences. Another example is British Airways. To see the company

beyond its role as a conventional transportation business, the former British Airways chairman, Sir Colin Marshall, states the philosophy of British Airways clearly; that is, to "go behind the function and compete on the basis of providing an experience" (ibid.: 4). British Airways takes itself further than being a transporter, and tries to relieve the stress and discomfort of passengers by offering them elaborate inboard experiences (ibid.: 81). Pine and Gilmore suggest that, to provide memorable experiences, business enterprises should look beyond their traditional roles and regard themselves as performers, working in the theatre, treating every business as a stage (Pine and Gilmore, 1999: 101). By using drama as a model, it is proposed that guidelines to deliver performances have five steps, the first of which is to set up a theme for the experience. Setting up a theme is like composing the main point of a story. The theme must be distinct, straightforward, and significant. A well-defined theme will influence how consumers think and feel about time, space, and other factors. Although there is no need to make the theme public, it is essential to ensure that the company follows the theme in terms of operating the business and hosting the event, since if consumers do not pick up on the theme clearly, their memory of the experience would not be vivid. The second step is to ensure that consumers have a profound impression of the experience by providing them with positive cues. After setting up a theme, the company needs to give consumers an impression, which can be taken away and planted in their minds to support the theme. It is suggested that they offer consumers positive cues consistent with the theme, so that they will be able to discover the nature of the experiences via these cues. The third step is to eliminate negative cues, since apart from providing positive cues, it is important to avoid any unwanted ones which may undermine the theme. The fourth step is to offer memorabilia, since one of the best ways to reinforce consumers' memories of a particular experience is to sell them souvenirs. Many consumers are happy to pay for souvenirs because, when they see

them, they remind them of their pleasurable experience. The last step is to engage all of the consumer's five senses, since sensual stimulation can be used to deepen the impression of their experiences. Generally speaking, the more senses consumers use, the better experience they tend to have.

However, not every company makes the same demands. Choosing appropriate sensual stimulations for different themes and for different companies is a major concern. The concept of 'Experience Economy' gives an insight into operating businesses through offering memorable experiences. Using drama as a prototype, Pine and Gilmore encourage retailers to run their businesses along these lines and to attract more consumers thus. Although Pine and Gilmore stand by their management discipline and mainly focus on business strategies, the character of work, of staff and of the workplace which Pine and Gilmore outline in their theory is inspiring for geographical studies. For Pine and Gilmore (1999, 2013), performing an outstanding event on stage is essential to the business . Every detail, from the staff suite to shop floors, plays an important role and requires careful consideration. Therefore, the spaces of the shop "must become a distinctive place for staging an experience" (Pine and Gilmore, 1999: 42-43). A retail space here is twofold. One is a place for staging. The space works as an arena where staff is playing, performance is showed, and consumers are involved. The other aspect of this is that a retail space is a vital element of the experience itself. Retailers who adopt the concept of experience economy to run their business ultimately aim to make their consumers engage in the performances. Consumers are not expected as audiences, but rather as participants (I will look at consumers further in section 2.4). The retail spaces constitute the ways, the time, and the degree of consumers' participations. The spaces of shops are far beyond concrete sales floors.

Especially in the case of physical bookstores, the spaces of bookstores have the irreplaceable quality of touch and feel which online bookstores cannot offer to their patrons. What physical bookstores can do goes beyond being transaction places for books. Physical bookstores offer particular bookstore experiences to their patrons. O'Dell and Billing (2005) use the terminology "experiencescape" to describe sites of consumption as stylised landscapes that are to a great extent strategically planned and laid out. These stylised landscapes are spaces wherein experiences are staged, delivered, and consumed. Applying Lefebvre's idea of space, O'Dell (O'Dell, 2005) acknowledges that space in general is understood in the way it is perceived, conceived and lived: physical material attributes that in themselves are produced by an amalgam of social activities that can be measured, observed, or described. They also acknowledge that space can be planned and manipulated to exert a certain degree of influence on users' senses and sensations. The manipulated spaces offer room for the plotting of experiences, where these experiences can also be staged and consumed, as well as the sites to offer the memorable events for consumers to immerse themselves in. The concept of 'experiencescape' is similar to Bitner's (1992) notion of 'servicescape', which is defined and popularised to describe the physical and psychological design of built environments in which a service is provided and delivered. Bitner unfolds the cognitive, emotional, and psychological perspectives of consumer responses to the material surroundings. Retail spaces can be considered an environmental and psychological method of promoting sales in which the items themselves are not just the ones being promoted but rather the entire experience of being there is what encourages a person to go there in the first place (Bitner, 1992). The environments for consumption and the experiential dimension of consumption are what O'Dell emphasises, too. However, different people might be engaged in an experiencescape in different ways since experiences "can never be fully predicted or

controlled as they depend on co-producing the performance of visitors and the interrelations of entities" (Svabo et al., 2013: 321). Therefore, what retailers concern should not be to 'design an experience', but to 'design for experiences' as Svabo et al (Svabo et al., 2013: 322) recognises, 'actual experience emerges as visitors (consumers/users) are engaged with spatial designs and with the social situations that ritualize and help shape experiences'. Spatial designs, according to Svabo, are what retailers need to be devoted to. In a similar vein, the urban design scholar Anna Klingmann, emphasises that spatial design and architecture are part of the experience economy. Klingmann (2007: 19) argues, 'for architecture, in the experience economy, the relative success of design lies in the sensation a consumer derives from it— in the enjoyment it offers and the resulting pleasure it evokes'. Instead of concerning the forms and functions that architecture has, Klingmann focuses on the experience and the sensations that the buildings and places offer to the users (see also O'Dell (2010) for the emphasis on senses and sensations in the experience economy). Spaces of consumption in the late-modern societies are no longer places for business transactions; rather, they are a "dizzying proliferation of settings that allow, encourage, and even compel us to consume" (Ritzer, 1999: 2). Instead of commodities in the shops, these spaces of consumption are becoming the objects of consumption; in other words, they are what consumers pay for (Urry, 1995). In this sense, the geographic location of consumers and the various circumstances in which they find themselves are significant to consumption experiences.

That these sites of consumption entice a customer to come to their locations is not just a matter of having the best product at the lowest cost but rather of presenting a certain image and ambience wherein people are attracted by pleasant experiences. The numerous malls and theme parks around the world, hotels in Las Vegas, the Dubai

Shopping Centre in the United Arab Emirates, and Disneyland are strong cases for experiencescapes. The design of these malls and theme parks can be considered a vast waste of space and electricity, with large avenues that could have been occupied by shops and products. But what we see are waiting areas, indoor fountains, fancy sculptures as well as expensive air conditioning systems. These equipments may seem like a waste of sales floors. However, people have a tendency to congregate around such places in order to attain the various experiences which are plotted and staged in the areas. The reason for such extravagances in a shopping mall is that people are attracted by presentation and the way in which they would be able to experience something beyond just shopping for goods and services (Tynan and McKechnie, 2009). In short, where and how a product is presented plays an important role in encouraging a sale. Businesses must find new ways of adding value to their enterprises by enhancing the consumer experiences. In order to do so, businesses must recognise that "experiences are a distinct economic offering" that can "provide the key to future economic growth"; "experiences in themselves represent an existing but previously unarticulated genre of economic output" and as such should be used in order to bring about success for the company (Pine and Gilmore, 1999: ix-x). It is due to this that the focus of most retail companies today is on enhancing the customer service through store design, customer relations, rules and regulations as well as through constant change in order to meet the needs of a variety of customers. Aesthetics and designs have become significant to retailers because they offer distinct shopping experience to customers. Therefore, it is important that retailers pay attentions to "things, environments, situations and events, and a wide range of materials [which] play active roles as mediators of experience" Svabo (2013: 316). Moreover, customer service is also crucial in making a shop appealing. In order to create an atmosphere in which customers would feel at ease and welcome, employees need to provide assistance and

any required help in a friendly and professional manner.

Although an experiencescape is a site specially made to deliver particular experiences, the formation of an experiencescape is a complicated process in which the relevant actants, including the company, the planner or designer, store staffs, and consumers, negotiate with each other (Sundbo and Sørensen, 2013). Take the points of sale as example: store staff are at the front line of business and as such are responsible for direct interaction with customers. Store staff members are therefore trained to have professional services skills in order to make consumers feel at ease. Despite the particular experiences planned by the higher level of a company, store staffs are important actors in delivering designed experiences and ensuring consumers have the desired experience, as are consumers.

In his work, *The Production of Space* (1991), Lefebvre pays constant attention to what is known as the everyday practices of life. This makes his work applicable to studies of spaces of consumption wherein large numbers of day-to-day shopping activities are performed. Lefebvre notes in numerous parts of his work that there is a link between representation and imagination within the physical spaces. He provides a conceptual framework from which the spatial everyday practices of human life can be understood to be central to the production and continued maintenance of physical spaces. The concept of abstract space, which can be described as a commodified and bureaucratised space, takes precedence over concrete space (known also as the space of everyday life and experience). For such a space to become dominant a concerted effort must be made to articulate an appropriate meaning and suitable activities that can take place within the dominant abstract space. For example, a church is meant to be a space of religion. The actions of a visitor in a church are very much different from

those outside of it. Whereas the visitor may normally speak loudly outside, he/she is humble and quiet inside the church. In this sense, the creation of an abstract space in itself implies a tacit agreement (Lefebvre, 1991: 56). A space is not just the construct or the building but rather a social product that in a way serves as a tool of social thoughts and actions. It can be associated with a method or idea applied to a certain space. But the idea can only applied to the space successfully if all actors, including the visitor in the example of church, agree to take action in a predetermined way. An experiencescape is produced to ensure its visitors have certain moods, feelings, actions, and behaviours. Nevertheless, there is always uncertainty in that visitors of the experiencescape may not act according to the plot set by the producers of the experiencescape. This is because consumers are unmanageable (Gabriel and Lang, 2006). It is from this point that it is possible to interpret the formation of an experiencescape itself is a complicated process for the reason that it is created through the collaboration of many different actants. Negotiations and collaborations are needed in any joint endeavour since a uniform result is hardly guaranteed. But in short, experiencescapes are well-constructed entities with specific commercial purposes designed to offer specific experiences.

## 2.4 Consumers, strategies and tactics

Taiwan's commentators argue that Eslite has improved the reading climate of Taiwanese society, making hanging around bookstores "a cool leisure activity" (Shih, 2006). The business circle has previously paid some attention to issues in terms of the commercial movements of Eslite (Lee, 2009). Academic criticism, meanwhile, has taken the form of explorations of issues such as the manner and function of the physical spatial arrangement in Eslite bookstores (Ou, 1997, Xie, 1999), and how purchasing

books is re-defined as a tasteful behaviour by Eslite (Hong, 1997, Wu, 2006). The majority of the reports, comments, and studies centre on the spectacular part of the company – how a national company builds up such bookselling empire, how Eslite invents new type of bookstores, and how the spatial arrangement help to encourage consumers to read and to purchase. Nevertheless, there has been a dearth of attention paid to consumers – why they visit the bookstores, what they actually do in Eslite bookstores, how they use the bookstores, how they make sense of the spaces designed and presented by Eslite, and how bookstore experiences matter to them. This has brought about a methodological approach to this research which encompasses both Eslite and its consumers. As LUNG Ying-Tai, a university professor who was also the commissioner of Department of Cultural Affairs as part of the Taipei city government, reminds us,

> Eslite bookstores are significant cultural landmarks for many Chinese-speaking people. The success of Eslite is not merely based upon the business strategies, but upon the openness and diversity of the society and upon the huge amount of readers who endorse Eslite's philosophy and identify themselves with the philosophy. (Yu and Yang, 2005)

According to Ms Lung, the readers and Taiwanese society as a whole play important roles in the success of Eslite. Eslite's success and the reasons for its bookstores' continued presence in the awareness of Taiwanese society is not, for Ms Lung, entirely dependent on the company. Instead, visitors of Eslite should be given credits, too. The survival of Eslite bookstores is one of the greatest forms of evidence of the continued patronage which the stores enjoy. Despite contributions from and the enduring support of its patrons, many visitors in Eslite bookstores "use the store as a library, reading without ever buying", as Shemper observes (Shemper, 2004, para 2). The reason visitors choose to browse in Eslite bookstores rather than its competitors may be to take advantage of the bookstores' ambience that attracts the customers. The

ways visitors use Eslite bookstores sometimes exceed the expectations of Eslite. In order to understand the various "faces" consumers have, this section will establish a standpoint by which we might conceptualise consumers. The section starts by examining the limitations of approaching consumers as passive subalterns or free decision-makers. It then explores the idea of agents, in the Giddensian definition, to develop notions of consumers. Finally, de Certeau's idea of "strategies and tactics" will be introduced to continue the acknowledgement of 'active' consumers and at the same time, to focus on the practical 'doing' which echoes the practice and performativity stressed in the more-than-representational theory.

## 2.4.1 Passive subalterns or proactive actor

There has been a wide range of studies on consumers, within economics, psychology, and sociology among others. Generally speaking, there are two leading accounts from studies on consumers. One is from a political and economic viewpoint, emphasising the ways in which consumers are manipulated by producers and marketing. The other is based on cultural studies, and stresses the freedom and creativity of consumers. Although consumers play the main role in both accounts, they tend to stand for opposite points of view. Traditionally, political economic studies lay particular stress on production (see Holton, 1992 for explicit discussions). The social relations of production and exchange are the core issues in this perspective. Consumption is considered along with ideas such as commodification and domination. Consumers are studied with regard to the ways in which producers manipulate them. For example, Ritzer (1999) introduces the idea of 'cathedrals of consumption' to argue that consumers are manipulated to consume more than they need by the 'enchanted' retail spaces.

In the last two decades, there has been a 'cultural turn' in the social studies of the economy (Du Gay, 1997, Ray and Sayer, 1999). Researchers started to be concerned with meaning, identity, and representation and their roles and impact on economic activities and economic development. In such recognition, culture is seen as inseparable from economics and also politics and society. Although the 'cultural turn' brings insights into the interlacing relations between the cultural and the economic, concerns on the determination from economic conditions are still central to these studies. Adorno's work on the 'culture industry' is a good example of a study that shows how consumers passively receive the symbolic meanings of cultural commodities (Adorno, 1991). The domination that producers intend to apply on consumers is through discourses which make consumers submit themselves to the claims of the media and markets. Being in control has more to do with meanings of commodity and ideologies of consumption. In this account, consumers either blindly obey the manipulation from producers or simply receive created social-cum-cultural signs. Consumers are always determined by the producer and capitalists; they are not able to escape from the social structure. However, other authors (Storey, 1999, Willis, 1990) contest this, and argue that this account overlooks consumer agency so that consumers are misconceived as passive and easily played upon.

In other accounts, cultural studies focus on the ways in which consumers actively use and estimate commodities, create and express themselves through consumption practices (Bocock, 1993, Featherstone, 1987). Among all interpretations of creative consumers, Willis' (1990) research on young people is a significant one. Willis shows how young consumers endow commodities with new meanings, actively interpret advertising, and construct their own culture through consumption. Therefore, young consumers possess the symbolic creativity which makes them inventive in everyday

consumption. Willis (1990: 128) argues that young people are creative producers. In this account, consumer sovereignty is celebrated. Consumers are free to decide what they want to buy, and they invent new meanings for the products they purchase. Through choosing products and creating meanings, consumers create the self-identities they crave and show distinctions between themselves and others. As individuals, consumers can satisfy their own desires by estimating the market mechanism to seek their own benefits; at the same time, they do not need to sacrifice their consumer autonomy. Consumers seem to be sovereign in consumption. However, as Hall (1996) warns us, it is a failure if we only count cultural studies and ignore the economic conditions of cultural practice in daily life. To approve the active role of consumers and to understand how consumers use and divert commodities is meaningful in acknowledging consumption. But at the same time, the conditions determined by the economy cannot be neglected, or weak theoretical paradigms will mislead consumption-related studies. Both of these two accounts have their own theoretical positions and stand for specific interpretations of consumption in certain contexts. When conceptualising consumption as a complex practice engaged in social and spatial relations, it seems unconvincing either to consider consumers as passive subalterns or free decision-makers, as it is not possible to reduce the diversity among consumers and the diversity of circumstances in which consumers are involved into one of two models, either passive or active (Ritzer et al., 2001); neither slaves who obey nor free sovereigns can fully capture the nature of consumers. But then how can we conceptualise consumers? Giddens's concept of 'agency' might be a good starting point.

## 2.4.2 Consumer agency

In his work *The Constitution of Society*, Giddens (1984) makes a detailed exploration of the connection between structure and agency. He identifies structure as "recursively organized sets of rules and resources" (1984: 25), and agency as a person's ability to do things (ibid.: 9). Giddens argues that, through human activities, social structures are unceasingly produced and reproduced, but at the same time they are the medium of human activities. Agency is considered as the foundation of actions, and is therefore formative in terms of human activities. Accordingly, "the constitution of agents and structures are not two independently given set of phenomena… but represent a duality" (Giddens, 1984: 25). What Structuration theory offers us is a distinctive perspective with which to conceptualise structure and agency. Social structures cannot be longer considered as contrary to agency; rather, they are inevitably connected. Giddens goes further in depicting the profile of people as agents. In the Oxford English Dictionary, the definition of agent is "one who exerts power or produces an effect" (Giddens, 1984: 9). The definition shows clearly the ability of people who can take actions in given situations and makes a difference. For Giddens, every agent is knowledgeable and reflexive. On the one hand, agents have the knowledge to deal with questions of what to do in their everyday life, and they are able to describe their actions and reasons for doing that through language (Giddens, 1984: 4-5). On the other hand, agents would reflexively monitor their everyday actions to exercise their life-projects (1984: 5-6). Because of their knowledge and reflexivity, agents continuously implement their power to make things happen. Giddens (1984: 176) notes that we need to appreciate the proper role of agents in our social worlds, otherwise we will fail to understand how the social world is constructed by persistent actions of agents. Traditionally, people who focus on how consumers are restricted by social structures and cultural conventions

see consumers as passive subalterns. For those who take the consumer as the subject of consumption, they focus on how consumers actively interpret the meanings of commodities and employ commodities creatively in order to make up their life. Consumers are seen as free creators. However, Giddens' theory of Structuration offers a new way of seeing consumers. Although structures restrict people, they are comprised of recursive social practices. That is, we need to understand that consumers sustain restrictions from the context of the situation; however, they are capable of grasping options within these restrictions and using the opportunity to create the lifestyle they desire. Consumers are not necessarily passive subalterns or free decision-makers; they can be both or neither. One thing we can learn from Giddensian agents is that there is no single face of consumers, and it is not important to categorise consumers into different faces. Rather, the key to understanding consumers is in the structure in which consumers are situated, and how consumers conduct consumption practices as agents, and how they react to the structure.

However, there are two defects in Giddens's idea of agency. Firstly, the reflexive rationality of individuals is overstressed while other facets - emotions and embodied experiences - are ignored in the consideration of interaction between agents and structures. Giddens argues that individuals carry out "reflexive monitoring" on their everyday actions and that they "maintain a continuing 'theoretical understanding' of the grounds of their activity" (Giddens, 1984: 5). The rationality to reflexively examine the self and the knowledge to conduct daily routine activities are indeed, in Giddens' sense, significant to agents. What we can see from Giddensian agents are intentions and knowledge. Although they may not be able to discursively specify their reasons for certain behaviours, through reflexive monitoring actors are able to clarify their intentions and purposes. It seems that individuals always know what they are doing

and what they need/want to do. However, as human beings, our nature is far more than mere rationality. We also have emotions, desires, sensations, and the like. Mestrovic gives an insightful comment, saying that the Giddensian agent is the person who has a 'brain' but no heart (Mestrovic, 1998: 78). There is a need to consider the non-rational nature of consumers because consumption is much more complicated than simply making and applying reasonable decisions to transactions. Secondly, while Giddens points out that individuals are able reflexively to make choices in their everyday lives, he does not explain the 'actual doing' of the actors. In other words, the processes of doing the routinized practices which Giddens talks about are reduced to rational choices. Giddens says little about the conditions of the consumer society and in what ways consumers actualise their choice through exercising their agency. To think further than whether individuals are capable of making decisions and think reflexively to make their lives in the way they prefer, I suggest we look at how the individuals actually enact the banal practices Giddens mentions through de Certeau's (1984) concept of strategies and tactics.

### 2.4.3 Strategies and tactics

Having addressed the capability of consumers, in this section I will explore Michel de Certeau's idea of strategies and tactics to see how consumers defend themselves empirically in the battle with retailers/companies. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau (1984) describes consumption as a site of resistance and consumers as creative agents who invent tactics to resist powerful corporations. He argues that when individuals face the imposed law of the place (e.g. the marketplace) which is designed to present strategies, tactics are invented to offer a number of ways to transgress the specific places. According to de Certeau, strategies are employed by "a subject of will

and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution)" to produce, to control, and to organise a place "from which relations with an exteriority composed of targets or threats (customers or […] objectives and objects of research, etc.) can be managed" (ibid: 35-36). Therefore, a strategy is the game of the powerful promulgated through defining a place, through the exercise of its own power and will, and then to manipulate the behaviours of users of that place. Tactics, in de Certeau's words, "are clever tricks of the 'weak' within the order established by the 'strong', an art of putting one over on the adversary on his own turf, hunter's tricks, manoeuvrable, polymorph mobilities, jubilant, poetic, and warlike discoveries" (1984: 40). Michel de Certeau links strategies with the practice in which institutions and structures demarcate realms and develop procedures in order to exercise their power and will, while tactics are the expedients that individuals employ to act in these defined realms in order to attain or further their own interests and desires (1984: 35-39). Taking walking in a city as an example, de Certeau suggests that as the roads and pathways are outcomes of the city-planning of the government, they therefore have a power which is inherently part of the official system. However, by walking in a city in day-to-day life, the city landscape may be changed as citizens find their own routes and directions which depart from the designers' original planned routes. De Certeau comments:

> … if it is true that a spatial order organises an ensemble of possibilities...and interdictions..., then the walker actualises some of these possibilities. In that way, he makes them exist as well as emerge. But he also moves them about and he invents others, since the crossing, drifting away, or improvisation of walking privilege, transform or abandon spatial elements. (de Certeau, 1984: 98)

The walker might only walk in some parts of the constructed order, choose his/her own shortcut, or he/she may even avoid walking on those paths that are considered accessible. He/she creates his/her own routes. For de Certeau, the walker has a double

agency, to both evade and disrupt the infrastructure of power (de Certeau, 1984: 98-99). Citizens are active in creating their own identities, rather than passively positioned as 'consumers'. Moreover, walker might create their own ways of using the space and thus avoid direct opposition to retailers or attendants.

Taking the example of the walker to consider consumers, it is suggested that consumers are actually far more active in their actions than most people realise despite consumers are commonly assumed to be passive and subversive. Through using these clever tricks, consumers are not manipulated by the established rules and spaces imposed by producers or media (1984: 29-42). The term 'consumers' utilised by de Certeau indicates in a broader sense individuals who use up goods and spaces shaped by authorities. De Certeau describes these consumers as manoeuvring within the territory of an alien power in order to accomplish their own ends. For example, a person exploring a city for the first time or a tenant inhabiting a room in a landlord's apartment might consume the city/room in ways which do not match the expectations of the city planners or the landlord. That is, while being in these functionalised spaces produced with certain apparatuses, consumers have their own ways of using spaces. Throughout his work, de Certeau postulates that the 'consumer' will act in a manner that is usually not in accordance with the established rules. Consumers are able to appropriate what producers offer in ways which suit their own agendas, thus effectively short-circuiting the dominant constraints imposed by or acting upon the producers. On the one hand, tactics such as these are creative practices which are potentially difficult to resist and which may divert authority and power. On the other hand, through those creative practices consumers are actively engaging with the spaces. These practices can, therefore, be understood as useful tools to subvert and affect the socio-spatial environments in which we exist. Through the actions of the

consumer a new space could be created.

Commenting on de Certeau's work, Bukatman (2000: 159-161) considers that the most valuable contributions of de Certeau's work are the capability of consumers and their ways to survive in the power relations between themselves and retailers. Although the products are given social and cultural meanings by designers or retailers, the meanings are expressed and embodied only through the acts of consumers. Consumers are creative in making their own means of consumption and creating the meanings of products (de Certeau, 1984: 29-37). From de Certeau's observations, the practice of everyday life is a means to interfere with and appropriate power. Power plays an important role in analysing consumption studies. Discussion on consumption spaces have disclosed the power operation within the relationship between production and consumption; that is, the retailers, designers and advertisers, through their production of enchanting settings in order to dominate consumers. The outcome is that consumers are manipulated in order to be engaged passively and exploited actively in the process of consumption (see Adorno and Horkheimer, 2007). Using this 'top down' approach to power relations seems too pessimistic a route to appreciate consumers' agency. But de Certeau's work helps to "understand how people, identities and bodies are disciplined and differentiated in specific contexts" (Mansvelt, 2005: 23), and to form the ways of operating through which we see the ways in which people take opportunities to resist being determined by the contexts. Through the use of de Certeau's idea, the commercial purposes and the particular configuration of spaces that are afforded by the experiencescapes of Eslite bookstores can be explored to assess the strategies Eslite uses, to explore the behaviours Eslite wants the consumers to enact, and to address what kind of 'proper places' Eslite wants to establish. At the same time, there is a possibility that experiencescapes themselves can be constructed

by both companies/retailers and consumers. Accordingly, in the case of Eslite and its bookstores, the visitors of Eslite are capable of using "a manoeuvre within the enemy's field of vision… and within an enemy territory" (de Certeau, 1984: 37) to re-shape the experiencescapes through their consumption practices.

## 2.5 The geographies of retail space

The aim of this thesis is to explore the production and the consumption of experiencescapes in Eslite bookstores. Although Eslite bookstores are commercial sites, we have learnt, from the reports and articles on newspaper and magazine, there are more than mere transactions going on there. There are various activities, such as free concerts, book clubs, cooking demonstrations, and storytelling for children, hosted in Eslite bookstores. And there are different types of 'shops' inside Eslite bookstores including bookshops, stationery shops, tea shops/cafés, restaurants, specific cultural and creative products selling points, and so on. The spaces of Eslite bookstores are engaged in a wide web of everyday life. To understand retail spaces in particular, I now want to turn to the existing research. The attention is specially paid to two aspects. The first one is to survey the production and consumption of retail space in existing studies. This provides the understanding of how retail spaces are created and used and the practices associated with them. The second one is to articulate the interest on the affectual, emotional, and experiential geographies in more recent works.

### 2.5.1 The production and consumption of retail space

Work on the geographies of consumption has expanded speedily in the last two decades, bringing aspects of both the economic and the cultural spheres together.

Traditionally, studies dealing with the economic perspective place their focus on the retail site and economic activities. The main concerns in this type of studies include retail organisation, corporate strategy (Clark, 1993), market structures (Christopherson, 1993, Clark, 1994), consumer decision (Mittelstaedt et al., 1977) and store location (Guy, 1980). But in the last two decades, there has been a 'cultural turn' in the social studies of the economy (Du Gay, 1997, Ray and Sayer, 1999). It is argued that the economy is inseparable from culture since there are more and more cultural goods, such as fashion and literature, produced and circulated through the market and by mass media. Symbolic meanings, popular cultures, and identities have been connected with economic studies. For example, Bocock (1993) considers consumption as an active process which relates to self-identification. In order to become what one wants to be, the individual has to devote himself/herself to consumption. And because identity is not about class, race or other structural status, the initiative to consume is especially significant in creating identity. Consumption is the key through which individuals position themselves. Featherstone (1991) creates a term "aestheticisation of everyday life" to describe how consumers actively utilise signs to construct and express their daily life. Featherstone indicates that daily life is actually an artistic work to a certain extent as through consumption people are able to follow their own will to use commodities, clothes, and even experiences to create the life they desire. The 'cultural turn' encourages geographers to break the boundaries of geography itself and overlaps with studies in other disciplines. This cultural turn has brought geographers from focusing on the economic dimension on retail spaces *per se* to carefully consider how culture and economy are entangled through practices and therefore to overcome the separation of economic and cultural geographies. Consumption is not only culturally driven, but also socially and spatially driven (Frith, 1978, Valentine, 1995, Zukin, 1998). Zukin (1998) indicated that the environment, especially in the cities, is lived in spaces

of consumption. Zukin argues that citizens are able to spend more time (non-work time) on consumption because the modes of economic activities have changed from Fordism to post-Fordism and a more flexible system of production. Built-up retail spaces are, therefore, developed through local area planning schemes, which might be supported by local governments. Moreover, Zukin (1998) argued that consumption in such spaces is not purely economical, rather it is also spatial, social and cultural. Retail spaces, such as malls and shopping districts, are environments created with a clear purpose to encourage the consumption of goods and services. These retail spaces normally offer amenities through restaurants, cafes and theatres, to evoke and satisfy citizens' and consumers' desires. What we consume are not only goods and services but also other things, such as the environment, which is out of the categories of goods and services. In this sense, based on the spatial arrangement, associations, and display of commodities (including goods and services), retail spaces are sites for the displaying, performing, consuming and producing of symbols through consumption practices (1998).

Most of the current researches on retail spaces mainly focus in two fields. The first one concentrates on the production of spaces to examine how these are produced by the retailer to promote sales. Studies include spectacularly built environments such as shopping centres, mega malls and theme parks. Ritzer (1999) introduces the idea of 'cathedrals of consumption' to explain how spectacular retail spaces are developed to allow, encourage, induce and even seduce consumers to pay for as many products as they can, including tangible goods and intangible services. The central idea of the 'cathedrals of consumption' is different from traditional political economic studies: people who are exploited are not labourers/workers but consumers. The 'cathedrals of consumption' display themselves in an enchanting form to which consumers can

undertake pilgrimages. The retail spaces thus become locations where people are able to actively practice the religion of consumption. Cathedrals of consumption, in Ritzer's argument, are aggregates of material space, workers' labour, services, ways of selling and so on. Therefore, what enables consumers to purchase is not only the spatial form and its function, but also the "setting" or "structure" of cathedrals of consumption (Ritzer, 1999: 6).

Among all the spectacular retail spaces, shopping malls are widely regarded as one of the iconic examples. In his essay *The 'Magic of the Mall'*, Goss (1993) examines the form, function and meaning of shopping malls to understand how they are constructed by retailers and designers to facilitate consumption and to manipulate consumers in order to promote purchase and potentiate revenue. While we might consider shopping malls as simply convenient sites for us to do one-stop-shopping, there are carefully regulated by an abundance of techniques to promote or to prevent some consumer behaviours. For example, escalator are located in certain places to make consumers pass as many shopfronts as possible and to prevent consumers from leaving sales floors too quickly. Moreover, as malls are privately owned retail spaces rather than public places, security staff is there to discourage certain types of behaviour and some groups of visitors (e.g. the homeless).

Apart from the functions and forms served to enhance consumption, shopping malls are also powerful semiotic systems. Shopping malls may seen to be innocent and authentic, but they are places "where Spanish galleons sail up Main Street past Marks and Spencer to put in at "New Orleans", where everything is tame and happy shoppers mingle with smiling dolphins" (Shields, 1989: 154). By using particular objects and settings to make various effects which brings Baudrillardian simulacrum of different

time and space, the designers/retailers create a 'spatiotemporal haze' (Shields, 1989: 152). The calculation of retail capitalism in the mall is packed, disguised, and shown as fantasy tour in the dream world for consumers to enter and realise their dreams. Goss (1999), drawing on North American shopping experiences, demonstrate how themes used in shopping malls reflect the desire that consumers want to experience something special and extravagant. Goss goes on to argue that shopping malls are built environments to "assuage collective guilt over conspicuous consumption" (Goss, 1993: 19) through architecture, interior design and themes that blur the link between shopping and purchase. Shopping malls, Goss (1999: 71) notes, "bringing together collective myth and individual memory and fantasy" to provide psychological comfort like religion does. Studies of shopping malls demonstrate how retail spaces are imagined, planned, and produced by the producers (architects, designers, mall owners and retailers) to allure as well as regulate consumers' shopping practices. Those studies also indicate the change of design in retail spaces. Previously, the design of retail spaces was more about on the function and efficiency; but now the design has to incorporate culturally charged symbols (Gottdiener, 2001). The above researches on shopping malls show that spectacular retail spaces are produced by entrepreneurs as entertainment sites to attract, allure, and at the same time, also to constrain and discipline the shoppers.

The second type of the current researches on retail spaces is to shift the focus on retailers to consumers. This type of work emphasis on the consumption of retail spaces to understand how consumers actively interpret meanings of the spaces and use the spaces for their own purposes. With the acknowledgement of the empirical dimension of consumption—experience— studies of consumption are able to place the concerns from an economic context *per se* on to the integration with social, cultural, and

geographical spheres. That is, although the act of purchase is essential to consumption, there are other significant elements which need to be considered, especially when the significant elements are indivisible from the transaction. In a number of ethnographic studies on young people, it is shown that teenagers are 'unacceptable flaneurs' who use the mall as a place to hang out (Matthews et al., 2000, White, 1993, Vanderbeck and Johnson, 2000). Although in this case young people is not imbued with a conscious intention of going against the retailers in terms of using the malls for their own good, as a safe environment the malls are ideal for young people to do something beyond the commercial function of the malls—specifically to linger around and to meet friends. The way how teenagers 'misuse' shopping malls demonstrates the potential that consumers have to escape from the manipulation of the producers. With the same interest on shopping malls, Shields (1989) places his focus on the ways in which consumers use malls in his investigation on the West Edmonton Mall in Canada. Shields discover that shoppers in many occasions use the well-controlled retail space in ways that contest the control or disregarding the control. Shoppers, in Shields's research, have their own cultural ideas and ideological principles that might not be the same as what retailers intend to state. West Edmonton Mall therefore does not only "promote a new representation of space and encourages the elaboration of the corresponding spatial practice of *[unmanageable consumers]* but also constructs […] a space of representation, a space in which the social imaginary is opened to new visions" (Shields, 1989: 153). Although studies on shopping malls from the perspective of production stress how consumers are overwhelmed by the spectacular consumption environments, the above studies of shopping malls show that the spell of the malls may not always work on consumers.

Apart from the big commercial spaces, some geographers dedicate their attention on

alternative consumption sites, such as second-hand stores (Chattoe, 2000), charity shops (Gregson et al., 2002) and car-boot sales (Gregson and Crewe, 1997b). These studies focus on issues around value, authenticity and appropriation of particular styles and, therefore, develop an understanding about the performance, the distinction and the spectacular in the practices. The other emerging studies on sites of consumption are home (Jackson and Moore, 1995), body (Bell and Valentine, 1997, Lupton, 1996), and Internet (Miller and Slater, 2000). These works on the various sites of consumption show the ways in which the consumption practice connect to different spatialities. Studies within these two types offer an insightful understanding of the interaction between spaces and consumers, and between spaces and retailers. However, the outcome from these studies raises questions of consumer agency. In recognising the dualistic viewpoint of consumer agency in existing studies, Kozinets et al. (2004) explore the ludic behaviours and identified elements of agency in themed retail environments. Kozinets et al. (2004) argue that the consumers are able to resist the rules of those themed venue despite the fact that those spaces are overpowering. Through the close examination on the tactical moves of the consumers and the counter moves of the marketers, Kozinets et al. (2004) propose the concept of 'interagency' to see the relationship between consumers and retailers in such spectacular site as dialectical rather than simply oppositional. Studies of Gregson and Crewe (1997a, 1997b) also show that the understanding of both main types on retail spaces are partial because the connection between retailers and consumers is overlooked. Retailers may ensnare consumers through the spatial arrangement of their shops; consumers choose to shop or not to shop in certain business establishments according to their preferences. In other words, spaces of consumption influence, and are influenced by, both retailers and consumers. Through investigate the ways in which people participate and construct themselves in car-boot sales, Gregson and Crewe

(1997a, 1997b) notice sellers and buyers negotiate to each other and together perform retailing/consumption in every interaction. The practices of retailing and shopping are not in opposition, but rather, they are in constant negotiation and are co-constituted. For Gregson and Crewe, the spaces of car-boot sales are living theatres in which both vendors and buyers perform and celebrate unconventional retailing and shopping together. Therefore, as Gregson and Crewe indicate, both retailers and consumers should be taken into account when investigating spaces of consumption. Gregson and Crewe also note that there is a need to acknowledge the diversity of consumption places because the occurrence and process of consumption is different in a specific geographical context. The exploration of different sites of consumption will offer insights to how a certain type of consumption practice link to specific retail/consumption spaces.

## 2.5.2 Affectual, emotional and experiential geographies

Apart from the spectacular and alternative shopping sites, there is an interest on experience spaces occur recently. Linking to the concepts of extraordinary experiences in consumption experience (Campbell, 1987), experiential marketing (Schmitt, 1999), and experience economy (Pine and Gilmore, 1999), this interest stresses on the importance of the practitioners being in retail spaces—what they do, how they feel, what they sense, and the ways in which they response to the material features of their surroundings. For example, drawing on the emotional experiences in the changing room and shop floor, Colls (2004) examines the interconnection between spatiality, emotion and consumption practice. Evers (2009) explores the importance of feelings and bodies to Australian surfers in understanding and learning masculinity. Holloway (2006) studies how religious-sacred spaces are produced and reproduced through the

sensuous, vitalistic, and affectual forces. Malbon (1999) examines clubbing experiences and argue how the pursuit of pleasure has impacts on young people's self-image and identities. Each of these studies touches upon different issues, but all of them emphasise the actual experience of the practitioners rather than the function of consumption sites or the immaterial in these studies is influenced by the cultural turn. The actual experiences have become the central points in these studies and are understood as taken place in the complicated and embodied network of human and non-human (Anderson and Harrison, 2010b, Bondi et al., 2005, Thrift, 2000c). Concerns in geographies of the affectual, the emotional, and the experiential have also occurred in the studies on retail spaces. Rose et al.(2010) advocate the need in acknowledging human feelings, emotions, and atmosphere in built spaces. By emphasizing the ways people interact with buildings and their projected sentiments towards it, Rose et al.(2010) argue that human interaction-generated feelings are an important part that is not being properly considered on recent works dealing with the 'geography of big things'. Thus Rose et al. (2010: 343) suggest that three human feelings should be emphasised: "the feel of buildings, feelings in buildings and feelings about buildings" because architecture shapes people as well as affects our perception and experience. Focusing particularly on brandscapes, Klingmann (2007) argues what people actually consume in this kind of manipulated landscapes– specifically made for companies to market their products and brands – is not the product but our sensations, our experiences, and lifestyles. Therefore, brandscapes have been used in big cities around the world to enhance the economic growth and the city image. Attention on the affectual, emotional, and experiential geographies also is paid in studies on shopping malls. On a recent study on a mall in Argentina, Miller (2014) meditates on the relationship between affects and bio-politics through exploring the bodies in governed retail environment. For Miller (2014: 17), malls are assemblages of "spatial

technologies of retail affect". By seeing human body as an important register in the politics of retail spaces, Miller explores the ways in which the mall enrol consumer bodies with certain intentions through the design of the mall and the technologies employed there. Focusing on affects, Miller argues that these contribute to bridge the gaps between two opposite viewpoints: 'control of the producers' and 'creativity of consumers', the two types of retail spaces I examined in the former part of this section.

To sum up, the interest on affectual, emotional, and experiential geographies offers a new perspective to understand consumption practices in retail spaces. As building up a relationship between our bodies and retail shops, the subject of the production and consumption of retail spaces shifts from the retail spaces (exercising power upon the consumer and his practices), to the producers (applying management skills on the shop and the consumer), to the consumer (actively interpret the meanings of the shop, the commodity, his shopping experience, and who he is), and finally to the affects of the built environments (upon human body and therefore the consumer decisions and behaviours).

## 2.6 Consumption, identity and neo-Tribes

Consumption, as Shields (1992a: 16) argues, "is a social activity built around social exchange as well as simple commodity exchange". The retail spaces, where shopping takes place, are therefore involved in complicated interaction between people, places and commodities. One of the aims of this thesis is to understand how consumers in Eslite bookstores are connected to the bookstores in their everyday life. With this in mind, this section is set to develop an understanding of how retail spaces may generate and enhance the sense of self and the connection to others in daily life.

Through social transformation within modernity, the individual enters the labour market and are involved in the process of 'individualisation', a concept which Beck (2002: 2-3) employs to describe how the contemporary society is less connected with traditional customs, values and collective identity. In such process of social change, individuals become "the agents of their own livelihood mediated by the market" (Beck, 1992: 130) and therefore have to create their own identities and life-styles according to every choice they make day after day. The most significant message in Beck's observations on the social change is that traditional identities, such as status and class are no longer stable; hence, individuals become responsible for their biographies. Bauman (2000, 2001) has a similar concept about this shift of social condition and identity. Observing how the society is becoming liquidised, Bauman (2000) notes that people are not born to identities anymore; instead, they have to construct and perform those identities themselves. Self is then "reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography" (Giddens, 1991: 53). Consequently, 'who we are' or 'what we want to be' is the mission that we have to continuously work on and reflect on. As Giddens suggests, lifestyles – individuals' preferences and daily practices including "small decisions a person makes every day – what to wear, what to eat, how to conduct himself at work, whom to meet with later in the evening" are contributive to the biographical reflexive project (Giddens, 1991: 81). This is the arena where consumption is inextricably tied to lifestyle choices and people's sense of themselves. For example, Featherstone notes "the particularity of the assemblage of goods, clothes, practices, experiences, appearance and bodily dispositions they design together into a lifestyle" (Featherstone, 1991: 86). For Featherstone, lifestyle is a life project to display people's individuality and sense of style. In this sense, consumption choices play an important role in showing the originality, taste and aesthetic competence that one has. In his book *Lifestyle Shopping: The subject of consumption,* Shields (1992b) also shows how

active consumers build identities through the purchase and the use of commodities through 'lifestyle shopping'. In other words, consumption is a means for self-actualisation. Discussion concerning the relationship between the self and consumption, suggests that in the late modern society, consumption has become a rich resource for as well as an expression of lifestyle choice and identity formation (Featherstone, 1987, 1991, Slater, 1997).

Borrowing from the connotation of tribes, Maffesoli (1996) develops the concept 'neo-tribes' to describe communities gathered around feelings rather than calculation for benefits. Maffesoli (1996) thinks that modernism has declined and traditional sense of group and community is fading away; the social change makes people search for lifestyles derived from emotional and empathetic identification with other people who share the same interests. This desire of wanting to belong is an elective sociality, the foundation for the identities of members in different neo-tribes. While Bauman (2001) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) argue that the late modern society is becoming individualised, Maffesoli (1996) believes that people in current society desire to belong. According to Maffesoli (1996: 75), the self is "in perfect harmony with the evolution of the image and the spectacle […] and of course with that of sporting crowds, tour groups or quite simply passers-by". That is, contemporary individuals look for sensory engagement with the other people; we want to embrace communities. However, neo-tribes are fragile networks with blurring boundaries as the contemporary society is full of risks and uncertainty. Shields (1992a) suggests the identity in neo-tribes is rather temporal because in the consumer society people constantly move among different sites of communities and work on their identities accordingly. In such sense, personal identity for Maffesoli is adjustable, across one community to another. What draws people together is the sociality of likeminded-ness. Therefore, neo-tribes may be

tribe-like but they are fluid and fragile groups. Comparing to Giddensian identity (1991), Maffesoli emphasises the emotional perspective of 'being together' and therefore locates the individual in the group with others while Giddens stress the rational/reflexive personal expression. Giddens explains what people can do in making their biographies: lifestyle choices. But Maffesoli elucidates the emotional and empathetic bond that one has towards his chosen group and lifestyle.

Maffesoli's idea of neo-tribes has been used to explore diverse groups and their sociality, for example, youth culture (Shildrick, 2006), sports groups (Best, 2013), and night-clubs (Slavin, 2004). Some of these groups have been for long considered as 'sub-cultures' and that raise a question 'should the group be counted as a subculture or a neo-tribe?'. Bennett (1999) argues that the idea of 'subculture' is less adoptable to studies on some groups, e.g. youth, style and musical. According to Bennet, groups based on the same music taste are an expression of lifestyles. Unlike what is argued in sub-culture, these musical groups do not exist to resist the mainstreams, but are based on the shared interests and states of mind. Moreover, identities in neo-tribes are fluid while in traditional subcultural theories are fixed. In such case, the concept of 'neo-tribes' is much appropriate to explain the "unstable and shifting cultural affiliations which characterise late modern consumer-based societies" (Bennett, 1999: 605).

For Shields (1992c: 15), members in such unstable and shifting neo-tribal affiliations are 'dramatis personae' because they cannot be simply categorised into a fixed group. Rather, its members are more mask-like. The multi-faceted persona "is supported by easy, generalized public access to a multiplicity of sites" (ibid.) and therefore the social and spatial context in which the persona engages is becoming more significant. Those

multiple sites which the persona travels across contribute to the identification of both personal and collective. In his research on clubbing, Malbon (1999: 17) examine the experiential engagement in go clubbing with the aim to explore the "lived, performed and emotional nature of clubbing". Through looking closely at clubbers, the dancing floor and the bodily practices, Malbon (1999) argues that clubs produce a kind of affinity between the place and the people. The dance floor is sensuous and affective. People gather there to enjoy the emotional and bodily experience of dancing and being with each other. The neo-tribal identity of clubbers is exercised through shared interests and lifestyles through their consumption practice. Accordingly, clubs are not merely places for people to go clubbing, but more importantly, are spaces of the neo-tribal affiliation of clubbing. From this point of view, retail spaces support people to express and enhance the group affiliation as they are where people can live out their favoured lifestyles. As Shields (1992a: 110) remind us, "[c]onsumption has become a communal activity, even a form of solidarity"; there is a need for us to recognise that retail spaces are spaces of sociality.

## 2.7 Conclusion

In the book *Acknowledging Consumption*, Daniel Miller (1995) uses "Consumption as the Vanguard of History" for the title of his introductory chapter. The sonorous title of the chapter shows the importance of consumption in contemporary societies and in academic studies. While Miller's title seems a bit bold, it is true that bookselling and book consumption bring impacts to our reading culture and that is definitely writing history as a part of the contemporary ways of life. It is clear why Miller positions consumption as so momentous. In order to conceptualise the production and consumption of Eslite bookstores, in the beginning of this chapter I demonstrated the

reasons and the ways in which more-than-representational theory is capable of helping this research. The demonstration also showed how more-than-representational theory influences the ways I understand and acquire knowledge. The chapter then offered theoretical concepts for research on the interactions between consumers and physical bookstores. This chapter investigated notions about experience economy, experiencescapes, consumers, the concepts of 'strategies and tactic', and the concept of 'neo-tribes'. In section 2.3 the management idea of 'experience economy' was introduced in order to explain how retailers run their business from the basis of the idea of 'experience as a commodity'. Moreover, the notion of 'experiencescape' was introduced in order to stress how spaces of consumption are designed and planned to offer specific experiences to consumers. In section 2.4, the idea of 'consumer' is re-considered and the concepts of 'strategies and tactic' proposed by de Certeau (1984) were discussed. In section 2.5, existing studies of the production and consumption of retail spaces were discussed. This section also showed the recent interests on affectual, emotional and experiential geographies of retail spaces. In section 2.6, the relationship between consumption and identity was explored. This section also examined the notion of 'neo-tribe' by Maffesoli (1996) and its implication to consumption spaces. In the next chapter, the methodology and methods which were employed to conduct the empirical studies will be illustrated.

# Chapter Three: Researching bookstores

## 3.1 Introduction

This thesis started from a concern that bricks-and-mortar bookstores are declining at a rapid rate while e-books and online bookshops are steadily increasing. In such difficult circumstances for physical bookstores, Eslite, a bookstore chain in Taiwan, not only stands firm in the bookselling market, but is also expanding its empire overseas. Eslite became an interesting case in the context of the current bookselling industry and leisure consumption. Departing from Eslite, this thesis seeks to explore the production and consumption of physical bookstores. Through more-than-representational theory, I focus on practices and experiences in the research. Therefore, methodologies which enable geographers to capture "what is done not what is represented" are required (Crang, 2003: 499). Although traditional methods used in human geography, such as in-depth interviews and observations, are questioned as to whether they can attend to the onflow of everyday life, I believe through an approach which is based on doing cultural geography (Shurmer-Smith, 2002) "there is no reason why these methods cannot be made to dance a little" (Latham, 2003: 2000). Therefore, I am confident in working with the 'traditional' methods in this research as long as the collected data will not be just "nicely packaged up in a few supposedly illustrative quotations" (Thrift, 2000b: 3) to represent and echo what is already known. In this chapter I will explain the methodology and methods that I used to conduct the research. Methodology and methods are often confused and wrongly identified as the same thing, but in fact they

are two different terms. While methodology refers to "a branch of knowledge that deals with the general principles or axioms of the generation of new knowledge" (McGregor and Murname, 2010: 420), methods are the tools or the techniques that are used to do research. In other words, methodology is the knowledge of how a piece of research is conducted and methods are the means we use to collect the empirical data. I will begin by explaining the choice of ethnography as my methodology, and especially the benefits of employing ethnography for doing research on consumer experiences and experiencescapes of physical bookstores. From this starting point, in I will go on to demonstrate the main methods which I use to capture the practices of making experiencescape and consumer experiences. The relationship of each method to the empirical research questions is outlined in Table 3.1. Section 3.6 will provide the conclusion of the chapter.

## 3.2 Ethnography

I will depict ethnography and some critiques of it in section 3.2.1. In order to pursue the topics stated previously, this thesis seeks to bring the spirit of more-than-representational theory into ethnography to alchemise a more-than-representational ethnographic line of approach (section 3.2.2) which offers a promising means for thinking about the complicated and lively bookstore experiences and consumers. In section 3.2.3 I will give details of the strategies which I used in doing more-than-representational ethnography empirically.

### 3.2.1 Ethnography and critiques

Traditionally ethnography has its roots in anthropological studies as the word

"ethnography" came from the Greek: the meaning of *ethnos* is "the nation", and the meaning of *graphy* is "writing" (Hart, 2008: 217). In other words, ethnography is a process through which to study a group of people from a specific community or a society and then to present people's life through writing. Ethnography is, therefore, both a qualitative research method (doing an ethnographic study) and a written product (the outcome of study). Researchers who conduct ethnographic fieldwork normally spend a certain amount of time in undertaking participation, observation, or, together with other qualitative methods, in discovering who the people think they are and what the people think they are doing. In so doing, researchers would, ideally, fully understand apparently "exotic" social practices and "irrational" beliefs' of the community/society from the viewpoint of an insider (Jackson, 2000: 238). With its strength of understanding of practices and beliefs of the researched, the ethnographic approach is no longer merely used by anthropologists to investigate native populations. Ethnography has been gradually employed in various disciplines to discover the ways in which practices and experiences correspond to the culture and social contexts in which a specific group of people live. For example, Frank (2000) offers an explicit account in order for us to understand a disabled woman. Frank's ethnographic work shatters our ordinary image of the life of disabled people, and expresses instead how the disabled woman faces and lives her life and feels for herself. What Frank presented is not only a biographical narrative, but a comprehensive record showing how individuals negotiate with and work out his/her own life. Another remarkable example has been given by Bhatti (1999). She carries out an ethnographic investigation of Asian young people in order to understand their education at home and in school. Her ethnography explores what Asian parents expect from the school and how teachers respond. The home-school relations emerge and are highlighted in her work, and issues of education are then brought into a broader context. The two examples of conducting ethnography

start from different foci, disability in the former and education in the latter. But they share the same spirit of ethnography – discovering the field before assigning actions of the researched into pre-existent academic categories and gaining multi-layered understandings of culture. Although ways of undertaking ethnography may vary according to different disciplines, ethnography is generally "the disciplined and deliberate witness-cum-recording of human events" (Willis and Trondman, 2000: 5). There are six common characteristics of ethnography (Cloke et al., 2004: 169). First, because people are regarded as "knowledgeable" and "situated agents", researchers are able to understand how the world is lived from learning through the people. Secondly, ethnography unfolds people's worldviews and their ways of life. Thirdly, a combination of the "shamelessly eclectic" and "methodological opportunist" is applied in research methods. Fourthly, both "what people *say* they do and why, and what they are *seen* to do and say to others about it" (*ibid.*: 169 [emphasis in original]) are studied through observations. Fifthly, when conducting ethnography there are always negotiations between what researchers say and what they do in the field. Finally, the researcher him/herself is the main research tool. The researcher has to learn how to behave in fields outside their normal experience. These six characteristics show the general remit ethnographic work should have.

One of the biggest critiques about ethnography is the role of the researcher. As shown in the six characteristics stated above, the researcher, and the relationships between the researcher and the researched, is significant when conducting ethnography. The researcher is the main tool through which to investigate the 'field' as well as for the storyteller to speak what he/she understands from the 'local people'. In that sense, the researcher is part of the study and therefore has influences on the field. The researcher becomes a variable. Another criticism of ethnography is the way that ethnographers

deal with data collection. It is argued that ethnography lacks structured and systematic ways of collecting data; as a result, the data may not be reliable. To respond to this criticism, the words of Cloke et al. clearly explain that through ethnographic research, findings are not "realities extracted from the field but are intersubjective truths negotiated out of the warmth and friction of an unfolding, iterative process" (Cloke et al., 2004: 170).

## 3.2.2 Becoming a more-than-representational ethnography

I have outlined what ethnography is as well as addressing its possible problems. Now, I would like to take a more sophisticated approach to ethnography for the geographical work of the thesis. More precisely, what I want to do is to tailor an ethnographic approach inspired by the concepts of more-than-representational theory for this research project. There are a number of inspiring qualities of more-than-representational theory, but here I will outline three in particular. It is not because these three features are the most outstanding, but rather, because the three features are fundamental to this research and therefore I would like to explain the relevance of the features to ethnography for doing the more-than-representational ethnographic study of the thesis.

### Feature one: life, but not as we know it[10]

The objective of more-than-representational theory is to shift the current emphasis on representations to the practice, the action, and the performance of everyday life (Lorimer, 2005, Thrift, 2007). A more-than-representational thought suggests that we give up axiomatic hypothetical rules and recognise the ongoing quality of everyday life.

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[10] The sentence is borrowed from the name of chapter one in *Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect* by Nigel Thrift (2007).

In so doing, we are able to witness life not as we know, but as it could be (Thrift, 2007: 1-26). In fact, the spirit is, just as LeCompte and Schensul remind us, that when doing an ethnography we must:

> … first discover what people actually do and the reasons they give for doing it before we can assign to their actions interpretations drawn from our own personal experience or from our professional or academic disciplines. (LeCompte and Schensul, 1999: 1-2).

By adopting the idea of 'witnessing the life', a more-than-representational ethnography would value what LeCompte and Schensul said, from two perspectives. The first is the priority of 'discovering the lived field'. Rather than quickly categorising what we see from the field into academic or theoretical terms, more-than-representational ethnography makes us stay in the field to witness the field. In so doing, the researcher is not a match-maker who simply draws lines between our everyday life and theories. On the contrary, an ethnography with a more-than-representational spirit enables the researcher to immerse himself/herself in the field and to discover its complexities. With relevance to my thesis, it is important to take Eslite bookstores as complicated spheres in which complex encounters happen. Thus, to understand the experience of consumers, it is necessary to be in Eslite bookstores for a considerable period of time before explaining the geography of shopping/visiting in Eslite bookstores with reference to any existing concepts. The second dimension relates to what people actually do in the field. The reason and meaning of doing are no longer the only focuses of understanding the field; instead, the complicated lived experiences are the central concern of ethnography (Marcus, 1998, Atkinson et al., 2001) and of more-than-representational theory. This consideration hints at the importance of spatiotemporal embodied movements of consumer experiences. Shopping in or visiting bookstores is more than a look-around or a pick-and-pay action, but is instead a series

of movements. What do the consumers say? How and for how long do they browse in Eslite bookstores? Do they feel comfortable being in the store? Do they read in the store? How quickly can they find the goods they want? Do they ask questions of staff? Do they invite opinions from their companions? Do they keep quiet while in the stores? These questions are all keys to understanding consumer experiences in Eslite bookstores, and ethnography is able to offer ways to answer these questions. By moving away from merely understanding why people want to do that, the more-than-representational ethnography enables researchers to embrace "a practical comprehension of the world" through considering what people actually do and how they do it (Bourdieu, 1999: 135, quoted in Willis and Trondman, 2000: 6).

## Feature two: context

There have been various concerns about 'context' in social studies, in social anthropology and ethnography in particular. For example, Fetterman (2010: 18) asked ethnographers to look beyond the immediate scene of a culture or an event, because "each scene exists within a multilayered and interrelated context". Fetterman (2010) shared his experience of study on a Career Intern Program and showed (*ibid.*: 19-20) how the program was assumed to be a failure because he achieved only a superficial understanding of the hanging-out students and the classrooms. However, after further investigation, Fetterman revealed that the failure of the program was due to an administrative problem. The federal managing agency claimed that funds could not be given to the programme because the sponsors of the programme still owed the agency money. The program was running without sufficient financial support. That was the story behind the immediate scene of those hanging-out students and the neglected classrooms. Fetterman (*ibid.*: 20) wrote that knowing the context "helped prevent a common error – blaming the victim". The case of Fetterman's research illustrates how

important the context is. Nevertheless, Nigel Thrift (1996) proposed a more dynamic way of seeing context. Thrift (1996: 3) proposed taking context as "a necessary constitutive element of interaction, something active, differentially extensive and able to problematise and work on the bounds of subjectivity". According to Thrift, context is no longer the circumstances we are in but a social situation in which what and how we do actually vary. In other words, context does not represent a set of given backgrounds; rather it invites a particular kind of practice, experience, and interactions to occur. What Thrift offers to us is therefore a more-than-representational style of context. Taking this more-than-representational style, we may announce that without funding the program was not operated well, in the case of Fetterman's ethnography. In other words, the funding to some degree disables the Career Intern Program. From this more-than-representational stance, we are able to move beyond pondering on the fixed structure, and shift our focus to what situation, entangled by both the human and non-human, the actors engage in, how that enables or disables the actors' practices, and what the actors do/interact within the situation.

In the thesis I am particularly interested in how consumers respond to the experiencescape of Eslite bookstores, how they re-define the experiencescape of Eslite bookstores through their shopping or visiting experiences and how they may be enabled or restricted. The more-than-representational style of ethnography leads me away from seeing the social, cultural and geographical contexts as quiet and fixed background conditions, and instead towards an understanding of what and how the circumstances in which consumers are situated act in relation to consumers. The experiencescape of Eslite bookstores may be designed by Eslite on purpose for its commercial considerations. Are the experiencescapes designed to detain customers as long as possible? Are the experiencescape designed to offer neat retail places so that

customers can quickly find out books they want? How can Eslite make sure the experiencescapes it presents to it consumers are produced exactly as they wish? The answers are significant and interrelated to consumer experience and the space of Eslite bookstores. The answers reveal the experiencescape which Eslite conceptualises and works out with the cooperation of all company staff; the spaces before consumers' footprints. These spaces and how Eslite produces them are then worth examining. Because all the information works to tell the researcher parts of the fluid and related network of Eslite bookstores; therefore, the context is not "an impassive backdrop to situated [consumer] activity" (Thrift, 1996: 3) but rather a performative situation for the consumers and the experiencescapes of Eslite bookstores.

**Feature three: body and materiality**

Unlike some of the studies in cultural geographies which are only human-centred, non-representational/more-than-representational theory acknowledges that all kinds of "things" have agency, and are therefore capable of constructing, producing and demolishing the world (Thrift, 1996, 2007, Hinchliffe, 2007). Material objects matter to us to a great extent. The way we come to engage with and interact with the material world is through the body. The body plays "a dual role as both the vehicle of perception and the object perceived" (Thrift, 1996: 13). That is, on the one hand, the body perceives the outside world; on the other, it actively appropriates the external. The dual-direction effect makes the body both an object and a subject; in this way, we are able to sense, to feel, to conceive, to understand, and to think the world. In this sense, the more-than-representational thought suggests to us that the world is conceived through the body and therefore "bodies and things are not easily separated terms" (Thrift, 1996: 13). From a similar point of view, Miller (1997: 16) notes ethnography as a work "to evaluate people in terms of what they actually do, i.e. as

material agents working with a material world". Miller's words point out the importance of recognising our fleshy body and the physical environment. People do a thing, participate in an event, or make sense of the world through embodied engagements. This recognition enables researchers to shift their interests from discursive notions to something beyond thoughts and motives, namely, materiality and our embodied practices. A more-than-representational ethnographic approach would articulate the importance of the body and materiality. In this thesis, the considerations of the body and materiality are particularly helpful in understanding bookstore experience and understanding the experiencescapes of Eslite bookstores. Through being aware of what the body can do and what the body cannot do, the relationships between physical environment and consumer experiences are discovered. Experience is produced through a process that one undertakes in order to do something, both actively and passively, somewhere. The subject who goes through the experience is important. Yet doing something and being somewhere are significant as elements of experience. Doing something somewhere is inevitably bound to tangible objects and physical environments that have impacts on the experiences through their agency. The focus on concrete things reveals how consumers react to and interact with the physical world of Eslite bookstores. In addition, considering materiality helps to understand the construction of experiencescapes of Eslite bookstores. To render the bookstores in the manner Eslite wishes, the executive team and all staff of Eslite need to undertake conceptual as well as physical work. However, no matter the conceptual or the physical work, materials are required as tools and resources to ensure the bookstores are presented as what Eslite wants. An understanding of the impacts of materiality on Eslite would, in return, give detailed insights into consumer experience in terms of shopping/visiting in Eslite bookstores.

I have outlined three inspiring qualities of more-than-representational theory, and have given their relevance to 'doing ethnography'. I sketched a more-than-representational style of ethnography that enables the researcher to take the research case as being constantly in progress rather than as a motionless scene, and therefore the rich layers of interactions and relations among the people, the practices, the experiences, and the sites will unfold easily. In the next section, I will consider some strategies of conducting a more-than-representational ethnographic study.

### 3.2.3 Strategies for doing ethnography

Two strategies have helped in terms of conducting an empirical investigation study in this thesis: theoretically informed methodology for ethnography and multi-spaced ethnography. I will now outline the two strategies and explain how they can help in doing empirical studies.

### TIME ethnography

There is a general misunderstanding of ethnography: it is assumed as a method for observing and recording a culture/an event/a practice of a group of people, and then for presenting the records to readers. The results of ethnographic findings are supposed to be equal to 'the reality' or are used as evidence to support specific theories. In this sense, ethnography became a machine either for recording 'real' experiences or for gathering supportive 'lived' evidences for theories. As for researchers, they become recorders and record-players. In fact, this misunderstanding oversimplifies the nature and use of ethnography. As Willis and Trondman argue in *Manifesto for Ethnography*:

the 'nitty gritty' of everyday life cannot be presented as raw unmediated data – the empiricist fallacy, data speaking for itself – nor can it be presented through abstract theoretical categories – the theoreticist and idealist trap, the lack of interest in empirical findings. (Willis and Trondman, 2000: 12)

What Willis and Trondman advance is a manner of understanding empirical data. The nature of everyday life should be understood through examined empirical findings. Yet the examination of empirical findings should not fall into any theoretical traps. To avoid the dilemma between raw data and theoretical categories, Willis and Trondman identify the importance of theory in ethnographic studies:

[theory is] as a pre-cursor, medium and outcome of ethnographic study and writing. For us, though, theory must be useful theory in relation to ethnographic evidence and the 'scientific energy' derived from the effective formulation of problems, rather than theory for itself. It must be of help in understanding social phenomena in relation to ethnographic evidence. (Willis and Trondman, 2000: 7)

Theory is considered guidance for research practice to help defining and coping with research questions, and to enable empirical evidence to be 'translated' into study outcomes. Note that the significance of theory is useful to get out of the swamp of banal evidences collected from trivial life experiences. Nevertheless, how can the theory help researchers doing ethnography practically? Willis and Trondman suggest a theoretically informed methodology for ethnography (abbreviated as TIME). TIME is a means for researchers to connect theory and data. By using TIME, theory is able to be used to comprehend data while data offers a detailed exploration of everyday life to enhance the applicability of theory. To apply TIME to research, it is necessary to avoid a particular theory. This is because each theory is based on its own school, and ethnographic data is therefore explained by specific notions. However, it is not the theory but the phenomenon/event on which we focus. Moreover, theory should not be used as "an instrumental method, as a source of expertise and as an affective register

to inform an everyday life that is increasingly built from that theory" (Thrift, 2006: 301). The theory is beneficial only if it enables the phenomenon/event to be explored further through its disclosing power. To apply TIME practically, it is suggested that one develop "a theoretically informed, sensitive and flexible *vocabulary*, or a practical sense of relevant *theoretical sites* for casting the maximum illumination……on to a given topic of study" (Willis and Trondman, 2000: 13). In this research, the vocabulary or theoretical sites cover a wide range, from consumption/experience to practice/materiality. They work as a linkage between theoretical concepts and research objects; at the same time, they avoid using an existing theory as "a faithful rendition of what may be going on, as if that were indeed possible" (Thrift, 2007: 255).

## Multi-spaced ethnography

The second strategy is a response to the consideration of spatiality in ethnographic studies. Traditionally ethnography serves anthropological studies; researchers who employ ethnography stay with a specific tribe or region to dig out the culture of the locale. Through spending a considerable amount of time in a field site of choice, anthropological studies produce a deeper understanding of the people through dense data and empirical findings. Very close investigations in a single locale do enable researchers to unfold the numerous layers of the life of the researched groups of people. Yet ethnography conducted in a single tribe or region may tend to treat the researched group of people as a closed world/system and neglect the relationships between what happens in the locale and the relatively broader social, cultural and political world(s) in which that occurs. For example, the bookstore experiences in this thesis only occur in specific sites (Eslite Dun-Nan store, Xin-Yi store, Tai-Nan store, and Far Eastern store) but they are related to different places/sites. The experiences are related to the head office of Eslite because they represent the experience the company

aims to produce. The experiences are also related to Taiwan's media space because it has discussed Eslite. In order to overcome the problem of seeing the researched people/world as isolated I want to borrow the idea of 'multi-sited ethnography' from George Marcus (1995, see also Appadurai, 1990, Clifford, 1997) to form a multi-spaced ethnography. In his article named "Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography", Marcus (1995: 96) pointed out that multi-sited ethnography is needed when a researcher aims to trace "a cultural formation across and within multiple sites of activity that destabilize the distinction, for example, between lifeworld and system". What Marcus argues for are the qualities of "the connections, associations and putative relationships" in doing ethnography. According to different research objects, multi-sited ethnography can be applied to several modes such as 'follow the people' or 'follow the thing', and each of the modes would serve the research topic compatibly. Adopting a similar stance, Clifford (1997) gives a suggestion that we rethink "fieldwork" by using "routes" to replace "roots". His advocacy of 'routes' makes ethnographic investigations able to cross multiple locales. The notion of 'routes' gives ethnography the mobility through which one place can be linked to another, or one group of people can be related to the other.

At this point, I want to bring the more-than-representational approach to space/place into ethnography. Although Marcus was aware of the importance of geography in ethnography, his concept of sites was limited. What Marcus means by 'site' is the place in which a study is conducted. In this sense, where (the site/place/space) a study is conducted is a passive locale as a backdrop against which different people live or different cultures take place. However, 'place' and 'space' mean something more in more-than-representational theory. Spaces are heterogeneous interactions of various encounters between different actants, i.e. between different people or between

people and things/objects (Thrift, 1999). Places, like spaces, do not refer to locales but "are made of varying spatial practices" (Murdoch, 2006: 18). According to this more-than-representational thought, places and spaces are always in heterogeneous processes, and are therefore always associated with what people do and how they interact with others. For that reason, I want to call for a 'multi-spaced' ethnography in which ethnographic studies can take place in multiple locales or in a single locale but still be engaged in folded spaces. Thus, to understand a particular group of people or a particular culture, we have to recognise all the meanings and actions of the people or those things. It is because the people and those things occur in the specific time-space configurations of the connection of various encounters. In this sense, the technique that Marcus called "following" (follow the people or follow the thing) can be applied equally well even if ethnographers undertake studies in a single field-site. Despite the fact that a multi-spaced ethnography may be involved in multiple locales, the aim of ethnography conducted across different sites is not to compare one site to the others, and nor is it a way of adding more and more objects into studies. Rather, it is used to understand interactions amongst the researched people/culture in different spaces and the effects of the interactions.

In this thesis, the concept of 'multi-spaced' ethnography is especially useful. It helps the researcher to travel in the temporal and spatial networks in which the practices of Eslite executives and consumer experiences are involved, allowing the researcher not only to find out what an executive/consumer does and feels but also how the executive/consumer does so and who/what makes him/her feel so. That practice of Eslite executives and the resultant consumer experiences is not taken as a static state but as a dynamic effect, personal, interpersonal and equally relevant to non-humans. In this research, the term 'multi-spaced' breaks the boundaries between an actor's body

and the physical spaces, between the different spaces of Eslite bookstores and between consumers and staff. Practically, the idea on the one hand helps to understand the interactions between the executives/consumers and spaces, while on the other, it unfolds the impact of the executives on the experiencescapes of Eslite bookstores and consumers: these impacts work as vital contexts for the encounter of consumer experiences at Eslite bookstores. To apply multi-spaced ethnography, the division of the macro (system) and micro (people/phenomenon) scale is blurred in the sense that each of them has influence on the other. The empirical field may be located in one single site but the investigations travel along the chains of connections.

## 3.3 Methods used in researching bookstore experience

Having explored some relevant methodological concepts and the range of literature involved, I turn now to the five main research questions, articulated below.

Table 3.1 Questions and methods

| Research questions | Methods | Materials | Chapter |
|---|---|---|---|
| How does the Eslite staff imagine and deliver the designed experiencescape within the dynamic process of the ongoing compositions of traces? | Interviews and documents. | Audio records and transcriptions; texts and images including reports and articles in newspapers, magazines, and websites, and advertisements. | 4 |
| How do the experiencescapes of Eslite bookstores affect the embodied experiences of visiting Eslite bookstores? | Observant participations, on-site observations, and interviews. | Texts including field notes and research dairy; audio records and transcriptions. | 5 |
| How do consumers/visitors use the experiencescape of Eslite bookstores? | Interviews, observant participations, and on-site observations. | Audio records and transcriptions; texts including field notes and research dairy. | 5 |

| What do the ways in which consumers experience bookstores influence the sense of being a certain type of consumer? | Interviews, observant participations, and on-site observations. | Audio records and transcriptions; texts including field notes and research dairy. | 6 |
|---|---|---|---|
| How can the consumer practices have an impact on the meanings of bookstores and on consumers' ways of life? | Interviews, observant participations, and on-site observations. | Texts and images including reports and articles in newspapers, magazines, and websites; audio records and transcriptions; texts including field notes and research dairy. | 6 |

The main body of this section will discuss the different methods employed in researching experiencescape and the bookstore experience. The connection of each method to the empirical research questions is illustrated in Table 3.1. I will, firstly, give brief contexts to the Eslite bookstores in which I conducted the empirical studies. Following this, I will demonstrate the use of interviews and the analysis of existing documentary materials. I will then turn to the use of 'observant participation' which is used to look at the experience of visiting Eslite bookstores and the shopping experiences of others. Finally, I will discuss the use of on-site observations. Throughout these discussions the relevant ethical issues in doing the research will be addressed.

### 3.3.1 The bookstores

There were four bookstores involved in the empirical investigations of this thesis. Two of them are in Taipei (the capital, located in northern Taiwan): the first-ever Eslite bookstores, the Dun-Nan store and the flagship store, Xin-Yi. The other two are the biggest stores in southern Taiwan: the Far Eastern store in Kaohsiung and Tai-Nan Eslite in Tainan. Dun-Nan Eslite was established in 1989. It is located in one of the major

financial districts of Taiwan. In the beginning of its business, the bookstore was independent and specialised in art and culture titles.



Photo 3.1 Eslite Dun-Nan store (Source: Eslite)

There was an art gallery, a coffee shop, and a sales floor offering international stationery and interior décor products. Therefore, Dun-Nan Eslite stores were considered elite, appealing to the white collar group (Yu, 2004, Yu and Yang, 2005). The notion of its serving the elite went away after several further Eslite bookstores opened, although since then the style of bookstore-cum-boutique has been applied to every bookstore of Eslite. But Dun-Nan Eslite also expanded its scale, developing a music department, a children's bookstore, a stationery store, a performance/exhibition hall, a

lecture room, a tea room, and a café, as well as extending its opening hours so that it is the only bookstore which opens for 24 hours a day every day of the year in Taiwan.



Photo 3.2 Eslite Xin-Yi store (Source: Eslite)

Xin-Yi Eslite, the flagship store, opened on January 1 in 2006. It is the biggest bookstore in Taiwan, measured as almost 8,265 square metres and occupying an eight-storey building in the major business and financial district of Taipei. The building is filled not only with books, but also with a children's bookstore, a children's museum, a music store, a coffee shop, some restaurants, a wine shop, a stationery department, a gallery, a film centre, a performance hall, a food studio and some fashion boutiques. The scale goes well beyond that of conventional bookstores in Taiwan. The Tai-Nan store is in the city of Tainan, which was once the political and economical centre of the area as established by the Dutch East India Company in the seventeenth century, and which later became the capital of the Tungning Kingdom between 1661-1683. Later still, the Chinese took it as the capital of Taiwan, until 1887. Despite the capital being shifted at this point to Taipei, Tainan was still favoured by the Japanese, who ruled Taiwan between 1885 and 1945. During this time, the city of Tainan was re-planned and

renovated, along lines similar to Haussmann's renovation of Paris, by the Japanese (see Ong, 2000).



Photo 3.3 Eslite Tai-Nan store (Source: Marco Polo Press)

Today, Tainan is proud of its historical and cultural heritages. The Tai-Nan store is not large compared to Dun-Nan, Xin-Yi and Far Eastern stores, but it is the branch which hosts the most events among all the branches in the southern Taiwan.



Photo 3.4 Eslite Far Eastern store (Source: Eslite)

Far Eastern store in Kaohsiung, the biggest city in the southern Taiwan, is an award-winning store due to its beautiful architecture. Located on the seventeenth floor, visitors to the Far Eastern store can overlook the magnificent Kaohsiung port through enormous windows. Although it does not have an independent performance room, the large bookstore is able to host events and accommodate visitors on its wide, amphitheatre-like stairs.

The empirical investigations of this thesis were conducted in the summers of 2006 and 2007. This was the period during which chain bookstores in Taiwan reached a peak in business performance, but at the same time faced challenges from online[11] bookstores which gained a considerable foothold in the bookselling industry (Huang, 2003). As mentioned in Chapter One, Eslite is considered to be a reformist who brought a whole new concept to the spaces of bookstores (Jie, 2005). Moreover, reports of Eslite and its bookstores have shown the ambitions of the founder and, as a result, of members of executive team, all of whom work hard to create special bookstore experiences for their patrons (Wu, 1996, Zhou, 2000b, Xiao, 2002). The context of Eslite and its bookstores offers evidence as to the importance of bookstore experiences and physical form of bookstores in the case of this research project. In the following sections, I will give details of each method used to conduct the empirical part of my research.

### 3.3.2 Interviews and documents

Because I was interested in the ways in which consumers interact with experiencescapes and the ways in which Eslite executives imagine and produce these

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[11] The first online bookshop in Taiwan is books.com.tw which established in 1995. Nowadays every bookstores chain has its online bookshop. Nevertheless, books.com.tw has remained as one of the best booksellers in the island since its inauguration (Huang, 2003).

experiencescapes (see Table 3.1), I arranged interviews with visitors/consumers of Eslite bookstores as well as with staff working in Eslite. The interviewees in the group of visitors/consumers (see Table 3.2) were recruited initially from online discussion forums relating to Eslite.

Table 3.2 List of interviewees in the group of consumers/visitors of Eslite bookstores

| Interviewee | Sex | Age | Job | Member | Frequency of visit | Place of interview |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Chang | M | 44 | Accountant | Y | More than 3 times a week | Dun-Nan |
| Chen | F | 35 | Teacher | N | Every 3 weeks | Dun-Nan |
| Cheng | F | 31 | Shop owner | Y | Once a week | Dun-Nan |
| Chou | F | 33 | Secretary | N | Every two weeks | Xin-Yi |
| Chu | M | 15 | Student | N | More than 3 times a week | Xin-Yi |
| Fang | F | 39 | Researcher | Y | Every two weeks | Dun-Nan |
| Kao | M | 28 | Engineer | Y | More than 3 times a week | Xin-Yi |
| Kong | F | 30 | Housewife | N | Every 2 weeks | Xin-Yi |
| Lai | M | 34 | Restaurant owner | N | Every 3 weeks | Xin-Yi |
| Lao | F | 58 | Housewife | N | More than 3 times a week | Xin-Yi |
| Lee | F | 31 | Administrative | Y | Once a week | Dun-Nan |
| Lim | F | 65 | Housewife | N | Once a week | Xin-Yi |
| Lin | F | 27 | Street vendor | Y | Once a week | Dun-Nan |
| Liu | F | 41 | Marketing | Y | Every 2 weeks | Xin-Yi |
| Lo | M | 24 | Salesperson | Y | Every 3 weeks | Dun-Nan |
| Hsu | M | 46 | Software Engineer | N | Once a month | Xin-Yi |
| Huang | F | 47 | Teacher | N | Every 2 weeks | Xin-Yi |
| Mao | M | 39 | Shop owner | Y | Once a week | Dun-Nan |
| Muh | M | 37 | Systems Analyst | N | Every 3 weeks | Dun-Nan |
| Pai | F | 47 | Researcher | N | Every 3 weeks | Dun-Nan |
| Pao | F | 28 | Doctor | N | Every 2 weeks | Dun-Nan |
| Su | F | 19 | Student | N | More than 3 times a week | Dun-Nan |
| Tang | F | 42 | Doctor | N | Every 2 weeks | Xin-Yi |
| Tao | M | 62 | Retired | Y | More than 3 times a week | Xin-Yi |
| Tsai | F | 18 | Student | N | Once a week | Dun-Nan |
| Tseng | M | 52 | PHP developer | Y | Every 2 weeks | Xin-Yi |
| Wang | F | 41 | Doctor | N | Every 2 weeks | Xin-Yi |
| Wu | M | 59 | Sales manager | Y | Every 2 weeks | Xin-Yi |
| Yan | M | 30 | Public Relation | N | Every 2 weeks | Dun-Nan |
| Yo | M | 33 | Property manager | N | Once a week | Dun-Nan |

I posted a questionnaire online with a final question asking the respondents to leave their contact details if they were willing to be interviewees. I also left a note at the end of the information sheet of the questionnaire (see Appendix B) saying I was happy to offer advice if anyone had plans to study in or travel to the UK. I felt I needed to provide some means of thanking the respondents, and to have some way of attracting potential interviewees because so many questionnaires run by survey companies offered coupons and I was not in a position to do so myself. I contacted those who indicated interest through the last question of my questionnaire by email and arranged to meet up. All the respondents whom I contacted attended the arranged interview slots. The snowball sampling technique (Valentine, 2005, Secor, 2010) was then used for interviewees to refer me to other interviewees. One of the best advantages of using this snowball technique is that it allows researchers to gain access to specific social groups such as the isolated and the criminal (Faugier and Sargeant, 1997).

Although this thesis is not about impenetrable populations, the snowball technique helped to recruit members of Eslite bookstores fairly quickly and the majority of the members of Eslite bookstores amongst my interviewees were recruited in this manner. Another benefit of using the snowball technique is that the cost is low: I did not spend much time or money finding potential interviewees and that was a significant help as I had no external funding for the research. One may argue that respondents are not selected randomly and therefore there is a problem of sampling bias, but in the case of this thesis, the snowball technique was used as a means of contact rather than as a way to reach a certain number of respondents for statistical purposes. The recruited interviewees were not assumed to represent the entire population of consumers/visitors of Eslite, but were the cases through which we are able to witness the ways in which consumers/visitors interact with the bookstores and how their

bookstores experiences have impacts on their identities and their ways of living. Hence, it was not problematic to use the snowball technique here. Besides the snowball technique, I also recruited interviewees on-site, approaching visitors in Eslite bookstores, in particular older people, and asking if they would join the interviews. It was a bit awkward both for me and for those whom I approached in the beginning; nevertheless, I was rarely refused absolutely and found instead I was politely encouraged to talk more about my study. All the older interviewees, those in their 50s or 60s, were gained through on-site recruiting. I paid more attention in terms of recruiting interviewees to have interviews across various types of respondents. First, visitors/consumers in different genders were included. Second, age was addressed. I talked to people across different generations from the age of 15 to 65. Third, the interviewees were in different jobs (students, housewives, professionals, and the retired). Fourth, both members of Eslite bookstores and non-members were in the interviewee list. Fifth, those who liked and those who disliked Eslite bookstores were included. Sixth, I interviewed people with different budgets for books, and with different frequencies of buying books. Seventh, reading habits and the time being spent on reading were also considered. The main reason for having various types of respondents was not to cover all types of respondents and claim a fair selection of samples; rather, I wanted to explore the lived experiences of diverse properties, dimensions, conditions, actions, and interactions.

Anonymity was offered to all formal interviewees and all of them were happy to have that. All interviewees were informed of their right to withdraw from the interviews if they wished to do so. Before the interviews started, verbal explanations of a summary of the project, the research aims, and possible uses of their talks in the research were given in an information sheet, the same I used online for the questionnaire (see

Appendix B). The interviews were semi-structured, and each of the interviews took place over about an hour. An interview guide was prepared; specific questions were asked and particular topics were addressed (Secor, 2010). But I often asked a number of extra questions according to the situations and interactions I had with each interviewee. All the interviews were conducted in Mandarin and/or Taiwanese as all of the interviewees were Taiwanese, and they were fully recorded, transcribed, and coded (Crang, 2005).

As for the investigations on experiencescapes, I started by examining a series of documents relating to Eslite and its bookstores. The types of documents included articles and reports in newspapers, in magazines, of institutions, and web copy. The contents, which were about the spaces of Eslite bookstores, were especially important to the thesis. Attention was also paid to documentary materials relating to the book industry in Taiwan and to other bookstores. Further, printed materials from Eslite (such as booklets and flyers relating to those events hosted in Eslite bookstores) were included in the examined materials, too. These printed materials were particularly important in terms of knowing what kind of events were offered, and how those events took place, in the physical bookstores. To comprehend the analysis of these documentary materials, interviews were undertaken with Eslite staff (see Table 3.3 for the list of interviewees). The recruitment of the interviewees in the group of Eslite staff was a rather complicated one compared to the recruitment of consumers/visitors. In the beginning I posted formal request letters to the head office of Eslite and to the store managers of Xin-Yi store, Dun-Nan store, Tainan store, and Far East store. A summary of the research project was attached in each letter and a copy of the letter from my supervisor, Dr Jon Anderson, was enclosed, too. In addition, I also sent emails to the email addresses provided on the 'Contact Us' webpages of any website related

to Eslite, such as the official website of Eslite bookstores (http://vip.eslite.com/service/ContactInfo.aspx), and the official website of Eslite members (http://www.eslite.com/cs_question.aspx). The purposes of this contact were three-fold. Firstly, I asked to interview executive managers from head office, store managers and staff from the four branches. Secondly, I asked to place my questionnaires, which were designed to understand consumers' preferences in shopping practices, on every counter of Eslite's bookstores so that consumers could fill in the questionnaires while paying for their shopping. The questionnaires also had the purpose of recruiting consumers as research interviewees. Thirdly, I asked permission to carry out overt observations and to take video and photos inside the stores. Unfortunately, I did not get any reply to my letters from Eslite, but I did get emails. The first email response I got was from the customer service centre informing me they had transferred my case to their colleagues who might be able to help. After five days I received an email from the Public Relations Department of Eslite asking me to send my research proposal. After one week, Ms CHEN Shu-Jen, the director of Public Relations Department, emailed me and accepted an interview with me. Ms Chen also promised to give me a private guided tour of the Xin-Yi branch. The meeting date and time were set up in follow-up emails. Since the postal request letters did not bring about any opportunity to meet managers, the meeting with Ms Chen became my only route into Eslite. After this not-so-successful experience, I changed my strategy and went to Dun-Nan and Xin-Yi stores and tried to talk to staff face-to-face. I talked to store staff to ask for interviews, and was told to leave my contact details. Some days later, I got an email to inform me that my case had been passed to the public relation department. Shortly after this, I got an email from Ms Chen, the director of the public relation department, again. The processes of contacting and inviting potential interviewees took me more than a month and the result was rather disappointing. I decided to

exercise 'guanxi' (Brown and Brown, 2006, Gold et al., 2002) to see if I could gain more interviewees. Guanxi is often used to describe the "personal connections between two people in which one is able to prevail upon another to perform a favour or service" especially in Mainland China and other mandarin speaking communities in Southeast Asia, such as in Taiwan, Hong-Kong and Singapore, (Brown and Brown, 2006: 41). After several phone calls to friends of mine, I got four potential contacts, each of whom was an important person in the context of Eslite. One of these contacts later referred me to another staff member who accepted my interview invitation (see Table 3.3 for the list of staff interviewees, their positions in the corporation, and details about each interview). I offered my sincere gratitude during a phone call and invited the friend who provided help to a formal dinner, for which I would of course pay. Despite the fact that guanxi can be problematic (Gold et al., 2002), I was cautious in my use of it and strove to prevent the negative influences arising. For example, the reason I asked help from the particular friends I chose was that I understood them to be decent people and who were genuinely happy to help friends without asking for something in return. Through kindness and transparency I avoided the possibility of needing to reciprocate with something I could not afford or something legally or morally wrong. I contacted the four people who work in Eslite Corporation by phone; during these conversations, time and dates were organised for interviews.

Table 3.3 List of interviewees in the group of Eslite staff

| Interviewee | Job Title and store | Note |
|---|---|---|
| CHEN Shu-Jen | Director of Public Relations Department, Head Office, Eslite. Located in Eslite Dun-Nan store. | ✧ The interview was conducted in the coffee shop in Xin-Yi store. <br> ✧ The interview lasted about 45 minutes. <br> ✧ Ms. Chen was half an hour late and left fifteen minutes earlier than the promised duration of the interview because she had to attend an interview with a magazine. |

| HUANG Scott | Director of Marketing and Planning Department, Head Office, Eslite. Located in Eslite Dun-Nan store. | ✧ The interview was conducted in the coffee shop in Dun-Nan store. <br> ✧ The interview was about 75 minutes long. <br> ✧ He was very friendly to me. |
|---|---|---|
| CHANG Jing-Ru | Deputy Manager of Eslite Xin-Yi store. Located in Eslite Xin-Yi store. | ✧ The interview was conducted in the conference room of the office in Xin-Yi store. <br> ✧ The interview was about 75 minutes long. <br> ✧ She was very friendly to me and even talked about her personal problems during our first meeting. |
| YEH Ching-Hua | Senior Regional Manager in charge of all the Eslite bookstores in the southern Taiwan area. | ✧ The first interview with her was in a coffee shop next to Eslite Tai-Nan store (the biggest shop in Tainan) and it lasted about 60 minutes. <br> ✧ At the end of the interview, she asked me if I wanted to see Eslite Far Eastern store (the biggest one in Kao-Hsiung) and then arranged a viewing for me. <br> ✧ After the interviews, she showed me around Tai-Nan store and gave me a short explanation about the spatial design of the bookstore. <br> ✧ The second interview was in the office of Eslite Far Eastern store, and it lasted about 60 minutes. <br> ✧ After the interviews, she showed me around Far Eastern store and gave me a short explanation about the spatial design of the bookstore. <br> ✧ Bought me coffee during the two interviews. |
| CHENG Tony | Senior Supervisor of Marketing and Planning Department in charge of all the Eslite bookstores in the southern Taiwan area. | ✧ The interview was conducted in the coffee shop in Tai-Nan store. <br> ✧ The interview was about 70 minutes long. <br> ✧ Tony only promised to give me 20 minutes when I emailed to ask for an interview with him. However, on the day of interview we talked for more than an hour and he bought me a cup of coffee. |
| GUO Yu-Chun | Senior Designer in charge of all of the Eslite bookstores in the southern Taiwan area. | ✧ The interview was conducted in the coffee shop in Tai-Nan store. <br> ✧ The interview was about 75 minutes long. <br> ✧ Yu-Chun was not keen to be interviewed. She agreed to talk to me only after I rang her three times. |

The staff I interviewed were from four bookshops of Eslite: Xin-Yi, Dun-Nan, Tai-Nan, and Far Eastern stores. The interviewees were in different departments and positions. Anonymity was not applied to all the interviewees in the group of Eslite staff. Nevertheless, I will not identify which interviewees are the four people whom I contacted through my friend due to confidentiality. All the interviews began with explanations of the research purpose and methods, and the possible uses of their words. All the interviewees were informed the interviews would be recorded and they had the right to refuse the recording or to withdraw from the interviews. They were also offered summarised research findings if they would like to have them. Excepting the interview with Ms Chen from the public relations department, each of the interviews lasted for more than an hour. The interviews were carried out, transcribed, and coded in Mandarin.

### 3.3.3 Observation and participation

Observations and participations played important roles in the empirical part of the thesis. I employed methods to examine the experience of shopping/visiting in Eslite bookstores, and also to examine how experiencescapes intervened and were interacted with by consumers/visitors (see Table 3.1). In this thesis, there were three types of observation used: on-site observation, participant observation (Cook, 2005) and observant participation (Thrift, 2000d). On-site observation refers to the "complete observations" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007) I undertook in the bookstores on consumers/visitors with whom I had no other contact. Although I did not inform those I observed of my identity as a researcher, I did nothing to hide that either. In other words, the observation was basically covert, but if anyone came and asked me about what I was doing, I had no hesitation in telling him/her my purpose.

The advantage of doing covert observations is that it avoids "research participants chang[ing] their behaviour because they know they are being studied" (BSA, 2002: 4). Although covert observations sometimes raise ethical issues, such as the possibility of "violat[ing] the principles of informed consent and [may] invad[ing] the privacy of those being studied" (ibid.: 4), research participants in the covert observation in this research were consumers/visitors who acted and presented themselves in public rather than 'deviant' social groups who may intend to hide themselves from view. Moreover, the names of the participants were unknown, and it was thus impossible for me to disclose their data to a third party. Last, I had no contact with the participants; there was no possibility of any mental or physical harm to them or from them. Therefore, the ethical concerns possible here were not as problematic as in other scenarios, such as medical or psychological studies. Without any engagement with those whom I observed I was not able to explore them in the depth that talking to them and knowing their intentions and the meanings they gave to the situation they were engaged in might afford. Therefore, I undertook another type of observation which I will address later. But on-site covert observation allowed me to investigate the ongoing interaction between consumers/visitors and others, including human and non-human, and that was one of the main preoccupations of this thesis. Most of the on-site observations were carried out mainly in Xin-Yi and Dun-Nan stores. In Xin-Yi and Dun-Nan stores, the observations took place on average five times a week , for about two hours each time. In total I spent around eighty hours on observations. As seats/sofas are provided in the bookstores it was not too difficult to write field notes there, although I did feel awkward in the first week of the observation because most of people in the bookstore were reading rather than writing. Nevertheless, I had time, freedom and the facility to sit comfortably to write the notes.

The second type of observation I used was participant observation, which allows researchers to immerse themselves in a community and to watch activities unfold while recording their impressions of these activities (Cook, 2005). In other words, participant observation is an ideal method through which the researcher can "understand the world-views and ways of life of actual people from the 'inside'" (Cook, 2005: 167). In this thesis, I used participant observation to see how consumers/visitors undertake visits to bookstores. I recruited ten people (see Table 3.4) from the interviewees in the group of consumers/visitors and asked them to let me accompany them when they visited Eslite.

Table 3.4 List of respondents who I accompanied to visit Eslite bookstores

| Interviewee | Sex | Age | Job | Member | Frequency of visit | Place of interview |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Chu | M | 15 | Student | N | More than 3 times a week | Xin-Yi |
| Kao | M | 28 | Engineer | Y | More than 3 times a week | Xin-Yi |
| Lao | F | 58 | Housewife | N | More than 3 times a week | Xin-Yi |
| Lee | F | 31 | Administrative | Y | Once a week | Dun-Nan |
| Lim | F | 65 | Housewife | N | Once a week | Xin-Yi |
| Lo | M | 24 | Salesperson | Y | Every 3 weeks | Dun-Nan |
| Hsu | M | 46 | Software Engineer | N | Once a month | Xin-Yi |
| Huang | F | 47 | Teacher | N | Every 2 weeks | Xin-Yi |
| Pao | F | 28 | Doctor | N | Every 2 weeks | Dun-Nan |
| Yo | M | 33 | Property manager | N | Once a week | Dun-Nan |

I accompanied each of them to visit Eslite bookstores twice. The duration of visiting was not limited: the respondents were free to stay in the bookstores as long as they liked. A focus was placed on how respondents interact with the surroundings, whether non-verbal interactions such as gestures occurred, what respondents said to others (if they did so), and so on. Unlike the on-site observation, the writing of the field-notes was a challenge here. While accompanying the respondents on their trips to

bookstores I wrote down a number of key words; the fuller records were written down only after the visits finished. But I tried to have a short chat with the respondents before leaving them. I spent time in a coffee shop with them and talked briefly about what I saw and was interested in. The chats were about 15 minutes in duration, and helped me to check the accuracy of my observations (Seale, 1999). I then stayed in the bookstores to write the observation notes; in so doing, the environments helped in reminding me what respondents did.

The third type of observation I used was observant participation. Rather than the method of participant observation in which the stress falls on observations, observant participation emphasises the involvement of the observers (Brewer, 2000). By using observant participation, researchers are encouraged to immerse themselves actively in the life of the group of people that the researchers are studying. The difference between participant observation and observant participation not only relates to the emphasis of analysis, but also to our understanding, and what kind of understanding we might reach. Observant participation accentuates "serious empirical involvement involved in non-representational theory's engagement with practices, embodiment and materiality" (Dewsbury, 2010: 327). The body does matter in the method because we rely on the body to engage in the world we want to learn through the body. The knowledge we seek to present is then achieved by the body and is therefore central to immediate experiences. In this thesis, I employed this method to examine the experience of visiting Eslite bookstores and the experiences of interacting with the experiencescapes and other people. Prior to the actual involvement of this specific study, I had visited Eslite bookstores regularly since I was an undergraduate. As a student, I used to linger in the bookstores and browse the expensive and rare books imported from overseas. Despite hardly spending a penny in Eslite bookstores, I

considered myself a 'loyal visitor'.

In this research, I immersed myself in the experiences of visiting Eslite bookstores much more often. I visited Dun-Nan Eslite and Xin-Yi Eslite twice a week, taking my total visits of the two stores to four times a week. I attended a range of different events hosted in the bookstores; for example, I attended concerts which were normally classical music played on stringed instruments such as the violin. I also attended book events in which newly-released books were presented and introduced by authors. I also attended fee-commanding lectures provided by the Eslite forum on various subjects such as architecture, design, history, and philosophy. Attendance at other events like book exhibitions and films were also part of my empirical study. The main reason for me to undertake this programme of visits was to gain experience of being a visitor and consumers; at the same time, I observed events and talked to people including staff and other visitors. The reason I chose Dun-Nan Eslite and Xin-Yi Eslite primarily related to the degree to which Eslite promotes the two stores. I carried out observant participation for two months - four times a week and for about two hours - and on each occasion I did not make any plan to spend money on specific times or dates. Rather, I bought items when they caught my interest, as would have been the case if I had not been involved in research and was simply browsing. As for the events I went to, I chose only topics I found interesting, and did not attend all that was on offer. During this time, I kept a research diary to record the experiences generated (Whatmore, 2003), and to note down how I felt about my bookstore experiences too. I focused on my relations to the materiality of the bookstores and to other people, on other visitors, on the atmosphere of the stores, and so on.

Writing a research diary in the bookstores was not an easy job. Although I felt fairly

free to take notes without hiding my behaviour in the bookstores, when I was in the bookstores as visitor it was difficult to look around and take notes at the same time. Sometimes I even forgot the task of writing the diary when books or events drew my attention. My way to cope with that kind of situation was to write short notes during breaks in my visit, for example when I went to toilet or moved from one floor to another. At the end of each visit, I stayed in coffee shops in the bookstores to write out more fully. I tried to ensure the diary was written as soon as possible after finishing each of the observant participations.

## 3.4 Conclusion

I introduced ethnography as a methodology appropriate to conduct studies on the culture and the doing of specific groups of people. From the basis of existing ethnographic knowledge, I formulated a more-than-representational ethnographic approach that sets up a way for the study to connect the research objectives and theoretical ideas to empirical investigations. The more-than-representational ethnographic approach aimed to move beyond "the inability of knowledge in social analysis to do anything other than hold onto, produce, represent, the fixed and the dead" and towards to "apprehend the lived present as an open-ended and generative process" (Harrison, 2000: 499). In the latter part of the chapter, I pointed out the connection between the theoretical concepts, the research questions and research methods. I also gave detailed explanations of the methods I used in conducting the empirical investigations.

The following three chapters will outline the empirical findings that were discovered through using the methodological approach. The chapters will describe and examine

the multiple spaces of Eslite experiencescapes which are produced by Eslite, as well as the multi-layered bookstore experiences which consumers/visitors engaged in the experiencescapes of Eslite bookstores. Courtesy of the methodological approach outlined, these chapters will explore fully how consumers/visitors encounter and interact with Eslite bookstores, and also how the experiences affect what kind of people/consumers they want to be and what ways of live they practise.

# Chapter Four: Making Eslite experiencescapes

## 4.1 Introduction

As outlined in Chapter Two, spaces of consumption in late-modern consumer societies have become more than just places for business transactions: they are experiencescapes designed for particular experiences to be staged within, as well as the objects for which consumers pay (O'Dell and Billing, 2005). That is, the competitive prices of various commodities and a huge quantity of stock are not enough for consumers anymore. Instead, the retailers have to transform stores into experiencescapes to ensure their consumers have distinct and enjoyable experiences on their shopping trips. In order to provide particular experiences, with specific atmospheres and sociability, experiencescapes are normally deliberately planned, designed and produced by the retailers. Offering "nice environment for reading", Eslite bookstores are places designed for its visitors "to experience the beauty of reading and the fun of life" (Chen, Yeh, Interview, August, 2006, Jiang and Zou, 2006). Eslite bookstores are not only sales floors for books but also sites to provide its visitors with special reading experiences. In other words, Eslite bookstores are experiencescapes – "landscapes of experience" (O'Dell, 2005: 16). To understand the reasons why people like to visit Eslite bookstores, I want to start by acknowledging the Eslite experiencescape (and the focus will shift to the consumers in the next two chapters). This chapter is therefore set up to explore the Eslite experiencescape and to answer the first research question:

What are the bookstore experiences that Eslite plans to offer its consumers and how are the spaces of Eslite bookstores made to deliver the business purpose?

When looking at the production of space, Lefebvre (1991: 111) reminds us that replies to the questions of 'who produces?', 'what?', 'how?', 'why and for whom?' are vital. We know the spaces of Eslite bookstores are designed and produced as 'experiencescapes' by 'Eslite' for its 'consumers'; we have the answers to 'what', 'who produces', and 'for whom'. But 'why' and 'how'? According to Pine and Gilmore (2011: 68), one of the critical steps needed to make a successful experiencescape is a well-defined theme which "act[s] as the dominant idea, organizing principle, or underlying concept for every element in the experience". The theme of an experiencescapes represents the kind of experience the retailer wants its consumers to have. Despite the fact that consumers are always "unmanageable" and individual experiences may vary widely from one to another (Gabriel and Lang, 2006), a well-defined theme points out what the retailer has to do in order to create the specific space for the experience. For that reason, I turn to the head office and executive staff of Eslite to examine what they envisaged and how they planned, laid out and created the Eslite experiencescape. I also look backstage at the Eslite bookstores to examine critically why certain business strategies are employed, drawing attention to the processes through which the envisagement of places creates spatial realities. However, the chapter does not aim to offer a 'cooking recipe' for replicating the Eslite experiencescape; rather, it aims to explore the process through which the spaces of Eslite bookstores are imagined, talked, and produced. In other words, the chapter will reveal the spatial formation of Eslite bookstores and that will offer a number of ways through which to rethink the future of bricks-and-mortar bookstores.

To unpack the formation of Eslite experiencescapes, this examination relies on an

exploration of the different spaces of Eslite experiencescapes: the conceptual, the operational and the physical, as outlined in figure 4.1 below.

Figure 4.1 Multi-spaces of Eslite experiencescapes (Source: the researcher)
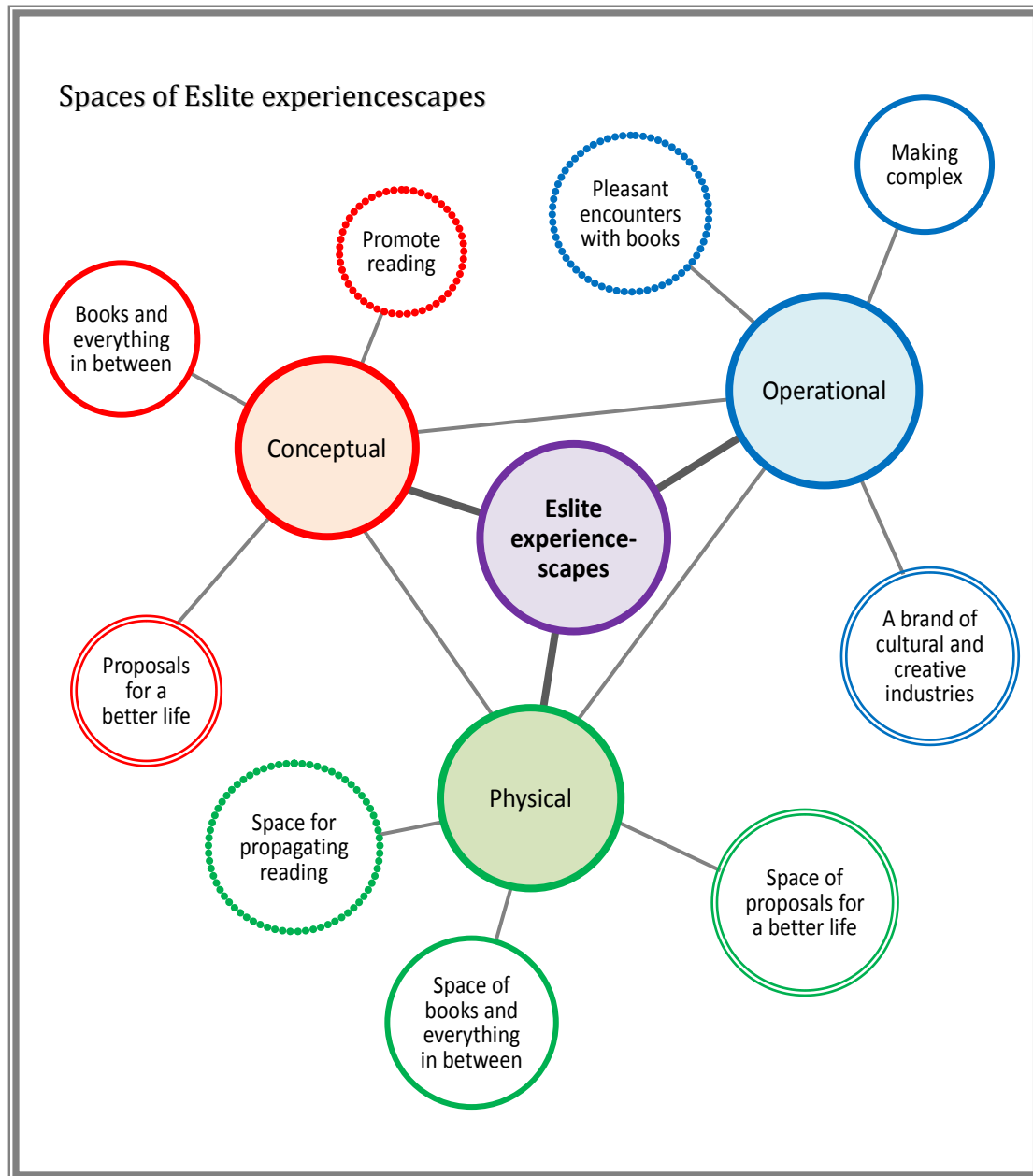


The conceptual space is about how Eslite executives conceptualise Eslite experiencescapes. The 'official statements' are taken from published texts produced since the establishment of the first Eslite bookstore, and from what is said in the interviews conducted as part of this research. In other words, talks from the head

office of Eslite and its executive staffs are the focus here. I borrow an idea from Gregson et al. (2002) in seeing talk as a citation of discourse which refers to a particular series of practices and representations. The talk of retailers is, according to Gregson et al. (2002: 1664), "illustrative of shared understandings and meanings that connect to practice: assumed, appropriate ways of doing things." Thus, the retailer's talk is linked with what is done and how, and it has the capacity to produce what it names. For that reason, I will explore Eslite's central themes, 'to propagate reading, not to sell books', 'books and everything in between', and 'providing proposals for a better life'. I will then turn to the operational space where the executives use three main business strategies to exercise these central themes. The three corresponding business strategies are 'offering pleasant encounters with books', 'making complex' and 'Eslite as a brand of cultural and creative industries'. The last space I want to explore is the physical one. How the physical space is actualised through the business strategies to reflect the three central themes will be assessed. Although I present the spaces of Eslite experiencescapes in three groups, these spaces are not separated. Rather, as Lefebvre (1991: 8) argues, there is "an indefinite multitude of spaces", and all spaces are connected to each other. As such, the chapter will unfold as follows. The ways that Eslite conceptualises the bookstores will be examined in section 4.2 to unfold what exactly Eslite expects its visitors to do and to feel in the experiencescapes of its bookstore. The business strategies will be explored in section 4.3 in order to understand how Eslite achieves its business intentions. Section 4.4 explores the physical spaces produced according to the concepts and business strategies. Throughout these discussions I will argue that the formation of Eslite experiencescapes is better understood as a complicated performance rather than as a linear construction (section 4.5).

## 4.2 Conceptualising the space of Eslite experiencescapes

In order to make Eslite bookstores as places "to experience the beauty of reading and the fun of life" (Chuang, 2006) there are three central themes that Eslite executives outline through which to conceptualise and define Eslite bookstores: they are 'to propagate reading, not to sell books', 'books and everything in between', and 'providing proposals for a better life'. I will address these themes next.

### 4.2.1 To propagate reading, not to sell books

The first theme that Eslite executives talk about in order for the consumers "to experience the beauty of reading and the fun of life" is "to propagate reading, not to sell books". The theme seems the opposite of the common idea about bookstores, which are regarded as stores where books are sold. As places for retail business, transactions and profits are the ultimate concerns of booksellers. However, the idea of earning money as primary function seems not to apply to Eslite bookstores. Unlike conventional book-retailers, "Eslite does not sell books; what Eslite really does is propagate reading," the founder of Eslite, WU Ching-Yu has said (Chen, 2005a, Hong, 1998, Huang, 1998). This is because Mr Wu believes reading makes "people comprehend the true, the good, and the beautiful" (Chen, 2005c). Hence, running bookstores is considered by Mr Wu as a way to contribute to society (Xiao, 2002, Xu, 2005b). It seems that Eslite has placed the focus of its business outside the sphere of selling books and designated itself a unique social-cum-cultural task. To put it simply, Eslite has been de-commercialising itself. The expression of its devotion to a social and cultural assignment has been shown not only in talks with mass media but also in interviews carried out by researchers. The director of the public relations department

of Eslite, CHEN Shu-Jen, commented that "our major and constant job is to promote reading" when she gave me a brief introduction to Eslite bookstores at the start of an interview conducted as part of this research (Chen, Interview, August, 2006). What Ms Chen said correspond with Mr Wu's comments to journalists. Accordingly, "Eslite bookstores are to propagate reading rather than selling books" is one of the most important massages that Eslite wants to convey to the public. The message shows that Eslite intends to be a different kind of bookseller.

However, propagating reading and making people experience the beauty of reading can be a complicated task, especially in Taiwan. One of the major difficulties that Eslite has faced in the journey of promoting reading is that the Taiwanese tend to regard reading as a disagreeable activity. The senior regional manager, YEH Ching-Hua, told me that "many people only do their reading to prepare for school examinations, to grant licences, and to pass work evaluations" due to the credentialism in Taiwan (Yeh, Interview, August, 2006). Credentialism refers to the overemphasis placing on one's credentials; academic achievements are considered synonymous with social success. In societies where credentialism is popular, such as Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, and Singapore, people generally believe that holding higher academic degrees or professional licenses is the only way to achieve a better life (see Zeng, 1999). In order to pass examinations amidst fierce competition, the majority of people spend a huge amount of their spare time reading textbooks or books related to their examinations and assessments. Other reading material is considered a waste of time. In this sense, reading is not an enjoyable leisure activity, and time spent on other types of reading material is limited. The situation is well-recognised by Eslite, and the managers want to bring about a change in the situation. For Ms Yeh,

we want to break the connect between books and examinations that many people have in their winds. We want to make a connection between reading and fun and to inspire people to read more. (Yeh, Interview, August, 2006)

Another major difficulty that Eslite faces is that reading is not concerned with the basic necessities of life. For some people, books are a uniquely portable magic, the key to the wide world, but for others, books are just printed work offering information, imaginative narration, opinions, or conjectures upon facts and realities. "One doesn't need books to survive and we understand that", Ms Yeh said. "But we want to let people understand the beauty of reading because reading makes us appreciate the world better and gives us the wisdom to face our lives" (Yeh, Interview, August, 2006). This understanding of how reading is important makes Eslite devote itself to promoting reading. For this reason, "Eslite wants to help people build up the habit of reading in their everyday life" (Yeh, Interview, August, 2006).

Not only popular fiction can be found in Eslite bookstores, but also professional and specialised subjects. Moreover, seats for readers and proper lighting are installed in Eslite bookstores, encouraging visitors to spend time browsing or reading books. In fact, the friendly and convenient environment for reading seems to function in the way Eslite Corporation plans as a considerable number of people like to spend their leisure time reading in Eslite bookstores (Xiao, 2002, Yang, 2005a, Yu and Yang, 2005). The strategies and the design of the physical space will be discussed in detail later, but here I want to emphasise that through broadcasting the notion that 'Eslite bookstores are to propagate reading, not to sell books' the Eslite Corporation assigns its bookstores a new role that makes Eslite bookstores different from its competitors. The discourse and actions of de-commercialisation diminishes the focus on business transactions, and at the same time, motivates the imagination as to what bookstores can be. On that

account, the general business concerns which conventional bookstores have are hardly learnt from Eslite Corporation in public media. For instance, it is difficult to see any news of Eslite bookstores in terms of choosing the right products (which books can make good sale), the ways to sell products effectively (how to promote books for more profit), or business strategies to compete with other retailers (how to increase turnover). Instead, how bookstores should make consumers feel in certain ways is one of the most common topics that Eslite Corporation has talked about, with the idea of propagating reading. For example, Eslite bookstores have to make consumers "relaxed and feel at ease" and "feel calm and peaceful" so that "consumers can more easily immerse themselves in reading" (Dai, 2005). The talks from Eslite Corporation therefore highlight the feelings that consumers would have when in Eslite bookstores. It is clear to see that Eslite bookstores are conceptualised as places for reading, not for selling books. Therefore the experience that Eslite experiencescapes aim to offer is not a good experience of buying books, but of enjoying reading.

## 4.2.2 Books and everything in between

The second common theme in the talks that Eslite executives have for consumers, "to experience the beauty of reading and the fun of life", is "to read books and everything in between", which was re-phrased from a sentence in an advertisement composed by Ms LEE Xin-Pin for Eslite bookstores:

> Rodin read human bodies and found beautiful coastlines that Columbus did not discover. Camus read Kafka and realised half of the truth has been illustrated. Between books and non-books, we welcome all types of readers. (Lee, 1998: 158)

Later, "to read books and everything in between" became popular in other advertising and non-promotional copy from Eslite bookstores, and was also used frequently by

staff in Eslite. However, the meaning of the sentence has altered. Today, the sentence is interpreted as 'everything can be read'. As the senior regional manager, Ms Yeh, explained,

> Not only books can be read. Anything that gives us affection, information, and inspiration can be read. For example, we read paintings, we read exhibitions, we read art works, and we read performances. (Yeh, Interview, August, 2006)

Generally speaking, the objects of reading are printed material such as books. As a carrier of culture and knowledge, books are considered as the media through which to offer texts and/or visual images that convey abstract concepts to readers. However, in Eslite bookstores, the notion of reading is expanded to include a wide variety of material goods, sensual events and fleeting performances because all of the above give us feelings and understandings through our apprehensions and interpretations. That is what Eslite means by "to read books and everything in between". Through acknowledging that reading materials can be more than books, the categories of commodities in Eslite bookstores are extended to an impressive array. The director of public relations of Eslite bookstores, Ms Chen, gave me a quick and clear picture of what is sold in Eslite bookstores by dividing the commodities into two groups:

> We provide both static and dynamic products. By static, I mean books, CDs, stationeries, furnishing and etc. As for dynamic products, we offer concerts, films, lectures, performances, these sorts of events. What we have is really diverse. (Chen, Interview, August, 2006)

What Eslite extends, then, is not only the subjects of books on offer, but also things unrelated to books, such as art works, coffee, music, and exhibitions. The connection between books and other commodities are trans-categorical. That is, the types of commodities in Eslite bookstores are multiple and the commodities are brought

together via planar relations rather than vertical and linear relations. Through the 'trans-category connections' a number of different merchandise lines are able to co-exist in Eslite bookstores. Bookstores have become more than sales floors of books, consisting instead of a number of areas for different purposes, such as sales floors of full of varying commodities, coffee shops, and exhibition halls or performance rooms. Various activities and practices, apart from reading, are therefore encouraged. Although the trans-category connections have made Eslite introduce numerous commodities into their stores, the company has also been criticised for becoming department stores (Wang, 2009b). Ms Yeh disagreed with the criticism and offered an explanation of why non-book products are important:

> This is related to what we talked about earlier in terms of propagating reading. We realised some people don't read every day, or books are only a tiny part of their life. No problem! We accept that! We are what needs to change. So we host concerts, exhibitions, films, performances, story-telling, etc.; and we also offer designer stationery, music, photo albums and autobiographies of popular stars. Let Eslite bookstores become a part of everyone's daily life. And hopefully reading will become part of everyone's life then. But first of all, you need to draw people, especially those who don't read normally, into bookstores, don't you? (Yeh, Interview, August, 2006)

For Eslite, the various activities and products are not meant to make Eslite bookstores into malls; instead, they are the means to propagate reading by attracting customers in the first place. The most significant value of the 'trans-category connections' is that bookstores are linked with other aspects of life through reading. Consumers do not only go to Eslite bookstores for books, but also to listen to a folk gig, to have a lesson in architecture, to drink a cup of coffee with friends, or to enjoy a mini in-store book fair. In that sense, Eslite bookstores are not just places of transaction/consumption (of books); rather they are places of entertainment, places of education, places of socialisation, and places of leisure. Eslite bookstores are one of the 'everyday' places.

As well as the option of books, Eslite offers many more products consumers can choose as reading materials according to their preferences. It is believed by Eslite that if consumers visit Eslite bookstores often, reading will become part of people's lives. Mr Chen also emphasised the idea that "to read books and everything in between" is not motivated by the "commercial profits"; instead, "everyone is able to find his own preferred way to read" (Chen, Interview, August, 2006). Despite the commodities in Eslite bookstores being multifarious, the commodities are not randomly chosen individual irrelevant items, and nor are the multiple merchandise lines in Eslite bookstores combined to offer the visitors the convenience of being able to find all they want/need in one building. The broad range of commodities in Eslite bookstores are rather carefully chosen, as Ms Yeh explained:

> Not any product can be placed in Eslite bookstores, and not any retailer can set up a counter in Eslite bookstores. We examine the commodities – are they of good quality, do they offer inspirational knowledge, do they represent creative ideas, and do they value culture as much as we do? (Yeh, Interview, August, 2006)

In order to practise the concept of "to read books and everything in between" Eslite has conducted a number of business strategies as well as paying careful attention to the interior design of the bookstores. Various events are hosted to bridge the gap between books and the wide range of goods. In terms of the interior spaces, music shops, electronics shops, stationery shops are designed and installed in Eslite bookstores to offer non-books goods. The strategies and the physical space will be discussed later, but I want to point out that through broadcasting the strapline of "to read books and everything in between" Eslite re-defined the material of reading and expanded that from books to inert goods and ephemeral performances. The discourse and action of cross-category connection brings books and non-books into Eslite bookstores as reading materials for the consumers. Books are no longer the key

products. Eslite bookstores become complex bookstores. On the one hand, there is a lot consumers can do in Eslite bookstores. Consumers can expect to go to Eslite bookstores and browse something apart from books if books are not particularly favoured. The practices of consumers, then, become even more diverse than buying books and reading books. Now, shopping for a model aircraft or joining a musical performance is common to see in Eslite bookstores, too. There are more busy interactions, which do not take place in other bookstores, going on in Eslite bookstores. The spatiality of (Eslite) bookstores has thus changed. By the same token, what the bookstores look like also goes beyond traditional ideas. Although bookshelves and bookcases are still the main furniture, glass display cases, performance stages/halls and digital apparatus are parts of Eslite bookstores. A café may sit next to the magazine area, counters of jigsaw puzzle and wooden toy blocks can be neighbours in the children's book area, while an exhibition hall may be just around the corner. 'Piles of books to the ceiling high' is no longer an image applied to all types of bookstores. In short, the discourse "to read books and everything in between" gives us more ideas about what we can read and also shows different imaginings of what we can do in bookstores apart from reading. So we can entertain, we can learn, we can socialise, and we can shop in Eslite bookstores. That tells us Eslite aims to make Eslite bookstores one of the 'everyday' places. It is from this dimension that Eslite reaches its goal of making Eslite bookstores as experiencescapes for consumers to experience the fun of life. What is more, consumer experiences are becoming even more important to Eslite bookstores. The experiences here do not mean the individual experience over a transaction such as if a customer is happy about the service he receives. Rather, consumer experiences refer to the interactions a customer has with goods/services/retailers during the period of visiting a store. Ms Yeh believes consumer experience is the reason why Eslite bookstores are able to compete with online

bookstores:

> It's very convenient to buy books online now. […] Why do people come here? I think is because of the experiences. In Eslite bookstores, there are lots of events for you to participate in and many products for you to discover. You can see, you can hear, you can touch, you can smell, etc. Just like the fun you have in open-air markets. Those real interactions between you and the environment are irreplaceable. (Yeh, Interview, August, 2006)

It is because consumers normally have multi-sensory experiences through their appreciation or participation of products/events in Eslite bookstores. The actual interactions occurring as part of a multi-sensory experience is the reason that physical bookstores, such as Eslite bookstores, continue to thrive.

## 4.2.3 Providing proposals for a better life

The third central theme which Eslite executives talk about for the consumers 'to experience the beauty of reading and the fun of life' is "providing proposals for a better life". This theme seems irrelevant to Eslite because it is not an organisation or an institution doing projects in terms of social, economic or environmental work for Taiwanese people and Taiwanese communities. So how can a bookseller offer its consumers ideas for a better life? The deputy manager of Eslite, LAIO Mei-Li, told journalists that Eslite wants to offer consumers "proposals for a better life" through the commodities which allow consumers to "acknowledge aesthetics" as well as to observe and pursue "happy lives" (Chen, 2004a). As previously discussed, the products sold in Eslite bookstores cover a wide range. There are still goods such as books and stationery; there are also dynamic commodities such as lectures and art performances. No matter if still or dynamic, Eslite tends to stock those goods that have specific cultural and creative characteristics that "may enhance consumers' everyday life" (Yeh, interview,

August, 2006).

Those products presented on the shelves or the events performed in the halls are carefully picked due to their unique "styles" and "cultural depth" rather than their obvious functions, both Scott Huang (Director of Marketing and Planning Department) and Tony Cheng (Senior Supervisor of Marketing and Planning Department) expressed the notion (Cheng, Huang, Interview, August, 2006). While the majority of goods contain the general utility that people want, for example, a pen for writing, the utility is not the reason why Eslite executives decided to present the products to the consumers. The products sold in Eslite bookstores are required to have denotative meanings behind the products and therefore to evoke specific feelings and thoughts in the consumers. In other words, it is the symbolic value rather than the use value that Eslite executives regard highly. The symbolic value brings differentiation and makes the products unique. Accordingly, Eslite aims to "guide the consumers to rethink the details of ordinary life" through appreciating "the aesthetics and creativity of the products" explained by GUO Yu-Chun, a senior designer of Eslite bookstores (Guo, Yeh, Interview, August, 2006). Take notebooks, diaries, and journals for example: Eslite bookstores sell only famous brands, such as Moleskine and Hobonichi, "because the design, brand philosophy and quality of the products" (Guo, Interview, August, 2006). Similarly, the activities and events are invited, hosted and presented because they are "inspirational" and "may work as food for thoughts and consumers may make changes in their everyday lives accordingly" said Mr Huang, the director of Marketing and Planning Department (Huang, Interview, August, 2006). Apart from the 'conventional' subject-matters on offer, Eslite also hosts some 'controversial' events. For instance, an exhibition and a symposium with the topic of 'Female art' was co-organised in 1990 with Awakening Foundation, which was established in 1987 to promote women's rights

and self-awareness. In addition, an exhibition titled 'Male and Male, Female and Female – the New Culture' was mounted in 1994 to offer Taiwanese people a greater understanding of homosexuality. Today, these issues may not seem so controversial, but they were fairly controversial in Taiwan as the 38-year Martial Law only lifted in 1987 and the Taiwanese society was by that time relatively closed. Therefore, Eslite aims to make consumers encounter "the aesthetics of everyday life" and "the full spectrum of life" (Chen, 2007b, Dai, 2005, Eslite, 2004). In other words, the commodities – both goods and events – offered in Eslite bookstores are expected to have impacts on consumers' lives. In that sense, Eslite bookstores become places to present the ideas proposed by Eslite to its consumers for a better life.

## 4.3 Operating the space of Eslite experiencescapes

In order to actualise the themed spaces of Eslite experiencescapes, Eslite executives have conducted a number of business strategies along with three themes "to propagate reading, not to sell books", "books and everything in between", and "providing proposals for a better life". The corresponding strategies are 'offering pleasant encounters with books', 'making complex' and 'Eslite as a brand of cultural and creative industries'; I will explain the three strategies below.

### 4.3.1 Offering pleasant encounters with books

It is suggested in section 4.2 that the theme "Eslite bookstores are to propagate reading, not to sell books" is to move Eslite beyond being a bookseller and into becoming a 'reading ambassador'. Accordingly, Eslite has been creating encounters through which consumers meet with books and fall in love with reading. To achieve the

goal, Eslite has paid attention to 'offering pleasant encounters with books'. Eslite understands that there are many different types of readers and each of them has preferred subjects and writing styles. While some people like reading science fiction, others may get pleasure from poetry. Moreover, even within the same subject, works by different authors are presented in various styles, e.g. business, literary, or practical. To meet the needs and preferences of all readers as well as to stimulate interests in reading Eslite has employed several strategies. The first one is to pay attention to the variety of subjects and styles, the number of titles, and the diversity of used languages. Eslite's stock is not only varied in terms of the numbers of books it carries, but also in its subjects and styles. The founder of Eslite, Mr Wu, stresses that bookstores have to fulfil "the desires and expectations of book lovers" (Jiang and Zou, 2006: 5). The majority of books in each Eslite bookstore are in Traditional Chinese, but books in foreign languages, such as Japanese, English, and simplified Chinese, can also be found. Although the number of books in languages other than Traditional Chinese is relatively small in terms of stock, Eslite bookstores are still one of the few bookstores where they can be bought. The second method is to launch **'Eslite recommends'**. Apart from the bestsellers and the new releases, Eslite started 'Eslite recommends' in 1990 in order to introduce readers to books which have been neglected. In so doing, not only the quantity of reading but also the quality can be improved. The recommended books are all shown with a short commentary to give an introduction to the books. The recommended books can be in any subject but there are a few criteria for the selection. Books which are "reprinted without copyrights, which are kitsch and inferior, are not considered in our recommendation lists", as stated by the director of supply department, LEE Jie-Xiu (Ren, 2008).

Photo 4.1 Books recommended by Eslite (Source: Eslite)

The third method is to offer readers information on publications through Eslite Reader, a monthly magazine published by Eslite. The columns in each issue included new books, book reviews, author interviews, Eslite-recommended music, and an event calendar. Every member of Eslite bookstores was entitled to a free copy. However, Eslite Reader was only published until 2008 due to "the severe challenge of the digital era" (Chen, 2008). Now information on books and publications is offered and updated through RSS (Really Simple Syndication) on the website 'Eslite Station'. The fourth method is to run various book-related events in branches. The events include book launches, book signings, storytelling, meet-the-author opportunities, mini book fairs, and exhibitions of artists' work. One of the most common types of book-related events is 'talk & signing', in which authors are invited to give a talk about new and forthcoming books. After the talk, the audience can have their copies signed by the author.

Photo 4.2 Book event 'The Wonder Journal - YANG Wei-Shan Talk & Signing' (Source: Lord Way Press)

Apart from the common types of events, Eslite hosts a number of more interactive events, too. For example, to celebrate its twentieth anniversary, Eslite invited artist LIN Ming-Hong, who is famous for his fabric pattern designs, to make book covers for the books stocked in the art section.



Photo 4.3 Book event 'Cover Off'. Artist: LIN Ming-Hong (Source: Eslite)

These covered books formed part of an art exhibition as well as being products for sale. Consumers were welcome to join the exhibition through exploring the covered books. At the same time, consumers were also welcome to purchase the covered books, getting the covers for free. The event increased the fun which consumers get through the interaction with the covered books. Whether common formats or not, events such as these are regarded as one of the best ways to "gain attention from consumers, provoke curiosity regarding books, and excite interest in reading", Mr Huang explained (Huang, Interview, August, 2006). The events are often advertised through creative promotion copies circulated in different written formats such as bookmarks, brochures, leaflets, postcards, and sales letters, and through digital media, e.g. online.
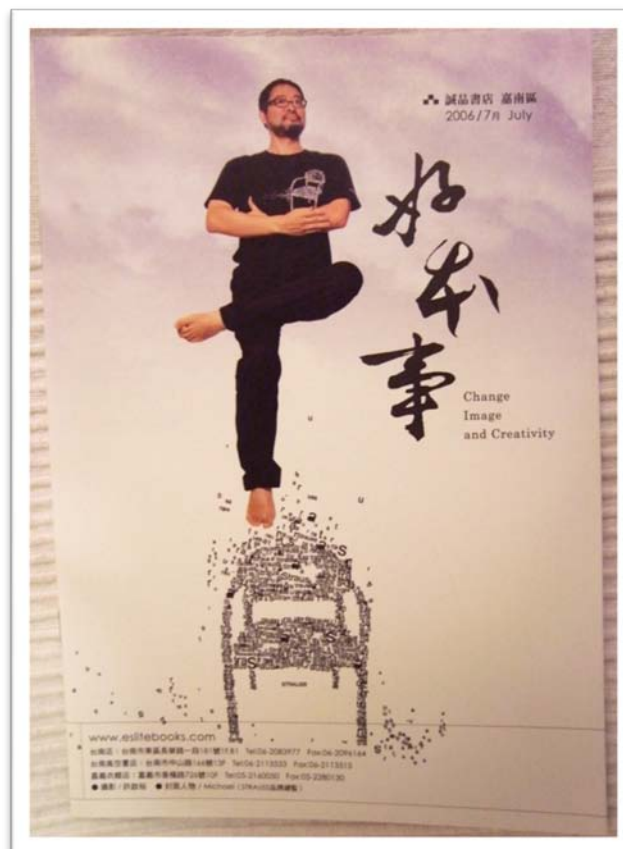


Photo 4.4 A promotion copy for a book event (Source: the researcher)

Those creative promotion copies have been regarded with favour in general because of the affection they have gained from consumers. One of the copywriters, LEE Xin-Pin,

has published three books which are collections of the copy she has written for Eslite. Finally, facilities for reading are provided in the bookstores. Ms Chen explained the physical space and material properties of Eslite bookstores are important tools for making consumers comfortable and encouraging them to read.

> We all think the space of Eslite bookstores is important. Good environments for reading need to be provided in order to propagate reading. […] the traditional bookstores were small and narrow. […] Eslite brought big changes to the space of bookstores. […] Not only are the bookstores spacious and neat, furniture such as desks and lights are carefully chosen for our readers so that the readers can feel relaxed and read comfortably. (Chen, Interview, August, 2006)



Photo 4.5 Seats in Eslite Xin-Yi store (Source: Ken Shin)

Ms Chen pointed out that the ways consumers feel and behave are affected by the surroundings in which they find themselves. If the bookstores are bigger and offer better lights and desks, consumers tend to feel at ease and pause to read in contented and undisturbed states. The above five methods are the main means that Eslite utilises

to satisfy the consumers and to inspire the consumers to read. Through the five methods, Eslite aims to offer encounters with books through diversified subject areas, book events and reading facilities.

## 4.3.2 Making complex

As we have seen in section 4.2, the theme "books and everything in between" has transformed different commodities and services into reading materials. Consumers are encouraged to visit Eslite bookstores and to 'read' books, goods, and events. The object of reading is expanded from texts alone to include ephemeral activities, performances, and exhibitions. In order to actualise the themed spaces of Eslite experiencescapes, Eslite has made its bookstores complex through introducing various lines of merchandise and services into every single branch of Eslite bookstores. The various products provided in Eslite bookstores are expected to encourage all kinds of consumers, with a variety of needs or wants, to visit, and often. Through using the strategy of 'making complex' Eslite incorporates different businesses into the sale floors of its bookstores. The business of Eslite can be divided into three sectors: "the cultural, the catering, and the mall". (Chen, Interview, August, 2006) The cultural sector represents the business engaging with bookselling, publishing, and cultural activates. The commerce of Eslite bookstores and Eslite Gallery, the production of printed works, and exhibitions and performances, belong to the cultural sector. The catering sector runs the kitchen equipment, wine cellars, and food and beverage stores. Eslite Tea Room and Eslite Wine Cellar are examples of the catering sector.

Photo 4.6 Performance in Eslite Xin-Yi store (Source: Eslite)

The mall sector deals with the commercial trading of commodities except books. Commodities such as stationery and personal accessories fall within the category of the market sector. The three types of business co-exist in the majority of Eslite bookstores; that is, consumers can find books, a café or tea-room, and non-book goods in Eslite bookstores, although the scale of the catering and the mall varies from one bookstore to another depending on the size of the bookstore. For example, branches in stations of MRT (the mass rapid transit system) do not operate catering businesses. In general, consumers have opportunities to see books and everything in between, and therefore they may go to Eslite bookstores for reasons beyond buying books. For instance, consumers may go to Eslite bookstores for a cup of tea or coffee with friends, or to see an exhibition of calligraphy. Eslite bookstores are not only places to read books or to purchase books; they are also places to socialise and undertake leisure activities. The strategy of 'making complex' multiplies the function of Eslite bookstores, creating more reasons for consumers to visit Eslite bookstores, and thus ensuring that Eslite

bookstores are engaged in more dimensions of our lives.



Photo 4.7 Eslite café, Eslite Dun-Nan store (Source: Eslite)

The concept of 'making complex' is not entirely new, however. Among existing marketing strategies, there is a similar one called 'diversification', which refers to a strategy that a corporation uses to increase sales volume and sustain growth through new products, new markets, or new technology (Texier, 2000: 3-4). A corporation using diversification "enters a new market without necessarily leaving its existing one(s), with a product new to the firm but not necessarily new to the world" and applies new technologies to existing products without abandoning old technologies (ibid.: 4). In the case of Eslite bookstores, Eslite expanded into new business outside of the scope of its existing bookselling commerce through engaging in entirely different businesses such as food, beverage, and creative goods. What Eslite has been doing through the strategy of 'making complex' is, then, very similar to the idea of diversification. In other words, the strategy of making complex seems like old wine in a new bottle. However, Eslite

was the first bookseller to run its bookstores successfully in this manner in Taiwan. The vice executive manager of Eslite, Wu Min-Jie, told journalists that "the strategy of making complex is the best model to sustain the business of Eslite bookstores" (Wang, 2009b). Like many loyal customers, Ms Wu had doubts about Eslite bookstores as combination stores in the earlier stage. But the profits which Eslite earns from selling books only accounts for 30 per cent of the total turnover of all the businesses that Eslite runs, according to reports given in some business publications (see Chen, 2007b, Ding, 2008, Lee, 2007, Xie, 2007). Ms Wu admitted that "the majority of our profits are from the malls; the bookstores have run at a deficit for many years" (Ding, 2008). Therefore, 'making complex' plays a vital role in enabling Eslite to maintain its bookstores.

### 4.3.3 Eslite as a brand of cultural and creative industries

It is stated in section 4.2.3 that the theme "providing proposals for a better life" has moved Eslite even further away from the existence of a bookseller. What Eslite has been doing is encouraging consumers to visit its stores in order to get ideas which may help them to make changes to their ways of living. In other words, consumers are expected to gain inspiration, to appreciate "the aesthetics of everyday life" and to encounter "the full spectrum of life" (Chen, 2007b, Dai, 2005, Eslite, 2004) through the commodities in Eslite bookstores. Therefore, what consumers experience is not limited to different goods and events, but also encompasses ideas for a better life as proposed by Eslite. In order to actualise the themed spaces of Eslite experiencescapes, Eslite has made itself a brand of cultural and creative industry and, accordingly, Eslite bookstores are designed as "platforms of cultural and creative industries" (Jiang and Zou, 2006: 5). As WU Min-Jie, the executive vice president of Eslite, told journalists in a press

conference "I hope in the future when you think about Eslite, what come up your minds is no longer bookstores, but a brand of cultural and creative industries" (Chen, 2007b). Ms Wu's manifesto is the operational strategy that Eslite employs to provide its consumers with the proposals for a better life. Compared to the previous two business strategies, the third one is fairly recent, and only started to appear in the public media after 2004. But what are cultural and creative industries, and does Eslite qualify as a brand of cultural and creative industries from its previous existence as a bookseller? According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, cultural and creative industries have to offer commodities which embody cultural values, symbolic meanings, human creativity, and intellectual property (see UNCTAD, 2008). In Taiwan, the Ministry of Culture in Taiwan gave the definition of cultural and creative industries as those which

> originate from creativity or accumulation of culture which through the formation and application of intellectual properties, possess potential capacities to create wealth and job opportunities, enhance the citizens' capacity for arts, and elevate the citizens' living environment (Act for the Development of Cultural and Creative Industries. (Ministry of Culture, 2010: 1)

The industries include music, performing arts, product design, digital content industries, and so on. In some European countries, the term 'creative industries' is preferred when indicating cultural and creative industries. For example, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in the UK uses creative industries to identify "those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property" (DCMS, 2001: 4). If we look at the thirteen industries which DCMS classifies as creative industries, the element of 'culture' is apparently involved. The reason why the British government uses 'creative' instead of 'cultural' is that the

government wants to "sidestep possible high-culture connotations of the word 'cultural'" (UNCTAD, 2010: 6). No matter whether they are named 'cultural and creative industries' or 'creative industries', it is clear that those industries share the same quality of being "at the crossroads of the arts, culture, business and technology" (UNCTAD, 2008: 6). In other words, what lies at the centre of the industries is that they undertake activities that are able to generate economic growth and development through creative assets. That is the potential by which Eslite, a corporation without manufacturing and production, becomes a brand of cultural and creative industry. Despite the fact that this transformation seems a huge project and the discourse seems fairly new, the founder of Eslite bookstores, Mr Wu, told the public just after the opening of Eslite Xin-Yi store that Eslite had begun its transformation. Mr Wu stated, "through offering diversified ways of reading, Eslite has made itself into a platform of the cultural and creative industries" (Jiang and Zou, 2006: 2). The diversified ways of reading Mr Wu mentioned are found in the activities and goods that Eslite bookstores provide, based on the discourse of reading "books and everything in between" (see 4.2.2). The director of public relations, Ms Chen, argued that the activities and goods offered in Eslite bookstores have met the criteria of being a cultural and creative industry, saying:

> Apart from the rich collection of books, Eslite is the first bookstore in Taiwan that has space for cultural activities such as exhibition and performance. We host at least 4,500 activities per year; the activities include art exhibitions, classes, dance, films, performances, theatre acts, etc. […] The products we have in the bookstores are with creativities and originality. […] You see how we value culture and creativity. We don't just talk about culture and creativity, we do them. (Chen, Interview, August, 2006)

As Ms Chen pointed out, the books, activities and goods that Eslite bookstores have are part of the economic offerings that belong to cultural and creative products.

Furthermore, Eslite has the ability to turn culture and creativity into wealth and jobs. Hence, Eslite, as Ms Chen argues, is doing cultural and creative work, and is a part of cultural and creative industries. That is, Eslite has showed its capability to make itself part of cultural and creative industries through supplying cultural activities and creative goods. Accordingly, Eslite bookstores have become places for the cultural and creative industries to be exercised. This aim of being a brand of cultural and creative industry shapes Eslite's identity, and encourages it to continue to offer products which are regarded as having impacts on consumers' lives.

## 4.4 Materialising the space of Eslite experiencescapes

I have noted the themes Eslite staffs talk about and the business strategies employed to make the experiencescapes through which Eslite aims to help consumers "to experience the beauty of reading and the fun of life". In this section I want to address the physical spaces which Eslite produces, along with the business strategies used to deliver the themes. The physical spaces will be explored below according to the themes as 'physical spaces for propagating reading', 'physical spaces for books and everything in between', and 'physical spaces for providing proposals for a better life'.

### 4.4.1 Physical space of 'propagate reading'

In order to create a nice reading environment through which to propagate reading, every branch of Eslite bookstores is designed by architects and professional interior teams. CHEN Rui-Xian, who designs most of the Eslite bookstores including the award-winning Far Eastern store, has talked about his design ideas in some mass media. Instead of encouraging purchases, Mr Chen claims the layout of Eslite bookstores is

intended to make consumers enjoy peaceful time and to read (Ding, 2004). To achieve these goals, Mr Chen emphasises "user contentment" as the main concept which drives his design on Eslite bookstores (Yang, 2005a: 21). 'User contentment' is related to how to make users feel at ease in the space. As bookstores are full of bookcases, I will give examples particularly of bookcases to demonstrate 'user contentment'. The ergonomic design of bookcases and their location is important; the design and the arrangement can lead to more comfortable and more enjoyable environments. In Eslite bookstores, there are different sizes and styles of bookcases located in different book areas, with specific functions. Generally speaking, taller bookcases are against walls while shorter bookcases are distributed in the centre of the bookstore (see picture 4.8). This means that the line of vision remains uninterrupted. Visitors can look around freely, finding the area they wish to visit easily. The arrangement of bookcases enhances the visual range/distance of visitors.



Photo 4.8 Bookcases in Eslite Xin-Yi store (Source: Eslite)

Moreover, the use of short bookcases and the location of tall bookcases against the wall makes bookstores appear more spacious compared with some small bookstores, with towering bookcases and stacks upon stacks of books on the bookcases. The arrangement of bookcases in Eslite bookstores is flexible in that bookstores do not come in one fixed shape or size along the whole wall/area. For instance, when there are windows, which allow the sun in with skylights (see photo 4.9, the girl standing in front of a window and the bookcase in front of her is therefore lower), care is taken to ensure that bookcases do not appear in front of the windows. Natural light is able to come into the bookstores for better illumination and to enhance visitors' moods. Bookcases have to be arranged to fit in with the distinctive condition of each bookstore.



Photo 4.9 Let in the natural lights between bookcases (Source: CHI Yuan)

The colours of the bookcases are also considered to have an impact on the moods of consumers, and they vary according to the categories of reading materials which they

house. For example, the magazines bookcases are white while those of literature are dark brown.



Photo 4.10 Bookcases of magazines are in white colour (Source: CHI Yuan)

The choices of colours are not random in such cases; rather, "the colours are carefully picked by the interior designers to create specific feelings such as the feeling of vivacity", said the deputy manager of Eslite Xin-Yi store, Chang Jing-Ru (Chang, Interview, August, 2006). Some effects of colours are universal despite the fact that the perception of colours is subjective and may be subjected to different cultures. Brighter colours are often described as energetic and darker colours are known as immutable. Thus the bookcases for magazines are white as magazines are considered less serious than literary books. The use of colours works as a way to link the reading materials to particular images.
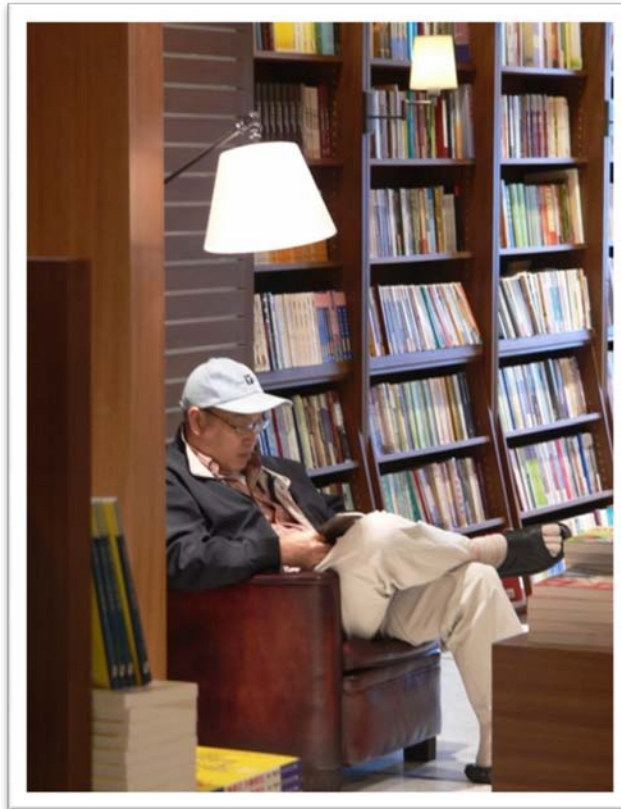
Photo 4.11 Stylish and functional armchair and light (Source: CHEN Pingu)

In addition to bookcases, furniture such as seats and lights are placed throughout the stores to help users to feel relaxed and comfortable. Mr Chen claimed he went abroad a number of times to search out "stylish and functional" seats and lights; "good designed furniture is important […] to shorten the distance between people and books and to encourage visitors to spend some time on browsing or reading books." (Xu, 2005a) For Mr Chen, good furniture encourages people to stay and to read. This friendly and convenient environment for reading seems to function in the way Eslite intends as a considerable number of people like to spend their leisure time in Eslite stores (Xiao, 2002, Yang, 2005a, Yu and Yang, 2005).

Apart from the spatial concepts from the architects, human factors and ergonomics are also given care and attention in terms of producing spaces to propagate reading. The furniture, hardware, facilities, devices and physical surfaces are carefully identified so

as to fit consumers' bodies and cognitive abilities. Deputy Manager of Eslite Xin-Yi store, Ms Chang, gave some details as examples to explain how much the physical space matters to Eslite; she said "the height of the tallest bookcases in Eslite bookstores is 240 centimetres, but bookcases for kids are different" (Chang, Interview, August, 2006). What Ms Chang said shows the consideration which goes into human factors and ergonomics in the store designs. The bookcases have to fit the average measurements of users' bodies, including children if to be used in children's bookstores. Books are thus reachable for most adults and children. What is even better is that the majority of the lower bookcases in Eslite bookstores are designed with angled back (see photo 4.12). The eyesight of visitors falls much more easily on information located at fifteen degrees, and enables visitors to read book covers and associated literature more easily (Chen, Interview, August, 2006).



Photo 4.12 Angled bookcases in Eslite bookstores (Source: CHI Yuan)

Apart from the larger scale of spatial/interior design, Eslite employs many techniques to display books in order to catch consumers' eyes. Eslite is aware of how visitors may

be attracted by books with the covers facing out. In general, books can be displayed either with the cover of the book displayed fully (called a face-out) so it is in full view or with only the spine of the book showing where the viewer can see the title and author but not the cover (called spine-out). The face-out display occupies more shelf-space than a spine-out one. But a bookstore with a high percentage of face-outs can create the image of being a speciality book boutique and therefore an expensive place to shop, while bookstores with virtually all spine-outs are often perceived as cramming in a huge selection of titles sold at low prices. Thus, "it is very crucial to find out the right percentage of face-out and spine-out and to do that, you need to pay attention to many factors such as what is the hot topic of current market and what books readers may be interested in," said the deputy manager of Xin-Yi store (Chang, Interview, August, 2006). Apart from the technique of face-out/spine-out, books in Eslite bookstores tend to be displayed by specific scenarios or themes. For example, many books in Eslite bookstores are, like other bookstores, simply placed on bookcases in order of subjects. However, Eslite also introduces books to its visitors via diverse routes in which books are specially arranged and presented with some visual works. Eslite has tried various unusual and novel ways of placing books on display tables. For example, instead of neatly standing book up on the display tables, the books in picture 4.13 are placed in a spiral shape with an assemblage of books lying one upon the other in the centre of the spiral shape. This may not be everyone's cup of tea but is something fresh which will tend to draw attention.
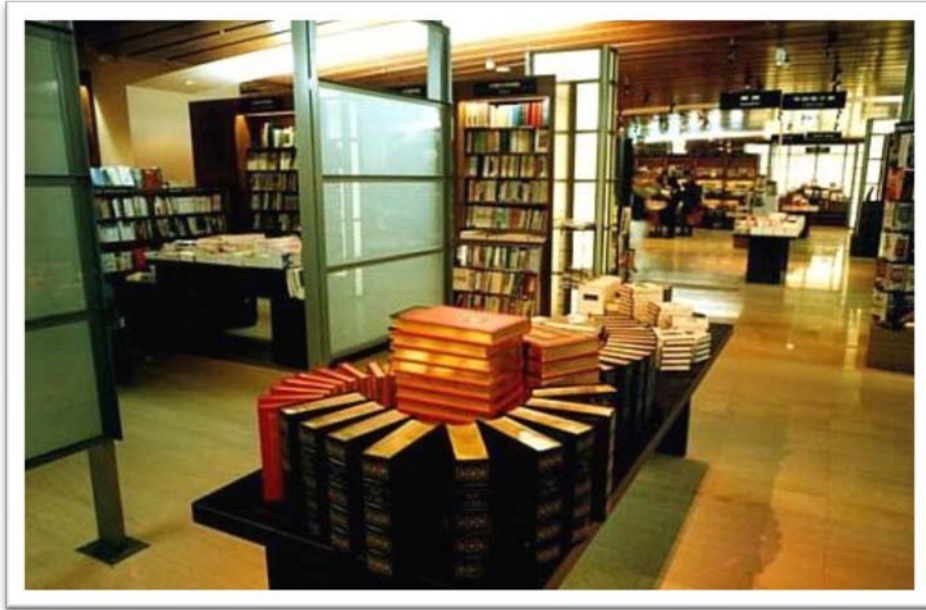
Photo 4.13 Special book display (Source: Eslite)

Table-toppers are great tools to attract consumers' eyesight, too. One of the frequently used types of table-topper in Eslite bookstores is a wooden unit as shown in picture 4.14. These table-toppers are independent units; they can be placed on any flat table. Table-toppers are normally used to create height and let some books 'face-out'. In such a way, the visitors can see the covers of books easily even if from a distance.



Photo 4.14 Table-topper (Source: Eslite)

Ms Yeh explained the importance of display when she was asked about visual works in the stores:

> … we put a lot of emphasis on the visual works… Even the same corner of a bookstore - the style would look completely different if you display your commodities in different visual designs. It's like the sceneries of bookstores. We want to create various sceneries for readers, and encourage readers to appreciate the books … the design […] has to be a concept to create a scene in the store … with different kinds of materials, readers' senses can be stimulated and that helps them to create imaginations from reading and for reading." (Yeh, Interview, August, 2006)

The word 'scenery' used by Yeh shows clearly the link between display works and consumers' experience. The scenery is a composite of corporeal matters and different ways of displaying products. For example, in photo 4.15 (on the next page) a sign and a black box are located on a display table. On the black box, the colours of words (white and yellow) are high-contrast or saturated; the sign board is arched, which makes it distinct from the black, upright, and four-square box. Compare to other display tables, a table with extra visual work is more likely to stand out although it is not necessarily more aesthetically pleasing to every single consumer.



Photo 4.15 (left) Books on a display table with a sign (Source: TSAI En)

Photo 4.16 (right) 'Books of the week' on a display table (Source: TSAI En)

In photo 4.16 Books of the Week are shown on a display table with a taller signpost. The signpost is the only signpost in the area, and it is much higher than the table surface. This is a way to draw consumers' attention and lets consumers see it from far away. Although books in the two photographs are displayed on similar tables, the ways of piling up books are slightly different. In photo 4.16 the books are not as neat as those in photo 4.15. Both the visual works and the way of piling up books create unique scenery and reflect Yeh's comments (even the same corner in a bookstore the style would look completely different if you display your commodities in different visual designs). The display gives consumers different visual stimulations and therefore they may, according to the information from the visual work, walk towards the table to see the books or walk away to skip something in which they are not interested. Consumer experiences are thus influenced. The above techniques and the spatial interior design are the main means that Eslite utilises to satisfy consumers and to inspire them to read. Through the techniques and design, Eslite aims to encourage consumers to visit the comfortable and friendly environments of Eslite bookstores and enjoy reading books from a wide range of subjects.

## 4.4.2 Physical space of 'books and everything in between'

As complex bookstores, areas with specific functions to accommodate different commodities, both books and non-books, are carefully planned by Eslite and deliberately designed by professional architects and interior designers. There are two essential elements in the design of the physical spaces. The first one is to produce the spaces to gather all products but also to articulate the variety of qualities that the products have. The second is to arrange the commodities harmoniously so that

consumers do not feel submerged or crowded. The first element of the design can be presented through the store layout for the best arrangement of those different areas. Store layout is a critical determinant in achieving success in retail because the layouts "strongly influence in-store traffic patterns, shopping atmosphere, shopping behaviour, and operational efficiency" (Lewison, 1994: 289). It is also generally argued in business and management studies that store layout contributes to store image (Baker et al., 1994), store loyalty (Merrilees and Miller, 2001), consumers' willingness to purchase (Baker et al., 1993), consumers' satisfaction (Simonson, 1999), and consumers' acceptance of price (Grewal and Baker, 1994). Therefore, store layout is a challenging task for architects. Generally speaking, there are four main types of store layout used around the world: grid, free-form, boutique, and controlled flow (see Fernie et al., 2003: 314-315). Every Eslite bookstore is designed in different layout as one format fits better than another depending on the scale and shape of the store, according to architect CHEN Rui-Xian (Xu, 2005a). While smaller Eslite bookstores may integrate different commodities in the same room, larger Eslite bookstores normally set up independent zones/rooms/halls for different commodities. Take Xin-Yi store as an example, where books and non-books are on different storeys of the building. Books are located on the first, second and third floors. Commodities on the ground floor include consumer electronics and fashion goods, such as laptops, mobile phones, clothing and bags. Additionally, consumers can enjoy exhibitions, performances, food and drinks on different storeys of the Xin-Yi store, spread over eight storeys in total.

Photo 4.17 Book zones on the first floor in Eslite Xin-Yi stores (Source: Eslite)



Photo 4.18 Fashion goods on the ground floor in Eslite Xin-Yi stores (Source: Eslite)
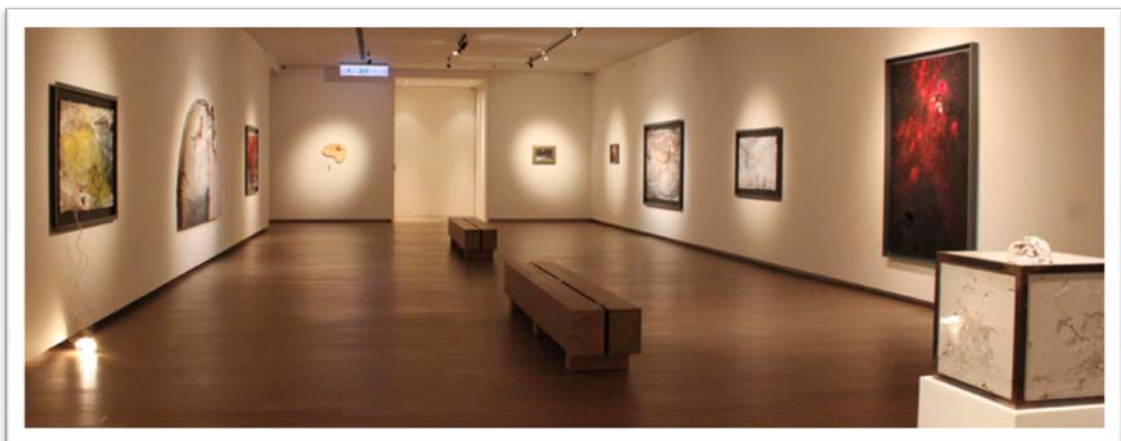


Photo 4.19 Exhibition room on the fifth floor in Eslite Xin-Yi stores (Source: Eslite)

It isn't only adults who can have fun in the bookstores, but also children. In Xin-Yi store there is a children's bookstore for little book lovers, together with a museum to

encourage every child to explore various dimensions of daily life, with furniture and facilities scaled to fit children.



Photo 4.20 Children's museum on the fourth floor in Eslite Xin-Yi stores (Source: Apply Daily)

For instance, children can pretend to be staff in a mini supermarket, or to be firemen driving fire engines. From the pictures we can see that each physical space of Eslite bookstores is designed and produced with specific functions designed to implement the motto of 'books and everything in between'. The benefit of arranging commodities into different zones according to the distinct types of merchandise is that consumers can focus on the specialities of the products while being engaged by different products presented in the bookstores

But how can consumers feel at ease with a mixture of different commodities? Architect Mr Chen thinks the concept of 'negative space' is particularly important in the cases of Eslite bookstores because 'negative space' allows the consumers to "rest from the busy 'noises' of the surroundings" (Ding, 2004, Yang, 2005a: 21). Negative space is the concept of producing intervals between substances for "spiritual power, meaning, and

attraction" to glow as well as for "imaginations" to form (Pilgrim, 1995: 59). Instead of making the most use of the physical spaces for stocking commodities, negative spaces are areas with nothing in them. Negative spaces, in this sense, can be used to avoid the jam-packed look and at the same time to allow consumers to use their imagination. That is why Mr Chen insists that he has "to leave blank places for users to imagine and to rest through inserting several negative space in Eslite bookstores" (Yang, 2005a: 21). The generous room that Mr Chen planned seems to reflect his aim of make consumers happy and at ease so that consumers would feel relaxed in browsing and reading books.



Photo 4.21 A 'negative space' in a zone for art books (Source: Eslite)

Photo 4.21 is an example of the concept 'negative space', leaving plenty of room for customer traffic and for consumers to rest their minds and exercise their imaginations. Through using this concept, Mr Chen has created harmony between the different commodities available in Eslite bookstores, and has also opened up the physical spaces of books and everything in between to avoid consumers feeling uncomfortable or

crowded. In short, the physical spaces of Eslite bookstores are produced to give consumers an environment that enables them to experience books and everything in between in comfort.

## 4.4.3 Physical space of 'providing proposals for a better life'

In order to propose ideas for a better life, Eslite has become a brand associated with cultural and creative industries. Eslite bookstores are planned so as to enrich consumers' lives though various commodities containing cultural meanings and creative values. The physical space involved in providing proposals for a better life is produced as 'stages' – for events as well as for commodities– to present the proposals of life projects that Eslite makes to its consumers. Since the establishment of Dun-Nan store, Eslite has hosted events. Now the various events are available in every branch. The types of event cover a wide range: art, concerts, dance, drama, film, photography, and events related to books. What is more, the number of events in Eslite bookstores is large. By the end of the year 2008, more than 3,000 sessions have been held across the branches, and the approximate number of people who have attended is 14 million (Wang, 2009b). It is noteworthy that the number of events held in Eslite bookstores has been increasing dramatically. Take the year of 2011 for example: there were 4,500 events hosted in just a single year (Cheng, 2011). In short, the number and variety of events that Eslite has held is without doubt exceptional. But why is hosting diverse events believed to be capable of giving consumers ideas through which to make changes in their lives? Ms Chang described how consumers become excited during the cooking events where chefs demonstrate their recipes in the cooking studio in Eslite Xin-Yi store:

> … Our consumers become very excited, they whisper to each other when they see

colourful ingredients are introduced, when they smell and hear noise come out during cooking, and when they taste the food […] often they buy the book after the event if not have one already and say to us they will definitely try to cook the dish at home." (Chang, Interview, August, 2006)

Through the process of encountering, observing, and experiencing the events, Eslite aims to turn the knowledge or information inside books into consumers' actual lives. The black words printed on white paper thus become real. A cooking event may make someone interested in the book, and afterwards, in cookery itself.



Photo 4.22 A cooking event at the cooking studio in Eslite Xin-Yi store (Source: Eslite)

On the other hand, events can make consumers engage with multiple senses and that gives consumers unforgettable experiences. Unlike reading, which only appeals to two senses (sight and touch), events normally engage each of our five senses. Consumers would be guided to know a topic through sounds, looks, smells, touches and even tastes. These multi-sensory experiences create a positive memory of the bookstores as consumers normally have a stronger emotional attachment when participating in events. For example, a competition/exhibition was hosted to promote Moleskine

notebooks. Personal notebooks showcasing ideas were sought for a competition. The winner won a trip to France while the top fifty notebooks were later displayed in the bookstore. Viewers were offered gloves to browse the displayed notebooks. Next to the exhibition desks, stocks of Moleskine notebooks were offered for sale.



Photo 4.23 (left) An information board for the notebook event in Eslite Dun-Nan store (Source: Eslite)
Photo 4.24 (right) Gloves are offered for viewers (Source: Eslite)



Photo 4.25 (left) Viewers were invited to browse the displayed notebooks (Source: Eslite)
Photo 4.26 (right) Notebooks were stocked and on the shelves for sale (Source: Eslite)

The competition/exhibition of notebooks did not only get consumers involved, but also gave consumers ideas as to how they can use a notebook in their daily lives: as a class notebook, a travel journal, or as a collection of personal recipes. In other words, the product is introduced to consumers not only by what the product is but also through the many ways the product might link to consumers' lives. As the director of the marketing and planning department, Mr Huang, pointed out, nowadays the events hosted in Eslite bookstores are "not monopolised, but connected to books or other commodities to make a whole package for ideas of everyday life" (Huang, Interview, August, 2006). Eslite sees events as a great way to enhance the interactions between consumers and the books and goods. The interactions make bookstore experiences enjoyable and memorable for consumers. After experiencing the events consumers are more likely to try something new and to do something different. That is the potential an event has to change someone's life and a proposal that Eslite offers for a better life. Therefore, the physical rooms/halls are essential for events. Eslite has consistently made sure there are permanent physical spaces, such as the cooking studio (see photo 4.22), and also temporary physical spaces, such as the display desks/tables for the notebook event (see photo 4.25 and 4.26). That is because the physical spaces are not the background of the events, but a tangible part of the event for consumers to engage in through their corporeal experiences. The physical spaces of 'providing proposals for a better life' must never be neglected if Eslite wants its consumers to fully "experience the beauty of reading and the fun of life".

## 4.5 A performative formation of Eslite experiencescapes

There has been a growing interest in the relationship between consumption spaces and consumer experiences in recent years (see, for instance, Goss, 1993, O'Dell and Billing,

2005, Pine and Gilmore, 1999, Power and Scott, 2004, Smidt-Jensen et al., 2009). Such spaces of consumption are specially planned as places offering specific or spectacular experiences to consumers. Therefore, consumption spaces are often recognised as simply constructed by retailers' business ideas. But, as I have shown in the previous sections, that understanding is only partially correct. While the common idea may lead to a misunderstanding - that if the retailers have different ideas, the spaces of consumption will automatically be different - I have demonstrated that the formation of spaces is far more complicated than that. I will expand on this point through arguing that the formation of Eslite experiencescapes is rather "performative" (Butler, 1988) .

Based on the business philosophy, Eslite applied three main themes – "to propagate reading, not to selling books", "books and everything in between", and "providing proposals for a better life" – to its branches so that visitors are able to experience the beauty of reading and the fun of life. Eslite bookstores are landscapes of specific experience; in other words, Eslite bookstores are experiencescapes. From what goes before, Eslite has done a good job in delivering the experiencescapes. The themes are created by Eslite (head office) and expressed through talks and texts released by head office and the executive staffs. The physical stores are actualised according to these themes. The Eslite experiencescapes are therefore held together by both discursive and material arrangements. However, the process of making experiencescapes is not straightforward as there are some problematic concerns identified by the executive staff. Firstly, making experiencescapes from retailers' plans may appear as a linear process (set up a theme -> define the elements for the experience -> construct a stage for the experience -> an experiencescape delivered), in which Eslite bookstores are produced based on the themes. But in fact the formation of Eslite experiencescapes evolved through continuous iterations and reiterations. The staff told me throughout

the interviews that "Eslite bookstores are to propagate reading" and "we want consumers to experience the beauty of reading and the fun of life", sentences which have also frequently appeared in reports and articles published in mass media (Chen, 2007a, Hong, 1997, Hong, 1998, Tong, 2003). The themes are used to indicate the business objectives which Eslite sets out to achieve: Eslite sees itself as more than a bookseller, aims to provide multiple products and services to enable consumers to read more and live more happily. The themes are not only said to the external world – the public and researchers like me - but also said to the internal world – store staff. In so doing, Ms Yeh explained, staff members are helped to participate in making the experiencescapes under the themes. Ms Yeh gave more details in terms of the importance of keeping the themes constantly in mind, particularly for staff involved in the design and planning department:

> You need to keep telling them (the staff) that […] so that they don't just do the task for its own sake but to make something bigger because they know Eslite bookstores are more than bookstores and they are the people who make Eslite more than bookstores. Talking the themes is inspiration to the staff; they [staff] have more enthusiasm and imagination as they know they are doing something bigger. (Yeh, Interview, August, 2006)

Staff members thus seem to have different understandings of their work, more passion and vision to devote themselves to the tasks they are assigned. But the point here is not whether the themes make the staff feel they are doing something greater or not. Rather, it is the occurrence of Eslite experiencescapes which come out through the acts of speech and writing leading directly to acts upon the bookstores. Talking over and over again about business themes direct the staff to do their work in ways corresponding to Eslite's aims: the staff recognises Eslite bookstores are more than bookstores, they offer creative ideas and they actively engage in making Eslite more than bookstores. The regular iteration of the themes realises the potential for changing

the concept of bookstores, as well as making the experiencescapes that Eslite wants. The experiencescapes are "constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler, 1990: 25) and equally important is that, in the case of Eslite bookstores, the members of the company have to participate in order to bring this about, too.

Secondly, making experiencescapes based on business plans and themes may appear ostensibly to be a question of retailer choice and therefore the retailers are able to do whatever they want without any constraints. But, in fact, Eslite staff do not hold the supreme power to control the construction of experiencescapes; they are influenced by and have to deal with the social and cultural contexts they are within. When the physical bookstores in Taiwan have been hit hard by online ones in the last decade, Eslite bookstores were not spared; they had continued losses for fifteen years. In order to carry on the business, some of Eslite's branches had to close down, and Eslite had to change its business strategy. Despite the fact that Eslite has always wanted to integrate different products and services into bookstores and make bookstores more experiential, books and the desire to propagate reading form the central focus of its business. Nevertheless, bookselling alone gave little profit to Eslite. Fighting to sustain the bookselling business, Eslite had no choice but to change itself, increasing its sales floors for non-book products and adjusting the stock of books. Talking about the change, Ms Wu said:

> I once questioned my father asking 'why did you allow malls to exist in Eslite bookstores?' But as I took charge of the operation, I realised there are some decisions you make only because there was no other option. (Wang, 2009b)

Although the model of retail complex we see in Eslite bookstores today is a model Eslite has been happy with, the deployment of the quantities between different merchandising lines, of the sales floor between different products, and of the human

and non-human resources arranged between different sections in the stores are not as Eslite wished initially. The current experiencescape we see is based on Eslite's plan and ideas, but there are specific social and economic conditions that even strong business willpower cannot overcome. Eslite has to deal with existing social and cultural frameworks. Therefore, the process of making experiencescapes is "neither free play nor theatrical self-presentation" (Butler, 1993: 95), but is conditioned by social situations.

Thirdly, in spite of the fact that the themes and operational strategies constitute the experiencescapes which Eslite talks, the importance of materiality cannot be overlooked. From sketches of ideas to the concrete bookstores for consumers to visit, the whole procedure of making Eslite experiencescapes is anchored in materiality: the bookstores occupy a piece of physical land, the buildings housing the bookstores are made of bricks and concrete, the architects and interior designers use objects to present their design concepts, and Eslite relies on different machines and devices to operate the bookstores. The physical spaces, material resources, and advanced computational processes for retailing shape together the formation of Eslite experiencescapes, along with the themes and the operational strategies used by Eslite. In the interviews with Ms Yeh, slatwalls were mentioned a number of times to demonstrate how a bookstore would appear differently if the slatwalls were located on side A rather than side B. She said:

> You see the books on the slatwalls (pointing at a picture), it's better to place the books on this side - we call it the yang side - rather than the opposite side, which we call the ying side, because the yang side is on the main traffic route of the bookstore [...] therefore, where and which side it's better to install the slatwalls is key to a view of a bookstore. (Yeh, Interview, August, 2006)

Slatwalls, as circled in red in the photo 4.27, are composed of horizontal grooved

panels which allow things to be displayed without closing off the store. Although it is common to see slatwalls in many retailers such as supermarkets and grocery shops, they are not usually seen in bookstores. But in Eslite bookstores, slatwalls are often employed. The yang side in the picture, according to Ms Yeh, is the side where the slatwall is; the ying side is the side at the back, facing the tall bookcases. Placing the slatwall and hanging the books on the yang side increase the possibilities for the books to attract visitors' eyes.



Photo 4.27 Slatwalls, Eslite Dun-Nan store (Source: Eslite)

As a result, the bookstores would look differently to the visitors if the books and the slatwall were not there. In Yeh's words, the view of the bookstore would not be the same. What visitors experience here, seeing a book, picking it up on the way to the next bookcase, depends on the deployment of slatwalls. That is why material resources play an important role in shaping the formation of Eslite experiencescapes. More precisely, the formation of Eslite experiencescapes is actualised through materiality.

Finally, the iterations and reiterations of how Eslite makes bookstores into a specific type of experiencescape do not simply perform the experiencescapes. Each iteration and reiteration also has the potential to create a new model of bookselling. The conventional business types of bookselling either focus on the product or the service to make sure consumers get the books they want in a hassle-free way. But Eslite went beyond offering good products and services towards focusing on its bookstores to provide consumers specific experiences. This experience-focused model had never been seen in Taiwan before, and Eslite bookstores are therefore regarded as "the vanguard of the second revolution of Taiwan's bookselling industries" (Hong, 1997). Today, the idea of having a good reading environment to help people enjoy their reading is common. Many bookstores and state-owned libraries assert their efforts of offering good reading or browsing experiences. For example, Du-Pu library was refurbished "to offer the townspeople a bookstore which contains the space and atmosphere at the standard of Eslite Bookstores" (Da Pu Library, 2004), and Pu-Li library, which was selected as one of the top four public libraries in Taiwan by the Ministry of Education of Taiwan, is famous for its atmosphere and regarded as "as good as a Eslite bookstore" (Wang, 2009a). The spaces of Eslite bookstores are constructed through a repeated performance of experiencescapes-making, and experiencescapes-making has constantly challenged the conventional concept of bookstores, and reading spaces in the case of public libraries. When the discussion and construction of Eslite experiencescapes becomes a new kind of iteration on a larger scale in Taiwanese society, the repeated performance of experiencescapes-making suggests an openness to the change of the conventional concept of bookstores.

From examining the process of making experiencescapes of Eslite bookstores (section 4.2 and 4.3) it is clear that the experiencescapes are not simply constructed by Eslite.

The themes do not have the omnipotence necessary to erase all other accounts of people and non-human considerations from the process of making experiencescapes. Rather, various practices such as the conversation between the head office and the architects, the communication between executive staffs and store employees, and the arrangement of bookcases and display appliances, have to be take place in order to perform the formation of experiencescapes. Moreover, the head office and executive staff of Eslite do not work like governing subjects, and are not able to make the experiencescapes without constraint. That is, retailers or the executive team in a company cannot be regarded as being above the sphere of constitution and therefore having sovereign power. According to the above four discussions, it is clear that the experiencescapes are not a pre-given reality, but rather they are enacted or actively performed. In Nietzsche's words, "there is no 'being' behind doing, acting, becoming; 'the doer' is a merely a fiction imposed on the doing – the doing itself is everything" (Nietzsche, 1997: 29). For example, the experiencescapes of Eslite are made possible by a wide range of practices that include business meetings, operational strategies, interior and spatial design, material and human resources deployments, corporation investments, and retail speeches. The ideas, the meanings and the commercial assemblages enacted in the performances combine the conceptual and the material. They are either made or presented in the name of a particular situation but the situation does not pre-exist. The process of making the experiences engages in these random situations and therefore the experiencescapes only form as part of this comprehensive engagement. As Ms Yeh said,

> The bookstores we received from the architects are pieces of finished design work; they are not bookstores. These bookstores are Eslite bookstores only after our staff work here, the computer system runs, the co-ordinated operational strategies function, and many other elements all come together. (Yeh, Interview, August, 2006)

As a consequence, we have to move away from a reliance on the thought that experiencescapes are 'constructed' by Eslite, which can be outside of the experiencescape that it describes and yet simultaneously participate in the construction of that experiencescape, towards to the understanding that the process of making experiencescapes is performative.

## 4.6 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter has attempted to depict what kind of experiences Eslite aims to offer to its consumers, what the themes of the experiencescapes are, and how Eslite produces its bookstores as experiencescapes. Through taking retail talks as practice, the chapter examines how the head office and the executive staff of Eslite talk about and imagine the experiencescapes 'to experience the beauty of reading and the fun of life', the business strategies they use to enable the stores to deliver the experiences, and the coordinated arrangement of the material object and spaces. Accordingly, Eslite bookstores are beyond stores selling books. Eslite and its staff seem to have done a good job of building up the stores. But, according to the research findings, the formation of Eslite experiencescapes must be acknowledged as a series of performances rather than linear construction. This is because Eslite has been created through a number of different practices, such as developing a new business identity (moving away from a bookseller towards a sedulous promoter of books), running new business models (making complex), and producing specific spaces (platform of cultural and creative industries). All of these practices have been conducted together and have been iterated over time to make the effect Eslite specifies and the resultant spatial materiality Eslite needs to function in this way. Moreover, the process of forming Eslite experiencescapes has not been without problems. In fact, the staffs have to deal with

some situations that they did not expect and could not prevent. For example, the business of physical bookstores was hit severely by e-books, digital devices and online booksellers. The social circumstances in which Eslite bookstores existed forced them to take action and to develop countermeasures in order to mitigate the impacts of these circumstances, as well as to stabilise its business value and objectives. In other words, Eslite has not been able to make the experiencescapes simply because it decided to do so. As Callon (2007: 323) accurately points out, "the notion of a self-fulfilling prophecy explains success or failure in terms of beliefs only" but "performativity goes beyond human minds […] leaves open the possibility of events that might refute, or even happen independently of, what humans believe or think." Therefore, seeing the formation of experiencescapes as performative will allow us to comprehend the intricate connections between Eslite's conceptualisations and its manifestations, between what Eslite does and the context (social/cultural/economical) with which it engages, between what Eslite says and what it is, and between the practices of Eslite and the heterogeneous materials that make Eslite bookstores what they are. In the following chapter, the focus will shift onto the consumers to explore the ways in which they experience the experiencescapes.

# Chapter Five: Bookstore experience of Eslite consumers

## 5.1 Introduction

As discussed in the last chapter, I argue that Eslite bookstores are carefully designed to offer consumers a specific experience. More precisely, in terms of the intentions of the Eslite Corporation, the bookshops are made into experiencescapes through which visitors can experience 'the beauty of reading and the fun of life'. That is, bookstores are defined and planned not merely as marketplaces for the buying and selling of books, but also as places in which consumers experience events orchestrated by the Eslite Corporation. In this sense, books are pushed away from their role as the major object of consumption, as is still the case in the traditional/community bookstore, and instead, the overall experience of going to their stores become what Eslite sells. The media in Taiwan, therefore, tend to picture consumers in Eslite bookstores as a specific group of people which visits Eslite bookstores as a "pilgrimage of cultural taste and aesthetic lifestyle" (Wang, 2009b: 113, Xu, 2012, Yu and Yang, 2005). Similar assertions in terms of consumer demographics are also prevalent online on blogs, forums, and bulletin board systems. For example, consumers of Eslite bookstores are often depicted in the articles on PPT Bulletin Board System[12], the largest BBS based in Taiwan, as a

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[12]   Originally run by students from National Taiwan University, now 'PTT is arguably the largest BBS in the world with more than 1.5 million registered users. During peak hours, there are over 150,000 users online. It has over 20,000 boards with a multitude of topics, and more than 20,000 articles and 500,000 comments are posted every day' (Wikipedia. Available from:

group of bourgeoisies which goes to Eslite bookstores for the purpose of showing off their cultural tastes in books and lifestyle aesthetics (for example, see the articles titled as 'Except the interior decoration what else does Eslite have?' (Xiao, 1999), and 'Reading in Eslite, buying at book.com.tw' (MSE, 2012)). As discussed in the literature chapter and the previous methodological chapter, consumers are multi-faceted and it is unlikely to be easy to shoehorn them into a single category, as Gabriel and Lang (2006) argue. Accordingly, it is impossible to have one definitive type of consumer of Eslite bookstores, as the Taiwanese media tend to suggest. Moreover, this research suggests that academics working on cultural theory have neglected the acts and movements that consumers carry out during their bookstore experiences. Consumers are simply matched to the role either as free sovereigns who through consumption actively create their identities, spaces, etc. or passive subalterns who are manipulated by companies and social and cultural discourses (as discussed in section 2.4). The match between what Eslite bookstores offer (experiencescapes for reading and life) and what consumers want/purchase (high/specific cultural tastes), which has been constructed by the Taiwanese media and social networks, identifies consumers as passive subalterns; Eslite's consumers are reduced to a monochrome type. To respond to the calls for understanding 'unmanageable consumers' (Gabriel and Lang, 2006) who are able to exercise their own sense of agency in order to create their desired ways of life (Giddens, 1984), I aim to avoid this simple reduction of understanding consumers. Therefore, in this chapter I am interested in going back to the 'scenes' where consumers' experience take place in order to explore how consumers interact with and respond to other people and their surroundings while in Eslite bookstores. As such, this chapter will answer the second research question:

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http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PTT_Bulletin_Board_System. [06 August 2013]).

What is it that consumers actually do in Eslite bookstores, and how are the designed experiencescapes experienced?

This chapter will also reveal the gap or conformity between Eslite's expectations of consumer experience and what consumers really experience; in other words, to what extent the experiencescapes are able to make consumers experience the experiences that Eslite claims. Therefore, I am interested here in how consumer experiences are situated within some manipulated spaces, but at the same time the ways in which they also shape the spaces through embodied actions, interactions and movements. As has been highlighted in the literature of consumers in Chapter Two, consumption can take many forms. But instead of focusing directly on the consumers who carry out actions, in this chapter, I want to take the notion of "ways of operating" that de Certeau (1984) offers to inspire the understanding of consumers. de Certeau (1984: xi) argues it is not the subjects with which we should be concerned, but the "modes of operation or schemata of action" because "the systems of operational combination […] compose a culture". That is, the ways of operating in our everyday life - how we walk, what we cook, where we go - are significant in order for us to comprehend how we navigate everything, and accordingly the reiteration of operating constitutes our way of living; namely, so-called culture. Another inspiration from de Certeau is his ideas of "strategies and tactics" (1984: 34-39) which are introduced to look at how ordinary people do things. While strategies are employed by the systems/institutions, ordinary people make use of tactics to deal with these strategies and to escape from them without leaving the defined circumstances. Accordingly, a strategy is a game of the powerful, and a tactic is "an art of the weak" (de Certeau, 1984: 37). By using de Certeau's notions, I will get closer to understanding how the visitors of Eslite bookstores carry out their visits. Some questions arise at this point: How do consumers

visit/make use of Eslite bookstores? Do they buy more books or more non-book products? Do they sense the beauty of reading and the fun of life, as Eslite claims? Do they make use of any tactics while visiting Eslite bookstores, to resist the formulated strategies? If so, what tactics do they use? These questions are all circulating around the 'how'; that is, circulating around 'ways of operating'.

Through looking at the practice of the visitors of Eslite bookstores, this chapter argues the "geometrical" spaces (de Certeau, 1984: 93) of Eslite experiencescapes do not completely determine consumers' experiences and their uses of the bookshops. Rather, consumers demonstrate complicated patterns of affiliation to 'ways of operating'. What consumers do in Eslite bookstores and how they make sense of visiting Eslite bookstores demonstrates an awareness of their practice as hidden production. In other words, rather than going to Eslite bookstores to experience the specific reading style and associated lifestyle as a means to show off their taste as has been argued by the Taiwanese media, the bookstore experiences of Eslite patrons seem to be much more about 'tactical' movements that give new meanings to the spaces of Eslite bookstores through their using of the experiencescapes. The chapter thus places the stress on two groups of Eslite's consumers in particular, each having quite different consumption practices: the tactical practitioners and the compliant consumers. The latter appears to accept and acclimatise themselves to the experiencescapes of Eslite bookstores, but calculated and non-fleeting concerns and behaviours are discovered. On the other hand, while tactical practitioners are assumed to make use of trickery to resist the experiencescapes of Eslite bookstores, nevertheless the ways in which they unconsciously use tactics for their interests without aiming to defend themselves against Eslite bookstores or the Eslite Corporation is observed. By using de Certeau's

concepts, we can explore the operational practices of the consumers as well as the relationship between spaces and the embodied, ordinary and more-than-representational practices. More precisely, we are able to look closely at the practices of bookstore experiences and the interaction and negotiation between the tactical practitioners/compliant consumers and the experiencescapes of Eslite bookstores. As a result, it is inappropriate simply to describe Eslite bookstore experiences as a question purely of pilgrimages of taste and the pursuit of an aesthetic lifestyle, or, indeed, of mere flaunting of tastefulness. Rather, it is necessary to recognise the different variety of doings that consumers undertake in their consumption practice in Eslite bookstores, allowing them to transform strategic imposition to their own advantage. The chapter concludes in exploring the significance of employing de Certeau's concepts, which play a fundamental role in developing an understanding of cultural/bookstore consumption with reference to the interconnection between spaces and practices.

## 5.2 Bookstore experience of the tactical practitioners

In this section I will depict the bookstore experiences of the tactical practitioners – the creative visitors – who use Eslite bookstores innovatively in ways beyond the expectations of Eslite. Starting with de Certeau's work (1984) on consumption, I address what tactical practitioners do with the experiencescapes offered to them for their own interests. In other words, I want to see how tactical practitioners move, using "trickeries" and "poach[ing]" from the property of Eslite bookstores (de Certeau, 1984: xii). According to the different practices, I categorised the bookstore experiences of tactical practitioners into three groups: turning the bookstore into a reading room,

having a nap in the store, and window-shopping and hanging out. However, these categories are neither exhaustive, nor mutually exclusive. On the contrary, one who normally goes to Eslite bookstores to read there may sometimes window-shop. The use of categories here is to highlight the diverse practices in which active visitors engage, rather than classifying the visitors of Eslite bookstores into certain groups.

### 5.2.1 Turning bookshops into reading rooms

There is a group of visitors who like to spend time reading in Eslite bookstores. These avid readers normally sit quietly on armchairs, benches, or sofas offered in the bookstores. If the seats are all taken, the readers sit on the floor or perch on corners while they browse through their chosen books. Such readers come from both genders, are of different ages, and have varied occupations. They do not flip speedily through pages; instead, they spend some time reading. The limited body movements show the avid readers are deeply immersed in their reading. It appears that what these readers do echoes what Eslite emphasises – bookstores are places to propagate reading rather than selling books, therefore the space of Eslite bookstore needs to be comfortable for its consumers – as discussed in the previous chapter. However, we can see some of them go beyond what Eslite means by 'enjoy reading' when we look at their posture. Instead of reading on the designated seating or standing next to the bookcases, these impudent readers occupy floors, corners, stairs, etc. They put their belongings – bags, mineral water bottles, and shopping – on the floor, next to their feet. The readers' bodies seem relaxed. They look almost as if they are in their own homes, rather than in a busy bookshop.
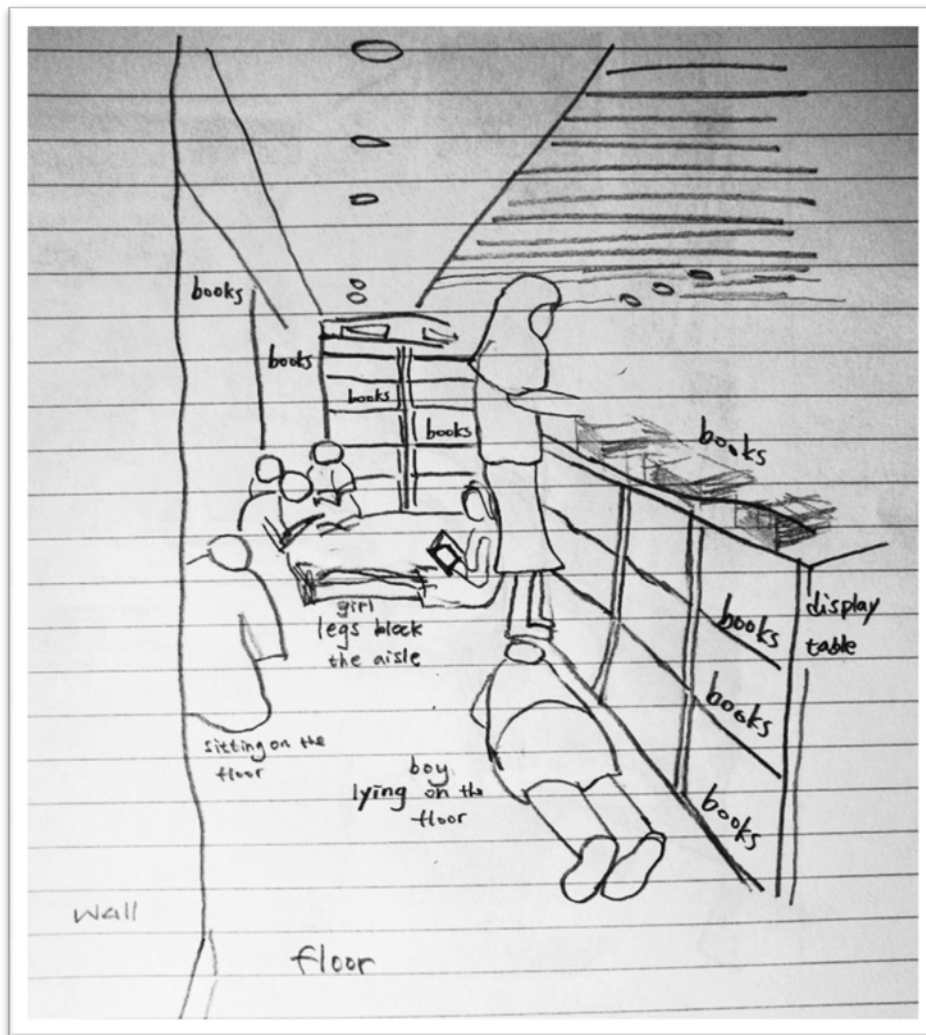
Photo 5.1 Field sketch made in Eslite Dun-Nan store (Source: the researcher)

Through offering specific experiencescapes for reading, Eslite aims to encourage consumers the experience of the beauty of reading, and to build up the hobby of reading. As nice environments for reading, it is common to see consumers reading in the bookshops, especially the areas where seats are available. However, the number of seats is limited, thus not every visitor is able to enjoy his/her reading on a comfortable armchair. Many sit on floors or stairs to read. The majority of the floors in Eslite bookstores are made of solid wood. Unlike the common floor material – tiles – in the houses in Taiwan, "the wood floor gives a warm feeling and makes feel like if I am in my room" said a research participant (Tsai, Interview, August, 2006). Often we see people

sit next to bookcases with their legs crossed, leaning on the walls or bookcases. Another common spot for people to sit is the stairs. These avid readers do not actively seek unnoticeable corners, but choose the spot right next to the bookcase from which they take out the books they want to read. The number of avid readers in the store depends on the time. There are fewer readers on floors during the week. But we find many more people sitting on the floor to read during peak time such as in the evening. The number of readers on the floor grows even larger at the weekend, when it is common to see people sitting close to each other. The number of "people reading in Eslite bookstores and the enthusiasm they show through their focused faces and still bodies make Eslite bookstores more like public libraries than those real libraries" (Researcher, Recorded in Ethnographic Field Notes, August, 2006.). To cope with the crowds, the readers have a tacit understanding in terms of the space they need to keep between each other. Research participant Kong shares the tips: "you need to pay attention in case your bag touches someone else, and of course, you only sit close to others if there are many people around and the space is not big enough for you to keep a distance from others" (Kong, Interview, August, 2006). The readers adjust their personal space and habits of movement according to how crowded the store is at any given time.

The avid readers cover a wide range of categories: male and female; teenagers; the elders; parents with children. But it is rare to see a man in a suit or a woman in formal dress. The shared character of them is their still bodies; they appear rooted to the spot, often staying for half an hour or even a few hours, hardly moving until they reach the last pages of their chosen books. The avid readers do not talk and they seem to come to the bookstores alone. Books seem to catch their attention completely; they hardly

raise their heads. The immersion in books forms a persistent force; any disturbance from others would constitute an affront. Perhaps that is why the store staffs do not ask them to stop reading or leave their spots. Research participant Lin recalls her experiences and explains "I have never been asked to stand up by store staff. You need to move a bit if you see someone comes to browse the books; don't block the view, so people know you are not a problem" (Lin, Interview, August, 2006). Research participant Kong explains how she avoids bothering other consumers: "keep your body next to bookcase as close as possible. Don't be stupid to sit just in the middle of the aisle" (Kong, Interview, August, 2006). Despite the fact that avid readers are thoughtful to other consumers, the reality is that they do reduce the space of the aisles and stairs. Especially at the weekend, it is common to see readers everywhere. Most of the readers are at corners, next to the bookcases, but some of them are in the middle of the aisle. The bookstores are turned into private reading rooms by readers' 'misbehaved' bodies. No matter how much concern for others the readers may have, moving out of the way of other consumers, for instance, not everyone is happy to browse with someone sitting by his feet. Research participant Lee says "I am used to see that [people sitting on floors], but that is a bit annoying because I feel awkward when I try to browse books, as if I interrupt the person's reading" (Lee, Recorded in Ethnographic Field Notes, August, 2006).

Although the avid readers do just what Eslite aims to promote - that is, reading - they actually take advantage of Eslite through poaching its resources. They enjoy reading in spots which are not designed for this use. Neither the floor nor the stairs are the locations designed by the architects for consumers to read on. Therefore, the design of the width of the floor and the stairs does not fit the use of the avid readers. The ways

in which the avid readers operate their reading behaviour misappropriates the design. Furthermore, the avid readers do not tend to spend money on books, despite the fact that they actively 'consume' the books. Reading books in the bookstores does not contribute to Eslite's business profits. Rather, the readers empower themselves through the embodied process of using Eslite's spaces for their own needs.

## 5.2.2 Having a nap in the bookstores

Eslite bookstores generally have long opening hours. In particular, Dun-Nan store is open twenty-four hours a day, and Xin-Yi store closes at two o'clock in the morning. The bookstores welcome late-night visitors. The late visitors are normally university students and people in their thirties. It is rare to see old people, young children, teenagers, and middle-aged women in the bookstores at night. Although most of the late visitors go there to read or browse books, some of them seem to be there for naps.
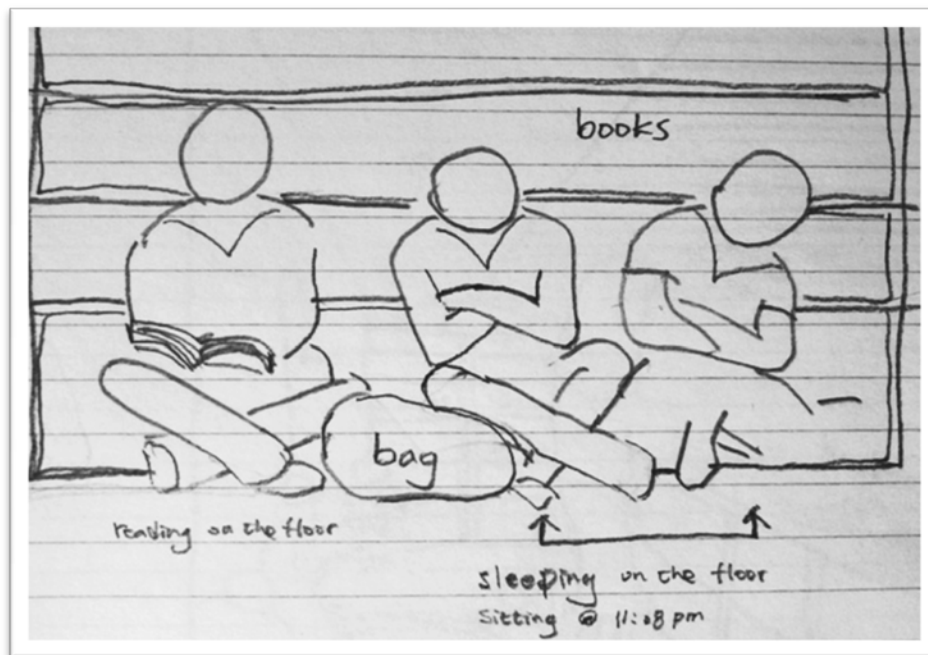


Photo 5.2 Field sketch made in Eslite Dun-Nan store (Source: the researcher)

These 'nappers' normally appear after eleven o'clock in the evening. They tend to sit on the floor or in the corner between two walls. They are not often seen on the in-store seats. Among the nappers, those who have their arms and legs crossed normally do not have books with them. It looks like books are not the reason bringing them to the bookshops. They appear to be in need of privacy and do not want to be disturbed. They often have big bags, backpacks, or nothing at all. Some nappers look less self-protective; they sit with their legs straight out (see photo 5.3). Their hands fall naturally, relaxed, along their bodies. Books can be found on their thighs. According to my observation in the bookshops, male nappers are far more numerous than female ones.



Photo 5.3 Field sketch made in Eslite Dun-Nan store (Source: the researcher)

Although the nappers are relaxed in the bookshops and that is what Eslite intends to offer to its consumers, what the nappers do is not what Eslite aims to see. The long opening hours are to allow urban inhabitants to visit the bookshops after their work shifts rather than for people to take naps. However, for people who need to wait for

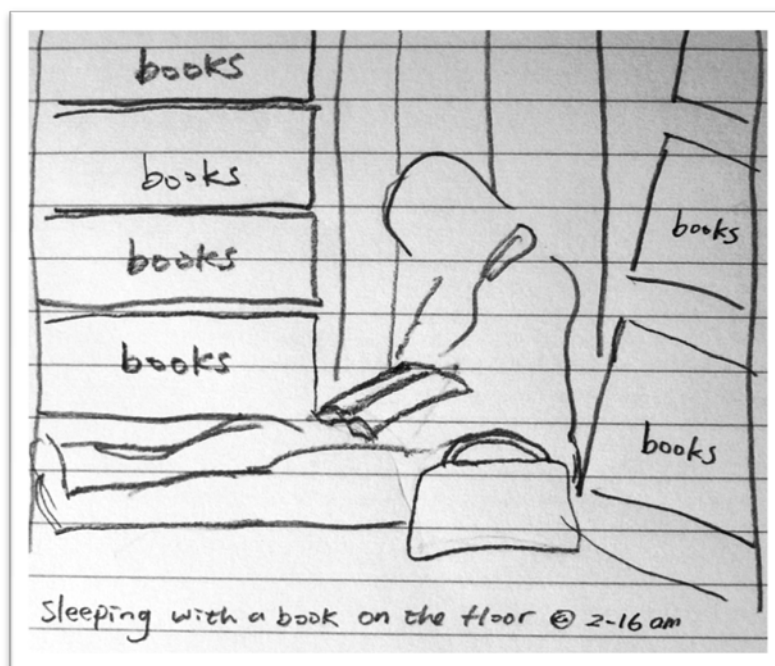public transition and transportation, Eslite bookstores are an ideal place to stay. Research participant Muh, for example, is happy to stay in Eslite bookstores when he has business trips to Taipei. He explained:

> Normally I have to return to Tai-Chung on the same day. After dinner with the clients I normally have a few hours before taking a coach. I like to stay in Eslite bookstores, close to the metro and no odd people around. Of course, I read books but sometimes fall asleep as business trips are always very intensive (Muh, Interview, August, 2006).

The bookshops are near metro stations and people can get to coaches, train stations and airports quickly. Moreover, it is safer to stay in bookshops than many other places during the night. Although they visit Eslite bookstores, the nappers are there not for business deals, nor for the experiences that Eslite intends to offer. What the nappers do is trickery: to use the physical spaces, enjoy the books, and gain a night's shelter. The nappers use the properties of Eslite without repaying the corporation. The nappers do not act against Eslite directly; instead of having naps on the provided seats the nappers choose to stay at corners or on floors. As de Certeau (1984: xix) points out, "tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance".

### 5.2.3 Hanging out at bookstores

As the categories of products becoming more diverse, some people criticise Eslite bookstores for becoming "Eslite department stores": "less cultural but more commercial" (Wang, 2009b). Less cultural or not, there is a group of visitors embracing the diversity of commodities. These visitors like to "wander around the city [bookstores] sampling life in a distracted and unpremeditated form" (Urry, 1995: 25); they are

"flâneurs" of Eslite bookstores. The flâneurs like to stroll around Eslite bookstores without having any shopping plans. Research participant Fang told me:

> I hardly make plans before coming here… no, it's not like going to groceries shops; you don't make shopping lists. Moreover, I am not like some book nerds coming here for books. I come to look around, you know, have a look on this or on that. When I got nothing to do and I don't want to be alone and bored, I come here (Fang, Interview, August, 2006).

There are some reasons why the flâneurs enjoy hanging around in Eslite bookstores; for example, consumers are indoors and away from the unpleasant weather (rain or heat) outside. But one of the most important factors is the diversity of commodities in Eslite bookstores. As research participant Yang told me, "in traditional bookstores you only buy books and then leave; here I read books, see some stationery, try some music… and so on. I *love* to hang out in Eslite bookstores" (Yang, Interview, August, 2006, emphasis original). The behaviour of hanging out could probably not have taken place in the traditional community bookstores a few decades ago. But the wide range of goods on offer is something on which the flâneurs of Eslite bookstores can spend time. The numerous varieties of products are encouragements for flâneurs to linger. Therefore, what was being criticised (Eslite bookstores are becoming department stores) is what makes the bookshops ideal places to hang out.

Moreover, the novel ways Eslite uses to present commodities are attractive, too. For example, giant posters are used to catch the eyes, books are displayed with relevant items to attract random readers, and cabinets showcase narratives in order to inspire consumers' ideas about the items they show. Research participant Mao told me that what he found interesting in Eslite bookstores was the way products are presented, taking a book called 'Tokyo Design Life 100+' as an example.

Photo 5.4 A book displayed in an Eslite bookstore (Source: WU Dung-Lung)

The book is about different design works, from beverage bottles to museums, in Tokyo. Instead of placing a pile of books on a bookshelf, the display cabinet presented the book with goods which were mentioned in the book in front of a giant poster. The goods are, for instance, a set of fork and knife by Sori Yanagi, a clock by Riki Watanabe, and a honeycomb lamp by Kyouei Design, placed on a tablecloth by Sori Yanagi. "I can't help stopping in front of this kind of display cabinet even if the book is not my cup of tea… the setting allows me to connect the books and goods to my everyday life; they expand my imagination", research participant Mao said (Mao, Interview, August, 2006).

The retailer has to draw the attention of consumers in order to let them have more

interaction with the commodities. Using display cabinets is one of the good ways for directing consumers' attention to certain products. The display cabinets are usually of a sophisticated design. Therefore, it is common for consumers to stop in front of the cabinets and gaze at the displayed items. Nevertheless, in the interview Mao only mentioned vaguely what the book ('Tokyo Design Life 100+') was about and in the end he did not purchase it. Apparently, consumers may be caught by the display cabinets and spend time looking at them, but this does not necessarily mean that consumers are interested in the displayed book. The point that Mao stressed is what the design of the display did to him. The design of the display helps him to link the displayed items with his life as well as increasing his imagination. But what does Mao mean by that? The case of Su offered a good example here. Su did not use notebooks, except in school. But after she saw a display cabinet in an Eslite bookstore, she started to use notebooks, which she subsequently found very satisfying. Su said:

> One day I saw a display cabinet with a theme of travelling. There was a notebook, opened - the pages were full of words, stamps, tickets, and photos taken by instant cameras… I loved it… I'm doing that now. I record my life with notebooks, I'm happy every time I read the notebooks… they gave me a small but *very concrete* pleasure in my busy life. (Su, Interview, August, 2006, emphasis original)

The cases of Mao and Su show that items shown in the display cabinets are not simply placed in the cabinets. On the contrary, they have a very specific function in a planned situation that invites viewers to get involved in the situation and link themselves to the items. Su took away the inspiration and started to make her own travelling notebooks. Su has brought happiness to her life through the proactive modelling used on the displayed items in the planned situation. Like research participant Fang, Mao and Su do not make plans in advance and then go to Eslite bookstores to execute their plans. In contrast, the flâneurs simply enjoy looking around. As Mao said:

it is the process, you walk around the store, see the decoration and goods, you find something, you pick up the item, touch it with your fingers, turn it around to see the details, etc., brings great fun. To buy, or not to buy - that is not the question. (Mao, Interview, August, 2006)

Mao's words indicate another characteristic of the flâneurs. Despite the large amount of time the flâneurs spend in the bookshops, they do not spend much money there. This directly contradicts what business and marketing studies have argued: the longer time consumers stay in the shops, the more likely they will make purchases (see Underhill, 2005: 86). The flâneurs of Eslite bookstores do not appear to fit that argument. For the flâneurs, being in the bookshops is more about a practice of passing time than a practice of consumption. As research participant Pai said, visiting Eslite bookstores is not to shop for goods there, but "to cruise the bookshops" (Pai, pers. comm., August, 2006). A flâneur of Eslite looks just like a common consumer in the bookstores. But the flâneur is just like the worker who uses the tactic "la perruque" doing his own work at the offices, as de Certeau explains:

It differs from absenteeism in that the worker is officially on the job. La perruque may be as simple a matter as a secretary's writing a love letter on 'company time' or as complex as a cabinetmaker's 'borrowing' a lathe to make a piece of furniture for his living room. (de Certeau, 1984: 25)

A flâneur does not take away anything valuable. But instead of being a 'good' consumer and making a purchase to contribute to the turnover of Eslite Corporation, the flâneurs uses the bookshops for his or her own enjoyment – for activities that are "free, creative, and precisely not directed toward profit" (de Certeau, 1984: 25).

## 5.3 Bookstore experience of the compliant consumers

In this section I want to shift the focus from the bookstore experience of tactical practitioners to the experience of the compliant consumers who seem to use Eslite bookstores in the ways Eslite expects. What people do and how they respond to the offered experiencescapes will be examined. In other words, I want to see how compliant visitors acknowledge and use the property of Eslite bookstores. According to their different practices, I categorised the bookstore experiences into three groups: bookworms, real books and real people in real bookstores, and lifelong learning. Like the previous section, the categories here are to emphasise the different practices of the compliant visitors rather than to reduce visitors to a limited group. While compliant consumers are assumed to behave as Eslite would like, tactics are present and are mentioned in the research observations and interviews. Most of the time, compliant consumers do not act against the experiencescapes of Eslite bookstores, but rather make use of tactics in their bookstore experiences in order to deal with or to smooth out the circumstances with which they are involved in the bookstores.

### 5.3.1 Bookshop trips of bookworms

A big portion of compliant consumers are bookworms, people excessively devoted to reading. What the bookworms like to do in visiting Eslite bookstores is to see books, to read books, to buy books, to look for books, to learn more about books, and to encounter unexpected books. In other words, almost every aspect of the behaviour of bookworms in Eslite bookstores is about books. The main attraction of Eslite bookstores is the opportunity to wander around with their eyes on books. Bookworms

use Eslite bookstores as bookstores, and that is one of the proper ways to visit Eslite bookstores, as the Eslite Corporation expects. It seems, then, that bookworms do not misuse Eslite bookstores. For instance, research participant Chen told me her typical Eslite bookstore experience is "walking around the stores to browse books" (Chen, Interview, August, 2006), and most of Lee's bookstore experience is about "finding newly published books or looking for particular books and buying books" (Lee, Interview, August, 2006).



Photo 5.5 New released books on display tables (Source: People's Daily)

Every bookworm has his/her favourite subject(s), but in general, the bookworms like to check areas including new releases, recommendations, and bestsellers. To check these areas is an important task for the bookworms because that "offers the key information about the newest and hottest trend of publications" (Lo, Interview, August, 2006). Therefore, Lo's Eslite bookstore journey normally starts with checking the display table(s) near the entrance of the bookstore(s). Lo said:

by seeing the books on the tables, very quickly I have a rough idea of the new releases. The checking thing makes me feel at ease because I learn "there is no big change recently" or "ah, something is becoming popular nowadays" or "finally someone knows what's really good". Then I check the bestsellers and the recommended... afterwards is the books I like. (Lo, Recorded in Ethnographic Field Notes, August, 2006)

For Lo, having information about the latest trends in publication is more important than recognising what titles are new and to which subject most new titles belong. Apparently, this information also contributes to Lo's emotional identity as "an advanced bookworm should know the news about books and the book business, apart from reading books" (Lo, Interview, August, 2006). That is why Lo acquires a feeling of comfort, of being 'at ease', after discovering publication trends. In such cases the display tables arranged by Eslite personnel are especially helpful for bookworms like Lo. The display tables make the task easier and save bookworms time. Books on display tables draw more attention from consumers and allow consumers a glance at the books very easily. As discussed in the previous chapter, the design and usage of display tables works as a better technique of visual communication in terms of delivering information, such as book covers, to readers. The deputy manager of Eslite Xin-Yi store, Ms Chang, stresses "the size of the bookcases, the height of the display tables, and design of the posters... etc. are all important... it's our job to make sure our readers can get what they want easily" (Chang, Interview, August, 2006). Despite the fact that the display tables offer benefits to visitors, Lo encounters a difficulty in using the tables sometimes. Lo explained that "I have to view the books on the tables promptly because the area is normally full of people; very annoying. My trick is to have a glance and come back again later" (Lo, Recorded in Ethnographic Field Notes, August, 2006). Lo does not mean to act against the spatial design of Eslite bookstores, neither does he

want to appreciate the display tables in his own way. But the crowd of visitors makes him adjust his manners. Lo has to respond to circumstances which are less than ideal by changing himself; he has to be flexible and creative in his interactions with the experiencescapes of Eslite bookstores. In addition to the common billboards indicating the ranks of bestsellers, the recommended, and etc., Eslite bookstores offer flyers and cards next to some books as introductory information by which consumers can get acquainted with these books. The supplementary information is particularly important for bookworms, who can then get abstracts of the books being introduced. Lee finds the information, particularly the supplementary details, is useful. She said:

> [T]he information on books is rich and ubiquitous in Eslite bookstores… and you know those cards? Information on the cards is usually short and straightforward, in a sincere style. I love to read the cards; they are really helpful for bookworms. (Lee, Recorded in Ethnographic Field Notes, August, 2006)

Nevertheless, some bookworms do not enjoy this information as much as others. For instance, Chen complains that it sometimes has a negative impact on her emotions: "there is information everywhere. Oh! I feel anxious! It reminds me there are still a lot of books that I haven't read… it's kind of stressful for me" (Chen, Interview, August, 2006). To deal with the stress, Chen shares her tips: "see the cards or whatever as part of the decoration in the bookstores. Don't read the words" (Chen, Interview, August, 2006). By avoiding reading the details of the information Chen successfully keeps away from the information excess which might lead to stress for her. So, while rich information is favoured by some bookworms, it may upset and push bookworms away, too.

Unlike the avid readers in Eslite bookstores, the bookworms may not spend time in reading in the bookstores despite having a great love for books. They may prefer to

read at home for the reasons that only thus they "feel carefree" (Lee, Interview, August, 2006) or "take as long as I like when I feel I want to read" (Lo, Interview, August, 2006). They are more generous in terms of purchasing books in Eslite bookstores. For the bookworms, books are more than a kind of commodity. Books "bring [readers] to see new worlds and new scenery which you can never imagine" (Lee, Interview, August, 2006); books "comfort people when they are sad, cheer people up when they are down" (Lo, Interview, August, 2006); books enable people to "experience the pure happiness which materials cannot offer" (Chen, Interview, August, 2006). Therefore, bookworms are willing to pay for the books they like even if the price of books is higher in Eslite bookstores. Nevertheless, this does not mean all bookworms are happy about the hardly-discounted prices in Eslite bookstores. Lee explains how she thinks:

> I'm happy to spend money on books - yes, *books*, not bookstores… I don't pay for bookstores… a book, say *Harry Potter*, is the same book everywhere. Therefore, I buy books here in Eslite bookstores if the book is not a higher-priced book, say like 300 Taiwanese dollars, but if more than 300 dollars, I would buy the book online. (Lee, Recorded in Ethnographic Field Notes, August, 2006, emphasis original)

While Eslite Corporation aims to attract consumers through offering them distinct experiences, Lee declares that what most important to her is books, not bookstores. Lee likes Eslite bookstores and goes there once a week; she seems to enjoy her experience in Eslite bookstores. As a bookworm, Lee is willing to pay for the books she likes, but she prefers to spend the least money possible on a book. For that reason, Lee sets up a price threshold to decide whether she will buy a book in Eslite bookstores. Lee may not seek 'opportunities' to move against the strategies utilised by Eslite Corporation/ bookstores, but through her different consumption decisions and actions she switches between being a consumer and a visitor (without purchase). Lee, therefore, withdraws herself from the role of an entirely compliant consumer.

## 5.3.2 Real books and real people in real bookstores

Some people prefer brick-and-mortar bookstores to online bookstores. These people favour intimate contact with books: they like to take books off the shelf, they like to smell books, to feel the weight of books, to sense the quality of the paper, to flip pages with their fingers, or "to see the cover with [one's] own eye, to see if the book is worth buying" (Mao, Interview, August, 2006). They are old-fashioned people and they prefer real ink, real paper, real people, and 'real bookstores'. As Tang said, "you know there's something *real* in your hands, the weight, the smell, the touch, the colours… you see *real people*, you see bookstore personnel… that's the warmth *real* bookstores have but online stores don't" (Tang, Interview, August, 2006, emphasis original). Tang's words show that tangibility, including books, people, and the stores, is important to the 'old-fashioned' people, those who like to have corporeal interactions with others. Tao offered an example of the advantage of talking to real people, saying that in a physical bookstore, there are staff to help: "even if you don't remember the name of the book you are looking for, just tell them anything you remember, and there's a very high possibility to get the right book" (Tao, Interview, August, 2006). But searching for books online is another story. Tao said online bookstores are convenient only if you know the names of the authors or books, otherwise looking for a book "will be like looking for a needle in an ocean" (Tao, Interview, August, 2006). Therefore, the ideal bookstore experiences for old-fashioned people should be corporeal, emotional, and sensuous. Among the physical bookstores in Taiwan, Eslite bookstores are regarded as one of the bookstores which very much take the corporeal, the emotional, and the sensuous into account because they are designed as experiencescapes, to offer distinct experiences for consumers (see the previous chapter). When research participant Mao recalled his

bookstores experience, he talked about store furniture and his corporeal practice of visiting Eslite bookstores. He praised the use and the location of the display tables. Mao pointed out how the arrangement and utilisation of the display tables benefits consumers:

> I found it's easy for us to browse books in Eslite bookstores. You don't need to tiptoe to get books from tall bookcase or to stoop to pick a book up. That's annoying, isn't it? In Eslite bookstores you just stop and open the covers that draw your attention. Your footsteps are rather smooth. (Mao, Interview, August, 2006)

Unlike the taller bookcases which are fitted against walls, the display tables are usually arranged to the sides of aisles. Display tables are used to show books with a degree of ostentatious theatricality. Such books are in general newly-published, bestsellers, and recommended. Books on display tables can easily catch consumers' eyes when they walk down the aisles. In other words, increasing eye contact is the initial task of the display tables. Apart from the function of catching customers' eyes, Mao noticed how his body reacted to the display tables in the shopping experience, smoothing his movements. Mao's case shows that the use of display tables is not only related to our sight, but also to our body and to our kinaesthetic sense. Mao is not the only one who praises the store furniture; Tang has similar opinions, too. But unlike Mao talking about his body/movements Tang placed her focus on her feelings. She described how the use of taller bookcases makes her feel anxious:

> [S]ome bookstores like to maximise the stock of books: they use lots of big tall bookcases, more like libraries than bookstores... I feel horrified of being there. But most of Eslite bookstores have display tables and lower bookcases in the middle of the space, tall bookcases are only against the walls, and I feel carefree and happy to explore books… that is how bookstores should be, isn't it? Bookstores should make people close to paper books. (Tang, Interview, August, 2006)

Photo 5.6 A view of a small traditional bookstore (Li Ming bookstore in Taipei)[13]

Tang compares how she feels about being in Eslite bookstores and other physical bookstores. The Eslite bookstore experience is "carefree and happy" while others can be "horrifying". What make Tang feel this is the use and the location of lower bookcases. Indeed, the design of interior spaces and the choice of furniture are significant in evoking users' emotions. But what is more important in Tang's words is that Eslite bookstores make paper books close to consumers. The joy of coming into contact with real books is exactly that about which the old-fashioned consumers care in particular.

Another positive emotion that some of the old-fashioned consumers have is the romantic sentiment one has when he/she meets a good book by chance. Tao quoted words from the famous Chinese writer, Eileen Chang, to describe his feeling when he sees a book he likes by chance in a physical bookstore:

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[13] The picture is taken from *Facebook page of the book street of* Chong-Qing South Road, 2012. Available from:
https://fbcdn-sphotos-c-a.akamaihd.net/hphotos-ak-ash2/s720x720/546679_251908181576804_713116805_n.jpg, accessed on 25 July 2013

> [J]ust like Eileen Chang's words, "through thousands of years of the boundless time, you happen to meet them, neither a bit early nor a bit late"… ahh! it's so romantic to unexpectedly bump into a book you like. (Tao, Interview, August, 2006)

Tao went on to claim that these romantic encounters are more likely to happen in Eslite bookstores because he does "not need to fight with the small fonts on the book spines, the book covers can be seen with half an eye on the display tables" (Tao, Interview, August, 2006). The store furniture is again praised by old-fashioned consumers, and the case of Tao points out the visual aspect of this. Tao indicated display tables are able to show books more clearly so that he can see better the words on the book covers, even with a degenerative condition affecting his vision (caused by ageing). This emphasis on visual availability increases the opportunities of encountering a book which may please. For the old-fashioned consumers, physical bookstores are places for traditional (non-digital) book-shopping practice. Physical bookstores allow old-fashioned consumers to have actual contacts with books, with other people including other consumers and store staff, and with the bookstores themselves. For old-fashioned consumers, visiting bookstores is not only about buying books, and therefore the convenience of online bookstores is not attractive for them. Old-fashioned consumers like to be happy and carefree in their exploration of bookstores; they also like to have interactions with books, people, and the stores through their actions, their bodies, and their senses. Eslite bookstores are ideal spaces for old-fashioned consumers for this reason. But what really makes Eslite bookstores stand out from other physical bookstores is that Eslite bookstores make the actual contacts easy and happy, in an unconstrained mode, which is why old-fashioned consumers tend to be very fond of Eslite bookstores.

### 5.3.3 Lifelong learning

It may sound strange to talk of bookstores as lifelong learning centres, but there is a group of people that likes to visit Eslite bookstores for the talks, lessons, and seminars hosted there. Larger branches of Eslite bookstores, such as Dun-Nan store, have lecture/screening rooms for random or regular lessons and seminars.



Photo 5.7 Eslite forum at Xin-Yi store (Source: Eslite)

In contrast, smaller branches do not have specific spaces for talks or lessons, with these normally taking place in the performing areas of the bookstores instead. The research participants in this study were mainly visitors of Dun-Nan and Xin-Yi branches of Eslite bookstores; therefore, the talks, lessons, and seminars discussed in the following sections took place in Eslite forums – the lecture/screening rooms. The lessons in Eslite forums cover a wide range of topics, from architecture to literature. The lessons normally take place over two hours in the evening, and are given by experts in their

fields. The lessons in Eslite bookstores provide a route through which people who are curious about certain subjects can improve their knowledge. Lifelong learner Huang recalled the motivation of going to the lessons: "with a background in business, I tend to look at the world from a fixed viewpoint. My family has complained to me that I'm made of money. So I started to have some lessons" (Huang, Recorded in Ethnographic Field Notes, August, 2006). Through the lessons, these lifelong learners become happier because they feel more satisfied with their life. The bookstore experiences that the lifelong learners have in Eslite bookstores give the learners fuller contentment in terms of their lives. Huang said: "it's great to learn new stuff. I'm becoming more charismatic... I'm happier about my life now" (Huang, Recorded in Ethnographic Field Notes, August, 2006). But how exactly does the experience of going to these lessons influence the learners and their lives? In her experience, research participant Shih described how the lessons she had in Eslite bookstores made her a better citizen. She told me the lessons taught her how to think critically, so she has become an active audience through examining the information she receives and feels herself to be a better citizen:

> You know the TV chat shows, especially politics-related ones? I used to take whatever those pundits say, even if some stuff sounds wrong, because I didn't know how to argue. But now I can see through the rhetorical techniques the pundits use to deceive or mislead the audience. When I learn something through the media, I check carefully to see if it is biased so that I know how to react to it and I feel I'm a better citizen. (Shih, Interview, August, 2006)

Unlike Shih, who thinks the lessons brought about a change in her, Yo seems more moderate when talking about the influence of the lessons to his life:

> [N]o big change, to be honest, if you are looking for a 'wow' answer. I guess the lessons encourage me *to re-feel*, *to re-think, and re-connect with* the world. In the busy daily routine I tend to forget the warmness and the beauty which is readily

available if I'm willing to see it. The lessons remind me to pay attention to those goodness. (Yo, Interview, August, 2006, emphasis original)

According to Yo, the lessons had no noticeable impact on his life. But the words 're-feel, to re-think, and re-connect' Yo used imply the spontaneous actions he takes after having the lessons. He is actuated by the lessons to reassess what he is used to with a refreshed mind and eyes. The cases of Yo and Shih show that the experiences of going to lessons have brought lifelong learners changes. The lifelong learners acquire intellectual knowledge from the lessons, and apply the knowledge in order to examine the information they receive in their daily life. Moreover, the lessons also offer the learners new perspectives to look over once more what happens in life. The mind and the heart of the learners are constantly refreshed so that the learners are able to appreciate life anew. Therefore, no matter whether the influence of the lessons has a 'wow' effect or not, the influence does alter the tactics that lifelong learners use to deal with the circumstances they encounter in everyday life. In other words, the lessons have altered what the lifelong learners do, feel, and think every day. That is why the learners are happy to visit Eslite bookstores/Eslite Forum for the lessons there despite having to pay for the lessons. Yo said: "it costs me about 300 dollars (about 6 pounds) to see a film; a lesson here is 350 dollars (about 7 pounds) - considering what the lessons have given me, I really think the lessons here are cheap" (Yo, Recorded in Ethnographic Field Notes, August, 2006). One may argue that it is easy to find free online lessons; therefore, going to bookstores especially for lessons seems unnecessary. But Yo argued that having lessons in Eslite bookstore is an ideal approach. Yo explained his situation and the reasons why the lessons in Eslite bookstore work for him:

> You know the long working hours in Taiwan; after work I don't have much time. I need someone to process the raw data into systematic information for me. Moreover, I may not have the background knowledge and the reading materials

may be difficult for lay people like me to digest. I need someone to guide me. I need someone to answer my questions. (Yo, Recorded in Ethnographic Field Notes, August, 2006)

What Yo said highlights the fact that one of the key elements that make quality lessons is the lecturers/speakers involved. It is not essential that the lecturers should be famous, although the lecturers of Eslite forums often are. What is more important is the quality of information they provide. For example, Huang told me the main reason she keeps attending lessons is that the lecturers explain things well and make the subject easy to understand. Huang said: "the lecturers are famous but I didn't expect them to be so amazing. The way they teach makes me understand everything without effort. That's why I keep doing the lessons. Who gives the lessons is incredibly important!" (Huang, Interview, August, 2006). Huang went to the lessons because of the fame of the lecturers, but what motivated her to attend further lessons was the quality of explanation given by the lecturers. Famous experts may catch the attention of life learners from the outset, but it is their teaching skills which are key to ensuring life learners continue learning. It seems that Eslite Corporation knows this well, and has invited good lecturers to give the lessons. The efforts that the Eslite Corporation pay are appreciated by the learners. Huang complimented the Eslite Corporation:

> … finally I have the opportunity to cease my boring life and learn something about humanities and social stuff. I believe the more we learn about the social stuff, the more we care about society. The more we care, the better society will be… Eslite Corporation has been contributing to this through creating opportunities for people like me. (Huang, Interview, August, 2006)

The bookstore experience for lifelong learners is about life change. Through having lessons, the learners transform the way they feel and think of the world. The transformations can be more or less noticeable, but they show how the lessons influence the learners as well as the active engagements of learners in the lessons.

## 5.4 The inventive geographies of Eslite bookstores

Tactical practitioners or compliant consumers both re-appropriate the experiencescapes of Eslite bookstores. By looking at the bookstore experiences of the tactical practitioners, I have shown that such practitioners make creative use of the experiencescapes for their own concerns and interests. The tactical practitioners like to read books in the bookstores but are reluctant to purchase books. They use Eslite bookstores more like public libraries and private study rooms than profit-seeking shops. The tactical practitioners also like to hang out at the bookstores to do window-shopping there. Eslite bookstores are visited as concept showrooms as much as sales floors. Compliant consumers, on the other hand, are not as wittily sneaky as the tactical practitioners; they praise the bookish ambience of Eslite bookstores and enjoy browsing books and spending money on books; they appreciate the tangible contact with books and the physical spaces that Eslite bookstores elaborately plan; they participate in lifelong learning lectures introduced by Eslite; they take part in the various activities and events hosted in the bookshops. Compliant consumers seem to follow the scenarios that Eslite sets up for its consumers: to enjoy the beauty of reading and the fun of life through becoming acquainted with a wide range of different reading materials, including books and non-book commodities, in the organised places produced by Eslite. Nevertheless, the empirical findings and records show that compliant consumers have to adjust their practices when they get involved in unfavourable but unavoidable encounters in the bookshops. What is no longer achieved in the same way is no longer experienced in the same way. The compliant consumers are, therefore, tactical, too.

With reference to the tactical bookstore experiences of the two groups – the tactical practitioners and the compliant consumers – we come to an understanding that both groups have a shared characteristic: they do not rely on the guided/imposed style of visiting/experiencing the Eslite bookstores. In order to make bookshops more enjoyable, consumers take the shops upon themselves in a bid to re-define the functions of spaces, to re-state boundaries, to re-establish orders and etc. In short, the consumers enact whatever 're-' they consider to be needed. Consumers have their own ways of operating. That is, through constantly seeking "opportunities" under the strategies made by the producers, a consumer carries out thousands of trickeries to "[make] a space for himself and signs his existence as an author on it" (de Certeau, 1984: 31). No matter that the operating is obviously tactical or seems to be compliant at first glance, the consumers carry out more than merely doing something scattered over the experiencescapes of Eslite. In other words, the defined spaces are diverted, and re-produced through the practices of consumers. In that sense, the consumers act as creative artisans who are able to re-configure the given situations with constant countless possibilities in these strategically created places. As de Certeau (1984: 38) suggests, "[c]ross-cuts, fragments, cracks and lucky hits in the framework of a system, consumers' ways of operating are the practical equivalents of wit". The inventiveness of consumers' practices shows the potential to re-imagine geographies. The notions of strategies and tactics are inspiring in terms of providing new ways to understand the spatiality of the everyday life. We have to take de Certeau's notion of everyday practice further than merely making spaces for consumers themselves under circumstances of domination, moving instead to the process of making spaces for consumers themselves. In other words, rather than seeing the practices of consumers as reactions to pre-given spaces, what consumers do is to act a series of artistic movements of questioning,

analysing, demonstrating, negotiating, and re-making the spaces. Take Tsai's case as an example: she likes to read books in Eslite bookstores but she purchases scant books there. When she read books in the bookshops she feels comfortable with sitting on the floor. For Tsai, Eslite bookstores are not stores where books are sold, but her reading room. Through her constant misuses of Eslite experiencescapes, Tsai has made space for her reading hobby. That is, consumers are active in gathering and negotiating the space they engage in, and, accordingly, spaces can never be fixed, but instead are formed and re-formed by the diverted practices of appreciating the spaces. That is how the inventiveness of our everyday practices may help us to re-imagine the geographies of our daily lives. Based on the findings of this research, I want to suggest three points through which we can take notions of consumer practice and space further.

Firstly, de Certeauian spaces are inseparable from practices. The bookstore experiences of Eslite consumers show that visiting physical bookshops is not a still status; rather, it is an assemblage of constant flows of acts. The experiencescapes of Eslite bookstores can better be understood as drifting trajectories of users' doings, rather than finished products based on some conceptualised blueprints. In that sense, spaces are always practised. That is, spaces are not neutral sites inscribed with plans, meanings and objectives; rather, they are open, relational, and always in becoming. Secondly, de Certeau's attention to practices emphasises the importance of the body. The tactics that the consumers use in Eslite bookstores to re-make the spaces is always exercised through their corporeal doings. For example, some consumers 'occupy' the floors of Eslite bookstores to make themselves comfortable when they spend longer hours reading in the shops without seats. The occupying is often seen through consumer's bottoms, their extended legs or their lying bodies. Those embodied doings make the

appropriations practical and possible. In this sense, de Certeauian corporeal practices enable us to engage in spaces and through this to connect ourselves to the world. Finally, there is a certain manner of being a de Certeauian consumer that tends to be unnoticed. Do the practices of consumers always work to resist strategies? Does the ordinary man and the system have to form a binary opposition? From the recollections of my research participants, some were aware of being 'tactical practitioners', juxtaposing different components on purpose in order to strive against defined places (the experiencescapes of Eslite bookstores). But more frequently, others did not plan to resist defined places using 'the art of the weak' (de Certeau, 1984: 37). The "practical equivalents of wit" (de Certeau, 1984: 38) that my research participants operate are creative flash-tricks to manifest their preferred ways of being and using the places. For example, as a bookworm, Lee likes to visit Eslite bookstores, but she only buys books there if the price is no more than 300 Taiwanese dollars; otherwise she purchases books online. Despite the fact that she is very fond of Eslite bookstores, Lee employs a price threshold to determine the different consumption practices she uses. Therefore, Lee's behaviour (buying a book or not) is indeed a negotiation and compromise depending on her own financial ability, but not fundamentally an act of resistance to the strategies of the Eslite Corporation. In other words, the notions of strategies and tactics may seem to be in binary opposition, but the thousands of trickeries that consumers use cannot be reduced simply to confrontation or resistance.

## 5.5 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter has attempted to depict the ways that consumers experience Eslite bookstores, and to what extent the bookstores experiences match what Eslite

expects. The chapter avoids assuming the reason that every consumer visits Eslite bookstores is to acquire a specific cultural taste or the particular aesthetics of a certain lifestyle; it also refuses to assume that visitors belong to a specific class of people or a specific group. Instead, the focus falls on how bookstore experiences are involved and gain expressions in the interactive and embodied process of visiting/shopping practices. The chapter draws on de Certeau's notions of "ways of operating", and "strategies and tactics" to explore the ways of being in Eslite bookstores which visitors undertake. The visitors are divided into two groups - tactical practitioners and compliant consumers - according to how they interact with the experiencescapes of Eslite bookstores. The former may seem more resistant than the latter. But, according to the research findings, both are creative artisans whose doings are involved in a process of questioning, analysing, demonstrating, negotiating, re-defining, and re-making the given situations. Yet, the processes of re-producing the given situations are not in the linear mode of cause and effect. Rather, they are part of the interactions consumers have with their surroundings, including other people and material things. Consequently, consumers generate countless possibilities for the spatiality of Eslite bookstores through their practices in the stores. Visiting Eslite bookstores is not simply a matter of going there. Rather, it is a matter of practising in the bookshops, practising through the bookshops, and, above all, practising the bookshops. In the following chapter, I consider the significance of the bookstore experience and of visiting bookstores to the consumers. The empirical cases will examine ***how***, not merely *why*, Eslite bookstore experiences matter.

# Chapter Six: Experiencing Eslite bookstores does matter

## 6.1 Introduction

As pointed out in the first chapter, bookshops play an important role in our society. Bookshops are marketplaces for buying and selling books. Bookshops provide one of the most essential cultural materials – books – through which we gain knowledge and insight. Bookshops reflect the concepts of morality and justice and the freedom of speech and opinion of a society. Bookstores are one of the central parts of local communities. Bookstores are related to our emotions to some particular books and the memories of a specific group of people, such as shop staff and storytellers, with whom we interact in a specific period of time. While some people may prefer purchasing books in physical bookshops it is undeniable that online bookshops have become competitive. The advancement of technologies and the popularity of e-commerce offer many benefits to buying books online. For example, geographic barriers are no longer a problem. People who live in the Scottish Highlands can place orders on Amazon and receive books as those who live in Cardiff do. Moreover, time is no longer a limitation. You can easily download e-books to get you through sleepless nights rather than re-reading novels just because bookshops are closed in the evening. Online bookstores, electronic devices and e-books offer convenience which bricks-and-mortar bookshops cannot match. In this sense, one may ask 'how can physical bookstores survive?' Therefore, in this chapter I aim to explore why consumers go to Eslite bookstores and

how visiting Eslite bookstores is important to the consumers in order to answer the third research question:

How do bookstore experiences matter to consumers?

Being interested in this 'meaningful' nature of bookstore experiences means I am interested in the relationship within which we are connected to the bookshops and our practices in there. In other words, I want to know how consumers of Eslite bookstores value the bookstore experiences in a certain way. Through synthesising the interrelated concerns of the bookstore experience, consumption practice, identity and lifestyle, this chapter explores how, not merely why, Eslite bookstore experiences matter.

This chapter is therefore divided into three main sections. I will begin by examining the issue of Eslite membership cards to investigate the complicated relationship between the symbolic values of membership cards, members' identities and the spatial practice of members. I will argue that symbolic values are intertwined in the spatial practice of members and it is through spatial practice that members' identities are appreciated. In the next section I will explore the connection between the acts of visiting bookshops and the performances of identities. It will be pointed out that Eslite bookstores work as part of a process of identification. Finally, I will investigate the ways in which the material characteristics of the spaces of Eslite bookstores and the commodities sold in the bookshops bring impact on the process of identification among consumers.

## 6.2 Identity, symbolic meanings and practice

Eslite started to issue new membership cards, 'Eslite Cards', in 2005. The previous membership cards – Booklover's Cards – were superseded by Eslite Cards. With the

co-operation of TC Banks, Eslite Cards can also be used as Visa credit cards. Compared to Booklover's Cards, Eslite Cards have more functions and can be used in other shops. However, a number of existing members were not happy with the new membership policy, and wrote of their dissatisfaction on blogs and websites. These articles spread widely and got many responses from readers. The articles even caught the attention of the national media and then the complaints were reported in newspapers (see Chao and Ke, 2005, Chen, 2005a).

Table 6.1 Comparison of the two membership cards of Eslite bookstores (Source: the researcher[14])

| Booklover's Card | Eslite Card |
|---|---|
|  |  |
| ◆ 10% discount on books, but the offer is not valid with any other offer, discount or sale items. | ◆ From 5% to 10% discount on the commodities in all Eslite channels, including bookstores, cafés, forums, and restaurants.<br>◆ Reward points exchangeable for free gifts.<br>◆ Birthday gift vouchers.<br>◆ Eslite cards are also Visa credit cards which can be used as payments in other retailers. |

Moreover, the large number of complaints led to Eslite postponing the expiration of Booklover's Cards in order to offer members further explanation of the new

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[14]  The data of the benefits of the two cards is extracted from 'information for the membership' on the official website of Eslite. Available at: http://vip.eslite.com/member/MemberIndex.aspx. The pictures are taken by Mr GUO Chi-Rong.

membership card as well as more time to put in an application for Eslite Cards[15]. The new membership cards seemed more convenient but if this was the case, why were members disappointed? Why did the Booklover's Cards remain more popular? Attempting to answer these questions, I examined 63 articles and 969 comments on 47 blogs and 16 websites to understand how Booklover's Cards differ from Eslite Cards. Based on how the members associated membership with bookstore experiences, I want to argue that Eslite membership cards represent a specific identity which can only be recognised through a series of practices. In other words, an identity is not a still status tagged on an individual, but is a series of practices through which the person is connected to specific spaces, specific materials, and specific encounters. Moreover, the examination of the issue of Eslite membership cards shows how the representations, such as symbolic values of the cards, are tightly interwoven with the practice of the members.

Reporting the issue of Eslite memberships cards, journalists Chao and Ke (2005) suggested the reason why "a number of members of Eslite bookstores felt aggrieved" is because the new membership card of Eslite bookstores had an "unreasonable policy" attached to it. Members were asked either to apply for new membership cards or to give up their existing membership. In other words, the only way to keep their membership of Eslite bookstores was to apply for Eslite Cards. However, not everyone was qualified to apply for Eslite Cards because they are credit cards. Applicants had to provide evidence that they had either a steady income or sufficient bank savings. In

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[15]  In a media interview conducted in 2009, the vice executive manager of Eslite, Wu Min-Jie, apologised for "the rush launch of Eslite Cards" that "made Eslite bookstores lose a huge amount of members". Moreover, the Booklover's Card was brought back to members, issued along with Eslite Cards as membership cards, in February 2009.
Chen, W.-Q. (2009) 20-Year Birthday. *United Daily*, [Online] 10 March 2009. Available at: http://mag.udn.com/mag/reading/storypage.jsp?f_ART_ID=182278 [Accessed 12 September 2009], in Mandarin.

this context, a large number of students were not able to reach the criteria, thus found themselves losing their memberships. This policy seemed excluding students. In order to please their customers and to reduce complaints, Eslite offered existing members more indemnifying measures[16]. Despite some compensation on a good-will basis, members did not stop their complaints. The members explained "what we cared about was not how many benefits we are able to get from membership" (Guo, 2005); but rather, "how Eslite perceives the meaning of 'membership'"(Chiu, 2005), and "the attitude that Eslite deals with the membership" (Yang, 2005b). Accordingly, in the members' perspective, the membership cards are less about the function they have (the benefits of membership cards), but more about the 'symbolic meanings' that the card holders believe the cards have. That is, Eslite membership cards are much more meaningful than functional. As Baudrillard (1996) argues, the use value of objects, in the classical Marxian critique of political economy, should be replaced by sign value, which articulate the symbolic meanings signifying social relations. Membership cards represent "how much I favour Eslite bookstores over others, and that is the reason I buy books there", research participant Lo said (Lo, Interview, August, 2006). Membership cards show "the time I spent in Eslite bookstores and the money I spent in books", said research participant Lee (Lee, Interview, August, 2006). In this sense, the values of membership cards are subject to individual judgment, and in many cases, the symbolic value of membership cards shifts from one person to another as Baudrillard (1996: 200) rightly points out, "[t]raditional, functional objects were not arbitrary, but modern objects [as signs] are".

In spite of the fact that the symbolic meanings of membership cards are representational, the meanings are constituted through as well as constitute the action

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[16]  For detailed information, please refer to the website of Eslite Bookstores book, accessed at http://www.eslitebooks.com/about/eslitecard.shtml.

and interactions of consumers. This can be seen clearly through how the members talk about their member identity and what the membership cards imply. For example, Qin argues the Booklover's Card she has is very valuable, as she wrote on her blog:

> It is not easy to become a member of Eslite Bookstores. You have to spend at least ten thousand Taiwanese dollars[17] per year. Therefore, every member is proud of himself/herself because we spend such a large sum of money on books. You know, not Chanel bags, not Rolex watches, but books …… For people who enjoy reading, Booklover's Cards are indeed ID cards of booklovers. (Qin, 2005[18])

For Qin, the significance of the Booklover's Card is not merely the qualification as one of the members of Eslite bookstores. Rather, the card represents the identity of being a booklover because only through buying books in Eslite bookstores are the regulations of the membership met. There are different ways of obtaining a membership card of different clubs and retailers. For Eslite Bookstores, Booklover's Cards can be gained in three ways. The first way is to collect reward points. Every time a customer spends 500 Taiwanese dollars (approximately ten pounds) he/she gets a reward point. If 20 points are collected in a year, then the person would be granted a one-year membership. The second way is to spend over ten thousand Taiwanese dollars in Eslite Bookstores in one day, and then one becomes a member for a year. The final way is to pay two thousand Taiwanese dollars (approximately forty pounds) as an annual fee for membership. Once one maintains membership for 10 years, one becomes a permanent member of Eslite bookstores. No matter which route is taken, the consumer has to spend a certain sum of money on the membership card. That is why Qin claims that she has spent a lot of money on books and is proud of herself in terms of reading a relatively large number of books. The way in which Qin values her Booklover's Card and the extent she values it

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[17]  Ten thousand Taiwanese dollars is approximately two hundred British pounds.
[18]  The original article is titled 'The death of Eslite'. Qiu, Xiao-Ru, The death of Eslite. *Personal blog*, [Online] 07 March 2006. Available at: http://www.wretch.cc/blog/ch9999&article_id=2910402 [Accessed 07 March2006], in Mandarin.

shows that the meaning of the card is strongly connected to what she has to do and has done to get the card. These compulsory payments make the membership difficult to come by.



Photo 6.1 Cards for reward points (Source: the researcher)

Therefore, some members feel highly gratified when showing their Booklover's Cards during transactions. As Wenli[19] says:

> When I purchase books in Eslite bookstores and show my Booklover's Card at counters, I feel so proud of having the card. I hope I was watched by others. Buying a book with the card makes me feel I am distinct. (Wenli, 2005 Oct)

What made Wenli happy was not the fact that he has a Booklover's Card, but the sense of being distinct coming from the recognition and admiration of other people. Using his Booklover's Card makes Wenli feel he is preeminent. As Barthes (1964) argues, objects have many different meanings beyond their primary denotations, depending

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[19]  A comment to the article *The death of Eslite*. See Qiu, Xiao-Ru, The death of Eslite. *Personal blog*, [Online] 07 March 2006. Available at: http://www.wretch.cc/blog/ch9999&article_id=2910402 [Accessed 07 March2006], in Mandarin.

on how they are experienced in different social and cultural contexts. These connotations of objects do not simply arise by themselves; rather they are created, recognised and possessed through a process whereby people and objects have meaningful interactions. While for some people, gaining membership represents how much money they spend, for others it shows how much time they spend in Eslite bookstores. Chen (2005b) wrote on his blog: "when I worked in Taipei, the first thing after work was going to Eslite Dun-Nan store. I would only be willing to go back home if I spent some time reading there […] sometime, I even stayed until the next morning". As a member, Chen did not only purchase books from Eslite bookstores, but spent a large quantity of time reading in the bookshops. Membership was about having the passion to go to Eslite bookstores and enjoy reading there. From the cases of Qin, Wenli and Chen, it is clear that membership cards are neither about the function of the card – indicating the identity of being a member; nor about the benefit from holding the cards – member discounts. Rather, the membership cards are about the "experience of Eslite bookstores" (Chiu, 2005, Si, 2005) including looking around the shops, finding books, choosing books, buying books, collecting reward points, acquiring a membership card, and making use of the card to consume books.

Unlike Booklover's Cards, the new membership process for 'Eslite Cards' was through application. People who want to be new members of Eslite bookstores do not necessarily buy books in bookshops. Those common experiences which were shared by existing members would not necessarily apply to new members. Without the experience of acquiring membership cards, the meaning of the membership card is no longer the same. In Xu's blog[20], he expressed how he felt about new cardholders:

How can they be qualified to have the membership cards? Is it because they don't

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[20] Please visit http://blog.yam.com/cpshyu/archives/859026.html [Accessed on 0/March/2009]

know how to choose books or they don't read? … From now on, anyone who has money can get the membership cards. It seems my attachment to Booklover's Cards is valueless. What I have been proud of, the books, the readings, all those built up through a difficult approach, suddenly collapsed. (Xu, 2005 Dec)

Xu's words express not only his personal emotions, but also show why the shared experiences are central to the meaning of membership cards and are also important for a sense of 'in-group' or 'out-group'. Without the focus on books and experiencing them, identity as a member of Eslite Bookstores is more about money than books. For existing members, the experiences of acquiring membership cards are absent in the case of Eslite Card, and then, as a result, the meanings of membership cards, the being, the reading, and the consuming, are different. Xu (2005c) described precisely the difference between the two membership cards on his blog, saying that "Booklover's Cards are for booklovers and Eslite cards are for consumers". That is why members insisted the membership cards should be held by "people who share similar experiences" to the existing members, rather than to those whose membership was issued through TC banks. In other words, a membership card is not just a card representing the status of a member; instead, it represents the process of doing a series of practices in which a person becomes and continues to be a member.

Through investigating the resistance to new membership cards, it is clear that for those members who wrote articles online and circulated the complaints about the launch of Eslite Cards, the membership cards were not only small pieces of card proving the cardholders' identity (as members of Eslite bookstores). The membership cards are also more than mechanisms offering discounts to card holders. The meaning of membership cards go beyond their basic functions and connect to the identification process of members. Even though the function of both Booklover's Cards and Eslite Cards is intended to represent the membership and to provide rewards, Booklover's

Cards can never be replaced by Eslite Cards because they are meaningful to members. Booklover's Cards represent cardholders' devotion of time and money to their experiences in Eslite bookstores. Their devotion includes visiting Eslite bookstores, being/reading in stores, consuming books and collecting award points. The process of becoming a member makes some existing members proud of themselves, because they have expended considerable effort on their book consumption and hence considered themselves 'real' booklovers. Thus, when using Booklover's Card to pay in Eslite bookstores, they feel they are distinct and hope to be noticed. The way to obtain new membership cards is through the application to TC banks, meanwhile. This policy allows people to become members of Eslite bookstores without doing the things that the existing members did, and excludes the experiences of 'becoming members' even though these experiences are considered by the existing members as the central element of the identity as members of Eslite bookstores. Becoming and being a member is about what a person 'does' in Eslite bookstores rather than what a person 'has'. That is, the identity as a member is part of a procedure in which spatial experiences constantly negotiate the formation of identity. Eslite bookstores, in this case, are not simply book retail stores. Rather, they help visitor to shift their identity from visitors to booklovers. Identity as a member of Eslite bookstores is therefore formed and intensified through consumers' practices in specific spaces, as is their identity as booklovers. From the issues surrounding the membership cards, we learn the reasons why a number of existing members of Eslite bookstores were against Eslite Cards: it is clear that the meanings of the membership cards are inextricably linked with experiences (the members' experiences, which took place in Eslite bookstores), space (Eslite bookstores) and identity (as a member/as a booklover). Therefore, changes in membership cards go beyond membership benefits and business transactions. Rather, the transition reveals that an identity is always in the process of

forming and performing through our practices of being in spaces. Although symbolic values and representational meanings of the membership cards are perceptual, what non-representationalists tend to argue against (for example, Thrift, 2000b, Thrift, 2000c), the ways in which the members interact with the cards in their consumption practices show that representations are always intertwined within the bookstore experiences and the practices of consumers. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that representational dimensions of symbolic orders and structures are not fixed and dead as Thrift (1996) argues; with the perspective of knowing them in actions, the representations can come alive again.

## 6.3 Visiting bookshops and performing identities

As argued in Chapter Two, our sense of belonging was once strongly tied to class, family, religion, work, etc. But in today societies, our sense of belonging is becoming more fluid and unstable because modernity has transformed traditional societies into late-modern societies and the social roles of individuals are in a status of flux (Bauman, 1995, 2001, Giddens, 1991). In such a context, people have to build up their identities and social solidarity. The small daily decisions we make everyday have become one of the important ways on how to identify ourselves. Our identities and sense of belonging are increasingly connected with lifestyles, with the values and interests which shape our daily life decisions, rather than the prescribed identities in traditional societies (Giddens, 1991, Hetherington, 1998). In this section, I examine the relationship between wén qīng identity and visits to Eslite bookstores. More precisely, through exploring how wén qīng build up and perform their identity in visiting Eslite bookstores I argue particular practices in particular places are vital to the production and reproduction of the identity and ways of living for the consumers.

Figure 6.1 What wén qīng look like[21]

'Wén qīng' literally means 'literary youth'. The term 'wén qīng' is used in Taiwan to refer to people who are educated, think independently, resist following popular culture and mainstream discourses, and like to read books about the meaning of life. Although in general wén qīng refers to the specific group of young people, journalist Wang argues the disposition of wén qīng varies at different periods of time. For example, "wén qīng in 70s and 80s were more active in writing literature to express their worries as the diplomacy of Taiwan was in difficult situations" while "young people in 90s have much better life in the steady society and just make needless or useless bustles" (Wang, 2012). The most common image of wén qīng is slim young people with pageboy hair style, wearing hand-made glasses with black bold specs, having film cameras, MUJI T-shirt, and Converse canvas shoes. Apart from their outward look, wén qīng have distinctive ways of life. Typically, wén qīng play musical instruments, support social

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[21] Picture taken from *Marui's online portfolio*, 2012. Available at: http://fb.paint.twbbs.org/files/1346670606046.png, accessed on 25 July 2013.

movements, decorate personal rooms with Lomo pictures, enjoy 'do it yourself', go to art and cultural activities/exhibitions, like to visit creative marketplaces, read tough books, go to those independent coffee shops which have special features, visit Eslite bookstores and read books there, and so on. It is clear that wén qīng is not only an identity category but a series of practices relating to every aspect of a lifestyle. Participant Lo explained why his visits to Eslite bookstores relate to the lifestyle:

> It's not 'wén qīng', not the term itself. It's lifestyle: how you arrange your life and what do you do about it. We come here (Xin-Yi store), read some books, have a nice cup of coffee, listen to a live gig, browse good designed goods and so on. It's part of the life. Make the life in the style you like. For instance, you can pick a Moleskine journal, have wonderful notes about your travelling, and the journal will become a most beautiful *memory* in your life… Make your days fun and pretty; don't just watch TV or play with your i-phone. (Lo, Interview, August, 2006)

For Lo, the rationale for spending time and money in Eslite bookstores is not to have the tag of wén qīng. Lo takes his Eslite bookstore experiences as part of his life. Through undertaking leisure activities in bookstores, he builds up the lifestyle he likes. Eslite bookstores are therefore as an experiencescape of an aesthetic lifestyle that Eslite Corporation claims to want to produce. But rather than passively taking the aesthetic lifestyle, Lo shows his enthusiasm for actively doing something – buying a journal, having notes, and creating beautiful memories to bring fun to life. Lo also shows his decision is made after comparing the other style of life such as spending most of one's leisure time on watching television or playing with smart phones. Lo does not only go to Eslite bookstores to experience the aesthetic lifestyle; instead, he sees his Eslite bookstore experiences as a life choice and takes the full process of visiting Eslite bookstores as part of the daily life that boosts his living.

The case of Lo shows our situation in the late modern societies in which as Giddens

(1991) argues, the inherited traditional patterns can no longer be handed down, and people have no choice but to choose a lifestyle. According to Giddens, "[e]ach of the small decisions a person makes everyday – what to wear, what to eat, how to conduct himself at work, whom to meet with later in the evening" – contributes to lifestyle (Giddens, 1991: 81). In this sense, lifestyles are "not only about how to act but who to be" (ibid.: 81). In other words, a lifestyle may contribute to the constitution of a self-identity, but in order to do that, the lifestyle has to be practised in everyday life. As artist Chang Xuan, a singer and songwriter "who is considered as a herald of wén qīng in Taiwan", said "without practices, wén qīng becomes a term, a derogatory term" (Young, 2012). Similarly, research participant Pao emphasised the practical doing of the wén qīng identity by arguing the importance of going to Eslite bookstores:

> I come here (Dun-Nan store) often. What I do normally is to spend some time in reading. Even if I don't want to read anything particularly, I still come over here. It's part of my life now; I call it my 'life ritual'… yes, I check-in on Facebook if I come here… It's not about the checking-in… Well, claiming 'I'm a wén qīng' is nonsense if people do not see you here. You need to come here. You need to be here. And you need to let people know you are here. (Pao, Interview, August, 2006)

What Pao says is in the Butlerian vein of identity. In her works about body and gender, Butler (1990) uses the concept of performativity to demonstrate how gender identity is constructed and performed through reiterative corporeal acts rather than simply being the reflection of body features. Identity is therefore enacted in processes. In the case of Pao, visiting Eslite bookstores is a "life ritual" which is repeated regularly in acting out being a wén qīng. By endlessly doing visits to Eslite bookstores, he enacts the wén qīng identity. Accordingly, the identity of wén qīng "ought not to be conceived as a noun or a substantial thing or a static cultural marker, but rather as an incessant and repeated action of some sort" (Butler, 1990: 112). What is more, the status on Pao's

Facebook page is important in the process of identity construction, too. According to Pao, the identity of wén qīng can only be recognised if other people see the person in Eslite bookstores. It does not mean that the status shown on her Facebook page is equal to the identity of wén qīng. However, showing the status on Facebook is a way for Pao's friends to know what Pao does and where she is, and that is the way wén qīng identity can be perceived by others, through knowing what lifestyle choices Pao makes. Therefore, the identity of Wén qīng is not a label to be shown on the social media (Facebook checking-in). Rather, wén qīng is something one does (going to Eslite bookstores), somewhere one is (being in Eslite bookstores), and the doings witnessed by other people (letting others see you doing something somewhere). Therefore, wén qīng identity is "a corporeal style, an 'act,' as it were, which is both intentional and performative" (Butler, 1988: 521-522).

Eslite bookstores in this case are not destinations for leisure or book-shopping activity; rather, they work as the stages for Pao to act out her wén qīng identity and to exercise her wén qīng lifestyle. The materiality of Eslite bookstores, which enables Pao to perform her identity, will be addressed in the next section. But here, I want to stress that Eslite bookstores are part of Pao's identification. While Lo stressed that his Eslite bookstores experience is about his lifestyle choice, Pao placed the attentions of her Eslite bookstores experience on her personal identity. But for both of them, visiting Eslite bookstores is the way to actively engage themselves in being someone / having the lifestyle they desire. Following Giddens' concept of lifestyle, visiting Eslite bookstores for Pao and Lo is one of the decisions that they make regarding their concerns on how to live and who to be. Therefore, visiting Eslite bookstores and consuming goods there is an ongoing project in which declaration and demonstration of lifestyle and self-identity can be enacted.

## 6.4 The importance of materiality

Following the discussion in the last section, I want to take the relationship between visiting bookstores and the formation of wén qīng identity further to explore how important the material place of Eslite bookstores and the goods sold there are to people who are particularly concerned about this lifestyle. Through the investigation of how this group of people talk and use Eslite bookstores and the goods purchased there, I examine the significance of materiality to the bookstore experience of Eslite consumers. In particular, I suggest that the distinctive lifestyles pursued or performed by a number of consumers do not only depend on the material objects this group of people consume, but also on the tangible places they visit.

As discussed in the previous section, the physical spaces of Eslite bookstores are the stages for wén qīng to perform their identities. This does not mean that Eslite bookstores work as neutral containers which are outside the process of the identification. Rather, they actively engage in the identification through interacting with the performance that wén qīng act out. The material spaces of Eslite bookstores, their physical construction and presentation of the designs and plan made by Eslite Corporation (discussed in Chapter Four), constraint as well as enhance their spatial practice. The materiality then has impacts on the corporeal, experiential, and sensual dimensions of bookstore experiences and consumption practices (Cresswell, 2003). For example, the facilities in Eslite bookstores provide the physical sites for various activities. The exhibition hall in Eslite Xin-Yi store (see photo 6.2 in the next page) enables large-sized art work to be displayed and meet the audience. The exhibition hall is not simply an accommodation for art and creative works, but it also shapes the sensuous experiences of the consumers/viewers. In his discussion of agency and

objects, Miller (1988) takes a haunted house as an example to explain how inhabitants' agency is constrained by the house. Haunted or not, is not the point in the case of Miller's haunted house. What Miller wants to stress is the influence that the house works upon the inhabitants.



Photo 6.2 A calligraphy exhibition in Eslite Xin-Yi store (Source: Eslite)

The consumers who concern about lifestyle normally have slower paces when visiting Eslite bookstores because they do not take the visits as functional shopping. Money, time, and efficiency are thus not their main concerns. Lee explained very clearly that going to Eslite bookstores is "not buying toilet papers or washing powder… you don't just compare the price or the performance of the items, and then decide which one would be the best buy" (Lee, Interview, August, 2006). Instead, those who have concerns about their lifestyle look for and pay attention to the novelty of products as well as of the shopping environment. Yo said:

> Coming here (Dun-Nan store) is to appreciate products, such as the recommended books and stylish stationery. You don't rush into a payment to get an item; you need to look at the details carefully. You need to know why the goods are

presented in the ways which give you ideas about the designers and the brands… you are what you use… the pen you use reveals your attitude about life. (Yo, Interview, August, 2006)

The 'lifestylers' gave enjoyment and satisfaction from spending their time in Eslite bookstores. The slow-paced shopping is considered as a proper behaviour because commodities, for them, reveal a specific attitude towards life. Therefore, it would be wiser to examine the commodities before making a decision to buy. Moreover, 'you are what you use'; the goods you own and use say something about you. Research participant Lee said:

> Take cups for example, I don't buy them from markets because they look all similar. What is worse is that the cups you see in a market in Taipei probably you can find them in another market in Tainan. Cups are something we use every day, they may be inconspicuous but I really think they are part of the details of our daily life. What cups you use show how much you care about the life quality or ways of life. (Lee, Interview, August, 2006)

Sociologists (Campbell, 1995, Falk, 1994, Giddens, 1991) have long argued for the connection between consumption and the formation of the self . Goods represent the dispositions of the buyer/user/owner by the symbolic meaning attached to them. Through buying/using/owning a commodity we convey the message to other people that we appreciate, desire, and may also have, the qualities of the commodity. Material objects help us to present the characteristics we have/want. On the other hand, the materiality of objects is just as important as the meanings attached to the objects. Research participant Pao shared her experience of how a mug influenced her friends' attitude about her and about her lifestyle after a picnic she hosted. Pao said:

> One day I bought a Kinto squirrel mug in Eslite bookstores… when I saw the mug I knew it'll be great to use it for picnic. I invited my friend to Da-An park for a picnic. They thought I'm a nut to arrange a picnic just for a newly-purchased mug. But on the picnic day, all my friends loved the mug and asked me where to buy it. Now

they understood why the mug is important to how I want my lifestyle to be. They want to learn from me. (Pao, Interview, August, 2006.)



Photo 6.3 Kinto squirrel mug[22]

The case of Pao shows not only her passion for a particular lifestyle, but it also shows how her friends change their mind after seeing the physical mug. The ceramic mug Pao described to her friends may be different from the mugs that her friends imagined from her description. Because Pao wanted to have a picnic to have the opportunity to use her mug, in this sense, the mug actuated the arrangement of the picnic. Pao's friends only perceived her chosen lifestyle when they saw her using the mug in the picnic. The mug later conveyed Pao's preferred lifestyle and helped Pao's friends to understand her lifestyle. In the end, Pao's friends became interested in the mug and infected by Pao's ideas of lifestyle. In short, the material presence of the mug encouraged Pao to host a picnic, and then attract attentions from Pao's friends and evoke the friends' interests to learn about the lifestyle Pao has. As Miller argues, 'social

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[22]  The mug is officially called 'Mugtail squirrel'. The picture is taken from the official website of Kinto, available at http://www.kinto.co.jp/en/products/drinkware/mugtail/ (accessed on: 25 July 2013)

worlds [w]ere as much constituted by materiality as the other way around' (Miller, 1998: 3).

## 6.5 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter attempted to explore how visiting Eslite bookstores matters to the consumers through discussing the ways in which the consumers connect to Eslite bookstores. In the beginning, the launch of new membership cards by Eslite bookstores was explored. What we see is that membership cards are more than simple pieces of plastic indicating the benefits of membership and the status of being a member. Membership cards have symbolic meanings, such as signifying the expense of money in books or the support to Eslite bookstores; and the symbolic meanings are generated within the interaction between the cards and the uses of the cards. Visiting Eslite bookstores is important because only through the practice that things become meaningful to us. Secondly, I examined the case of wén qīng: how wén qīng identity and lifestyle is performed and assured through visiting Eslite bookstores. Eslite bookstores are stages for wén qīng to perform and present their identities as well as part of the process of the identification. In other words, wén qīng cannot be practised without Eslite bookstores. Finally, and continuing the previous section, I articulated the impacts of materiality that Eslite bookstores and commodities have on consumers' ways of life. Through examining the connections between consumers and Eslite bookstores, this chapter shows that through going to Eslite bookstores, the symbolic meanings of membership cards are presented, the identity and lifestyle is performed, and the materiality of objects and space enact the life world of the consumers.

# Chapter Seven: Conclusion

## 7.1 Introduction

In this thesis I set out to study the complicated geographies of Eslite bookstores and specifically the various ways in which the bookstores are made into experiencescapes and are thus experienced. This has been pursued in relation to both the production and the consumption of the experiencescapes by examining the retailer (Eslite) and the consumers (visitors of Eslite bookstores). The examinations have been undertaken with a more-than-representational approach which pays attention to the processes of producing and consuming rather than to some specimens or artefacts of the produced and the consumed. Giving attention to the processes allows us to move beyond questions such as 'what' is the experiencescape (in a final and static sense) and towards questions such as 'how' is this scape produced and experienced. For example, instead of being satisfied with the replies to 'what kind of experiencescapes does Eslite produce?' I have investigated further in order to know how Eslite produces the experiencescapes, and have conducted an examination of how the consumers use the experiencescapes rather than focusing merely on why they go there. Therefore, a multiple layered understandings of the consumption spaces, especially the manipulated retail sites, can be fully realised.

More specifically, I set out three interconnected research questions in the introduction chapter of this thesis.

(1) What are the bookstore experiences that Eslite plans to offer its consumers and how are the spaces of Eslite bookstores produced as experiencescapes to deliver the business purposes?

(2) What is it that consumers actually do in Eslite bookstores and how are the bookstores experienced?

(3) How do the bookstore experiences matter to consumers?

In concluding the research I will go back to each of the three questions in turn now and summarise what the research has offered with regard to each one. From the summaries I will also point out some limitations of my research and identify avenues for future studies in terms of physical bookstores as well as spaces of leisure consumption in general.

## 7.2 Making Eslite bookstores as experiencescapes

In relation to the first research question, this thesis has demonstrated that Eslite bookstores are produced as experiencescapes for consumers 'to experience the beauty of reading and the fun of life'. With this theme in mind, Eslite intends to make its bookstores places where consumers are able to encounter diversified types of reading material, to enjoy reading, and to have ideas for a better life. Eslite bookstores are therefore conceived as more than bookshops; they are places where people can spend hours reading books, having a cup of coffee or a meal with friends, and can learn something new in the lecture hall or appreciate calligraphy in the exhibition room, etc. The spatiality of Eslite bookstores is manifold. Through examining the production of the experiencescapes of Eslite bookstores, it is clear that despite the experiencescapes being produced on the theme they are given, the process of making Eslite experiencescapes is performative rather than constructive. That is because the formation of the experiencescapes is involved in a series of practices such as exploring

the business philosophy, creating a new business identity, running a new business model, dealing with embedded social conditions, deploying material properties to constitute specific spaces, and instilling the concept of the business identity in store staff. Every practice is constantly iterated and works in an interrelated manner so that the effect and spatial reality Eslite specifies can be produced. Furthermore, disrupting the notion of spatial production as construction does not mean simply to withdraw from considering a variety of representations such as business philosophy, symbolic meanings, values, and the social context. Rather, the process of performing Eslite experiencescapes is constantly engaged with the representations, and through practices these representations are defined, presented, re-defined and re-presented. The intricate significations are part of, instead of detached from, the performative production of Eslite bookstores.

It is clear from the examination that the process of making Eslite experiencescapes is therefore by no means a straightforward linear construction. This understanding offers a new perspective for studies of experiencescapes and other (leisure) consumption/retail spaces in general. While the concepts that retailers have for experiencescapes may seem to work as the determinants in the production of the retail spaces, they have to be imagined, interpellated, presented, and re-imagined, re-interpellated, and re-presented through various situated practices. In other words, acknowledging the process of making experiencescapes as performative enables other significant factors, which enact the formation of experiencescapes, to stand out from the superficial themes of the experiencescapes.

From this, some areas can be suggested which could be pursued further. Firstly, the input from store staff is relatively small in this study. In terms of examining the ways in

which the head office and executives manage to ensure that the themes of the experiencescapes are disseminated to store staff in order to produce the planned experiencescapes, it might be fruitful to explore further avenues for staff feedback. However, it is not easy to undertake such examinations due to issues of accessibility. I could not get permission from the executive teams to interview the store staff. Regulations may vary from one store to another, but without support from the researched company, I was not able to talk to the staff. Moreover, if the researcher was allowed to interview the store staff, the lack of real-time communications - between the executive staff and the store staff as well as between different store staff - which occur during work tasks made it very difficult to gain understandings of the gaps, or the lack thereof, between the way the executive staff imagine and perform the themes of the experiencescapes and the ways the store staff do. Secondly, while this study has been set primarily in chain stores in Taiwan, it is clear that issues related to the scale of the business, the capital that retailers have, and the social, cultural, and economical conditions will be different from one location to another. For example, independent bookshops in local communities would probably have smaller store sizes and thus different operational strategies. Therefore, research into those differences could explore the formation of such consumption spaces, with particular focus on the ways in which the retailers' respond to the background contexts in which they are embedded and how they deploy their resources, both material and immaterial, would be helpful in order to ensure that the iteration of 'doing the planned spaces' is carried on.

## 7.3 Experiencing Eslite bookstores

In relation to the second research question, this thesis has explored the ways in which the experiencescapes of Eslite bookstores are used and experienced through examining

two groups of consumers who have quite different consumption practices: tactical practitioners and compliant consumers. The bookstore experiences of the visitors express a mixture of different patterns of affiliation to "ways of operating" (de Certeau, 1984). While the compliant consumers appear to accept the experiencescapes of Eslite bookstores, the tactical practitioners are seemed to make use of trickery to 'misuse' the experiencescapes of Eslite bookstores. We see those visitors use the bookshops tactically and their actions often go beyond the plans of Eslite despite the spaces of Eslite bookstores being carefully designed and produced to achieve specific business purposes. There are many consumers constantly seeking 'opportunities' in the spatial manipulation promulgated by Eslite. These consumers are not directly against the 'strategies' of Eslite; rather, they make use of tactics in their visits to Eslite bookstores. What the consumers do is certainly not "proper", to quote de Certeau (1984). For instance, visitors who like to read in the bookstores do not always sit on the seats provided by Eslite. As illustrated in Chapter Five, a number of visitors do not mind reading books on the floor or stairs, some of them even lying on the floor or blocking aisles with their legs. As the number of people doing that increases, it becomes common 'scenery' in Eslite bookstores. Eslite certainly does not expect to have visitors occupying the aisles on the floor, and the stairs are not designed and planned as locations to read. These tactical visitors do not own the spaces of Eslite bookstores, but through their temporary use of trickeries the tactical visitors re-figure the spaces and re-make them. Therefore, visiting Eslite bookstores is not merely a matter of going into the spaces or representing the space. Above all, it is a matter of practising through the spaces and practising spaces. Besides, the compliant consumers also act as creative artisans who are able to re-configure any given situation with constant countless possibilities. In other words, visitors are not only in bookshops but also get involved with the bookshops. With the embodied engagement in the physical bookstores, the

spaces of bookstores are not neutral sites inscribed with plans and meanings; rather, they are open, relational, and always in becoming. Following the de Certeauian idea of practice, it is clear that visiting physical bookshops is not a static state, but an accumulation of endless and unstable flows of acts. Hence, the bookstores we know are those with drifting trajectories which make the experiencescapes of Eslite.

With these points in mind, there are a number of areas in which this research could be pursued further by future studies. Firstly, because of the time constraint of this research (the period of observation was during a summer season), it is possible that consumers' experiences of visiting bookstores may vary with different seasons or different durations of visits. The discussion of consumer experiences and practices in this research thus might differ substantially from further work. For instance, visitors who go to Eslite bookstores to enjoy the free air-conditioning in the blazing summer may not visit the bookshops so often in the winter. It may be much easier for consumers to have seats if they want to read in the bookstores, and therefore the number of people who sit on the floor or stairs would be smaller. The unexpected 'occupying' or 'misuse' of the spaces may not be seen as often then. Moreover, the spaces of bookstores change over time because more and more physical bookshops have been forced to make changes as the chains taking over the bookselling business and the online bookshops grow stronger. Bookstore experiences may become further diversified or monochrome. Finally, I was not able to get permission from Eslite to take photos or videos in the bookshops. Although pictures were drawn and notes were taken in the ethnographic field records, some hidden behaviours and micro movements may not be accounted for in the discussions of consumer practices. This might be facilitated by authorised permission to take films or photography given to a

larger scale observation or participation study. Nevertheless, I am sceptical as to whether or not researchers would be able to gain access given that Eslite refused requests because of corporate concerns and control of information.

## 7.4 Bookstore experience and everyday life

In relation to the final research question, the thesis has expanded from focusing on the 'doing' of consumers to the connection between the doings and the consumers to explore why as well as how visiting bookstores is significant. The exploration started with the case of membership cards for Eslite bookstores to understand to what extent going to Eslite bookstores and buying books there is important. When Eslite launched new membership cards, which are Visa credit cards co-issued with TC banks, they claimed the cards had more functions than the current membership cards, but the new cards received a protest from existing members. The existing members were against the new scheme in which membership cards are applied for rather than gained by virtue of the reward points customers collect, with existing members insisting that membership was more about visiting Eslite bookstores, reading in the bookshops and purchasing books there, rather than the static – largely financial – status of a credit card member. In other words, for these protesters the identity of a member of Eslite bookstores should be conferred by a series of spatial practices and the experiences of being/visiting the bookstores. How people recognise who they are, or who other people are in this case, is through the practical things they do in physical locations. The exploration then turned to look at the various commodities – books and everything in between – offered in Eslite bookstores. It was demonstrated that the wide variety of commodities not only offers an abundance of objects for individuals to view and consume, but also enriches the bookstore experience through providing encounters

with different substances, activities and people. From this perspective, it is these material connections to what we can do, what we can sense, and what we could feel which articulate the existence of physical bookstores. Finally, the exploration went on to explore notions of acquiring the lifestyle of 'wen qing'. It shows that practices in specific places retain a significant influence in constructing and exercising lifestyles. Not every regular visitor of Eslite bookstores is an Eslite member or a booklover, however. There is a group of people who regularly visit Eslite bookstores to learn, to form and to show their lifestyle of 'wén qīng', because Eslite bookstores are considered as places where wén qīng hang out. Visiting Eslite bookstores enables wén qīng to re-affirm their lifestyle by exposing themselves to the books Eslite recommends, to the commodities Eslite sells, to the activities hosted by Eslite, and to the people shopping around in Eslite bookstores. Equally, visiting Eslite bookstores allows the wén qīng-to-be to live out wén qīng lifestyle by learning and performing what wén qīng do. People are empowered to pursue the ways of life they favour through their spatial practices and encounters with people and material things at specific places. It is clear from the examinations of bookstore experience that embodied practices, lived experiences, spaces, identities and everyday life are intrinsically connected to each other.

With this in mind, there are a number of directions in which future studies might be developed. Firstly, the thesis has focused on the doings of people to develop an account of how consumers use and make sense of bookstores and their relationship to the shops. At the same time, the thesis has also indicated how cultural meanings, values, and ideological thoughts are intertwined within the bookstore experiences and the doings of consumers into their lives. While corporeal experience, embodied practice and ongoing performances, as non-representational theories "promise" (Anderson and Harrison, 2010a), offer us a new perspective through which to

understand the world without "inject[ing] a note of wonder back into a social science which, too often, assumes that it must explain everything" (Thrift, 2007: 12), we see representations are not dead but instead are vitally engaged in people's doings of everyday life. Accordingly, it is important to explore in more detail the ways in which representations can be performative, rather than simply abandoning the knowledge of the representational. I have touched upon the issue in this thesis but by no means have the interests been exhausted here. Secondly, there are also a number of more contemporary issues surrounding consumption spaces to which geographical studies have yet to attend; for instance, developing an understanding of experience spaces from the users'/consumers' perspectives. While online bookshops offer various conveniences that physical ones cannot, a significant number of people still enjoy visiting Eslite bookstores. The bookstore experience is something irreplaceable. However, consumers who go to Eslite bookstores do not link their experience to hedonistic consumption like those going to Disneyland (for example). Instead, they value the materiality which they encounter in Eslite bookstores. Experience spaces, then, offer more than merely a hedonistic and conspicuous experience. Furthermore, the link between spatial practice and materiality is important here, and further exploration of this might allow the re-engaging in a cultural approach of geographical issues in terms of leisure consumption and spaces of consumption. Finally, there are other possible ways to acknowledge the theoretical concepts of strategies and tactics (de Certeau, 1984). In relation to the production of Eslite bookstores, the thesis has focused on the practices of Eslite executive staff, to explore how the spaces of Eslite bookstores are made into experiencescapes. While there is one very definite bookstore experience that Eslite aims to offer to its patrons through Eslite experiencescapes, consumers have their own versions. Nevertheless, this does not mean that Eslite gives up on its commercial goals. Rather, Eslite has been trying to minimise the gap between

the expected experience and the actual experiences through a series of 'tactical strategies'. For example, the numbers of seats in the bookstores do not increase in relation to the increasing numbers of in-store readers. Visitors may sit on the floor or stairs and block traffic flows; Eslite does not evacuate these visitors. Readers on the floor have become part of the scenery in Eslite bookstores, and Eslite is happy to keep that as an expression of how much Eslite aims to promote reading and how much the consumers enjoy Eslite bookstores. Despite de Certeauian consumers being tactical practitioners, it is shown in this thesis that strategies may become tactics. The boundary between strategies and tactics can be ambiguous. The negotiation between practical and procedural ways of operating and tactical strategies could also be studied further to develop understandings of issues of power and politics.

## 7.5 Close the thesis and go to visit a bookstore

The mainstay of this thesis has been an attempt to develop an understanding of bookstore experiences through looking at the production and consumption of physical bookstores. I have shown how Eslite bookstores are produced as experiencescapes to attract consumers and ensure the business continues to thrive. I have also explored how consumers use and experience the bookstores. While there is a gap between what Eslite plans and what consumers actually do, visiting Eslite bookstores is significant to consumers. Despite the fact that I have attempted to indicate the connection between bookstore experience and our daily lives, my discomfort does not stop here. As bricks-and-mortar bookstores close down, how can I keep tackling the issue without reducing it to mere articulations of textual discussions that exist only in this sheaf of papers? In this brief final section I want to suggest another way of making sense of the bookstore experiences: taking this research project as an event which "initiates a new

sequence that retrospectively determines its beginnings, and which leaves its ends unknown or undetermined" (Rajchman, 1991: ix, quoted in Anderson and Harrison, 2010a: 22). It is time to close the thesis and go to a bookstore, now.

**Appendix A:** **Annual turnover of three leading bookstores in Taiwan**

Annual turnover of three leading bookstores in Taiwan

| | | (unit: millions of £) |
| | | 0.21093 exchange rate as in November 5th 2014 |
|---|---|---|

| Year | Eslite | Books.com.tw | Kingstone |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2001 | 135 | - | - |
| 2002 | 147 | - | - |
| 2003 | 146 | 11 | - |
| 2004 | 166 | 16 | - |
| 2005 | 190 | 21 | 46 |
| 2006 | 211 | 29 | 44 |
| 2007 | 207 | 41 | 39 |
| 2008 | 195 | 49 | 32 |
| 2009 | 187 | 64 | 32 |
| 2010 | 204 | 85 | 33 |
| 2011 | 226 | 103 | - |
| 2012 | 251 | 127 | - |
| 2013 | 278 | - | - |

*Books.com.tw is the biggest online bookseller in Taiwan.
*Kingstone is the second biggest bookstore chain in Taiwan.

**Appendix B:** Information sheet for potential respondents/ Eslite staff

**YU Hui-Yu**
**Cardiff University, UK**
**Research Project of Eslite bookstores**

## Information sheet for potential respondents/ Eslite staff

Dear ,

My name is YU Hui-Yu, and I am researching a PhD at Cardiff University. I am conducting research on Eslite bookstores and its consumers. I am going to give you information and invite you to be part of this research.

About the research:
Nowadays physical bookstores are experiencing difficult times, but Eslite is growing stronger and expanding its realm overseas. I want to find out how Eslite makes its bookstores attractive. I believe you can help me by telling me about your work in Eslite. I want to learn the concepts that staff have of Eslite bookstores and what staff do to the bookstores. The information you share will help me to understand the spaces of Eslite bookstores and to find out possibilities for the future of physical bookstores.

What you need to do:
This research will involve your participation in a one-hour interview at your preferred time and location.

Confidentiality:
The information that I collect will only be used for this research project. You full name may be shown in the thesis, but if you prefer, a pseudonym can be used instead of your name.

Thank you very much for your time, and if there is anything else you would like to know, please do not hesitate to contact me at yu_huiyu@yahoo.co.uk

Yours sincerely,
YU Hui-Yu

**Appendix C:** Information sheet for potential respondents/ Consumers

**YU Hui-Yu**
**Cardiff University, UK**
**Research Project of Eslite bookstores**

## Information sheet for potential respondents/ Consumers

Hello,

My name is YU Hui-Yu, and I am researching a PhD at Cardiff University. I am conducting research on Eslite bookstores and its consumers. I am going to give you information and invite you to be part of this research.

About the research:

Nowadays physical bookstores are experiencing difficult times, but Eslite is growing stronger and expanding its realm overseas. I want to find out how Eslite makes its bookstores attractive. I believe you can help me by telling me your experience of visiting branches of Eslite and your bookstore experiences in general. I want to learn what people do in Eslite bookstores and what the importance is of visiting Eslite bookstores in their daily lives. The information you share will help me to find out possibilities for the future of physical bookstores.

What you need to do:

This research will involve your participation in a one-hour interview and a bookstore trip depending on your preferred time and the location (branches of Eslite bookstores).

Confidentiality:

The information that I collect from this research project will be kept private. Any information about you will use only your surname instead of your full name. But if you prefer, a pseudonym can be used to replace your real name.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. It is your choice whether to participate or not. You will not be provided any incentive to take part in the research. However, as an indication of my appreciation for your time, I am happy to help you in terms of travelling to or studying in the UK if needed.

Thank you very much for your time, and if there is anything else you would like to know, please do not hesitate to contact me at yu_huiyu@yahoo.co.uk

**Appendix D:** Questionnaire given to all respondents

**YU Hui-Yu**
**Cardiff University, UK**
**Research Project of Eslite bookstores**

## Participant questionnaire/ Consumers

| Section One: About You | |
| --- | --- |
| Name | Gender |
| Age | Occupation |
| Contact (Phone number/email address) | |
| | |

| Section Two: Your reading/bookstore habits ( please tick □) |
| --- |
| How often do you read? _____ hours per week |
| Where do you normally get your books?  □Physical at _____  □Online at_____ |
| How often do you go to bookstores?  _____ times per week; or_____ times per month |
| Which bookstore(s) do you normally visit? |
| □Eslite □Kingstone □Senseio □Kinokuniya □Mollie □Others_____ |
| Why do you prefer the one(s) |
| □Close to home/work □Books are Cheaper □Rich stocks of books □More |

| |
|---|
| magazines☐Various products ☐Others_____ |
| |
| **Section Three: Your Eslite experience (please tick ▢)** |
| Are you a member of Eslite?    ☐Yes      ☐No |
| Do you like Eslite                ☐Yes,<br><br>bookstores                because_____<br><br>                ☐No,<br><br>                because_____ |
| How often do you go to Eslite bookstores?    _____ times per month |
| Why do you normally go there? |
| Do you normally go alone?  ☐Yes      ☐No, with _____ |
| How long do you normally stay there? _____ hour(s) |
| How often do you buy books at Eslite bookstores?    _____ time(s) per month |
| What else would you buy at Eslite bookstores?    ☐CD/DVD/LP ☐Stationeries  ☐<br><br>Clothes☐Gifts ☐Toys ☐Living accessorise ☐Food ☐<br><br>Others_____ |
| Have you ever attend events in Eslite bookstores?    ☐Yes      ☐No<br><br>If yes, what did you attend?<br><br>_____ |

Finally, would you like to join an interview to talk about your Eslite experience?

☐Yes    ☐No

Thank you for completing the questionnaire, please return by e-mail to:

yu_huiyu@yahoo.co.uk

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