



**As You Are Now: Post-Dramatic Theatre in Ireland**

**(2009 – 2014)**

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## Introduction

### **As You Are Now: Post-Dramatic Theatre in Ireland (2009-2014)**

In recent years, post-dramatic theatre in Ireland has transitioned from a fringe practice to a consistent feature of annual venue programmes and curated festivals. This thesis investigates the emergence of this theatrical form, asking why post-dramatic theatre emerged to such an extent during the period in question and what aspects of theatre are particular to the form. This research is organised thematically, first locating post-dramatic theatre in a theoretical and practical context, before considering post-dramatic theatre practice through elements of performance, spectatorship, space, and text. A thematic approach makes it possible to engage with points of intersection between postmodern experience and post-dramatic forms, where multiplicity, fragmentation and incoherence are rife. It also allows for a neater analysis of these individual components in their own right.

However, it is at these points of intersection where the first problem in critical research on post-dramatic theatre arises; placing dramatic and post-dramatic forms in opposition and observing differences. Even Lehmann finds that the range of description for this dramatic alternative is limited in scope: “The new theatre, one hears and reads, is not this and not that and not the other, but there is a lack of categories and words to define or even describe what it is in any positive terms” (Lehmann 19). Indeed, a recurring theoretical issue in relation to post-dramatic theatre is that it is often defined in negative or oppositional terms. In the introduction of *No More Drama*, for example, Peter Crawley insists that “it is easier to say what the subject of our enquiry is not, than to settle on a single classification” (Crawley and White 11). This loose framework of categorisation presents an ongoing challenge to the critical thinker, as there is no one established structure or model of post-dramatic theatre. Instead, as Crawley suggests, it is easier to observe differences from the dramatic than it is to observe the independently post-dramatic components of a performance. Nevertheless, this research will illustrate that accepting such positions with respect to post-dramatic theatre is to settle into critical passivity. Post-dramatic theatre is an active theatrical form, and as such, the rules of its composition are created within the performance itself. While it may be challenging to firmly identify its constituent parts as a result, the larger

strategies of post-dramatic theatre are quite evident. On a grand scale, post-dramatic theatre challenges the traditional ways of making, performing, receiving, and documenting theatre. Karen Jürs-Munby states that the 'post' of post-dramatic functions "as a rupture and a beyond" (Lehmann 2). As such, even when post-dramatic work departs drastically from an established dramatic pattern, it is fundamentally the dramatic form that informs any such radical departure. It is always the dramatic that the post-dramatic is attempting to move beyond. Hence, the post-dramatic maintains an active quality of resistance that is often misconstrued as negation of the dramatic, when this is rather a direct resistance to closure of meaning. Indeed, in adapting some of the terms that Günter Berghaus proposes for postmodern art, there are clear frames of reference for considering post-dramatic theatre, such as: self-consciousness, ambiguity of meaning, irony, quoting of elements from different cultures and periods, mixing of high art and mass culture, incongruity of composition, crossing of genre boundaries, and the mixing of media (Berghaus 72). These terms provide a substantial frame of reference for the content of this research and will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 1. However, the central argument of this thesis will show that where dramatic theatre makes meaning, the post-dramatic makes ambivalence. Not only does this rhetorical position resist placing dramatic and post-dramatic as oppositional forms, it also uncovers an intention for post-dramatic performance composition. With further trade in positive terms, Crawley offers the following distinction between dramatic and post-dramatic:

Where once the theatre obeyed unities of time and space, of character and narrative, the art of the twentieth century moved from modernist atomisation to postmodern pluralism. Making meaning through fragmented experience, not the cohesive artefact of a play, this is theatre for which the centre could not hold (Crawley and White 11).

Crawley's distinction illustrates the shift beyond cohesive and structured drama to the plural and fragmented form of post-dramatic. Indeed, the transition to postmodern pluralism in theatrical practice that Crawley describes is not an isolated event. Rather, it is symptomatic in wider Irish culture throughout the Celtic Tiger era. Perry Share and Mary P. Corcoran note pluralism among a list of recent changes in Irish society, also

including “reflexivity, in terms of a greater self-consciousness about identity, belongingness and how we spend our leisure time” and “a fragmentation of dominant narratives and types of shared experience, such as trust and community” (Share and Corcoran 3). While Ireland’s economic collapse is not the sole reason for the recent prominence that post-dramatic theatre has gained, this thesis recognises the end of the Celtic Tiger as a significant catalyst in post-dramatic entering Ireland’s theatrical mainstream – a position that will be developed in depth through the opening chapter.

### **Why post-dramatic theatre? Why now?**

Between the years of 2009 and 2014, Ireland experienced the failure of the Celtic Tiger narrative. Ireland’s property bubble inevitably burst and banks failed while political leaders capitulated to demands of the global market and sought a bailout. As Fintan Walsh puts it, this is a period in which Ireland “plummeted from the heady heights of neoliberal abundance and excess into political, economic, social, and cultural turmoil” (Walsh 2). In essence, post-Celtic Tiger Ireland uncovered a substantial gap between our perception of ourselves (the nouveau cosmopolitan neo-liberal ideal) and the reality (a deeply unequal society). As Perry Share and Mary P. Corcoran observe, Irish people “had been seduced by an image of [Ireland] as a wealthy, global, cosmopolitan and sophisticated nation and economy. That national illusion has now been severely challenged, if not shattered, and a debate has started in earnest as to whether we collectively managed to delude ourselves over the last number of years” (Share and Corcoran 2).

Post-dramatic theatre emerges at this time as an appropriate cultural form. Rather than offering the comfort of a new narrative to a weary society, post-dramatic theatre instead embraces the chaos of lived experience. As Chris Morash states, “the theatre does not develop; it responds, moment by moment, with whatever resources available, to the continual challenge the audience carries with it into the auditorium from the world outside” (Morash 274). Fintan O’Toole critiqued Irish theatre in this period, finding it alarming that the theatre did not respond with a “power play” or great social play on the crisis. However, O’Toole’s criticism is problematic for two reasons.

Firstly, as has been detailed, there was no one narrative of the crisis to which one play could respond. Secondly, as Sara Keating argues, O'Toole overlooked a quantity of contemporary work by groups such as ANU, Brokentalkers, and THEATREclub that turned to portraying disenfranchised communities, demonstrating "the willingness of contemporary theatre artists to be political in a more fundamental way: by taking the cultural and dramatic dialogue outside of the theatre all together" (Keating 2011). In overlooking these developing artists, O'Toole also misses the space that is available for entirely new approaches to cultural response. Louise Lowe, artistic director of ANU Productions, suggests that "the very concept of theatre is being interrogated at the moment, questions are being asked that cannot be answered behind a fourth wall, and there is a lot more play to be had" (Walsh 57). Indeed, such responses to the cultural moment by contemporary theatre-makers offer one aspect of why post-dramatic theatre transitions from the inaugural Fringe Festival in 1995 to becoming firmly rooted in Ireland's theatrical mainstream by 2014.

Another aspect of the surge in post-dramatic work is present in the aftermath of the banking crisis, in an environment where securing financial support becomes increasingly competitive. Between 2008 and 2012 the Arts Council saw its annual funding fall by 25% - a drop that led to an overhaul of the theatre funding model. Moving away from the model of regularly funded companies, eleven established theatre companies had their funding completely withdrawn while others sustained drastic cuts. As such, the theatre company model was presented as unfeasible to any group not already supported by it and even those groups were not necessarily secure. The Arts Council launched a plan for a new funding structure, moving away from the traditional company model and initiating a variety of strands to support new and emerging artists, as well as once-off project awards. In one sense, this structure allowed fringe theatre-makers to compete for funding to an unprecedented extent.

Of course, there is no single reason or cause that post-dramatic theatre developed in Ireland in the way that it did. At the same time, there are a series of conditions present in the early stages of Post-Celtic Tiger Ireland that made it possible for post-dramatic to emerge in such a notable manner. These conditions will be considered at greater length in the following chapters.



## **Locating Post-Dramatic Theatre**

In tracing the origins of post-dramatic theatre in Ireland, one is inevitably drawn towards a discussion of postmodern experience. This is not to say that postmodern and post-dramatic are the same. There are notable similarities, albeit with specific expressions in the case of theatre. Therefore, it will be necessary to consider the theory behind postmodernity as it applies to an inherent understanding of contemporary life. Jean François Lyotard asserts that “the generations precipitate themselves. A work can only become modern if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant” (Lyotard 79). In this sense, our contemporary society has absorbed into postmodernity to a point that it has become an implicit influence on our experience. This will establish the foundation for analysis of theatre in contemporary Irish society and link with the idea that there are a variety of postmodernisms rather than one unifying concept. It follows that there is an Irish postmodernism, but what implications would this have on our understanding of contemporary Irish theatre? Furthermore, the post-dramatic form as a postmodernism of its own and whether it is possible to align an Irish postmodernism with a theatrical postmodernism will be considered. While there are a variety of origins for the post-dramatic form in an international sense, some idea of its specific expression in Irish theatre will be explored. This will uncover a legacy of experimentation in Irish theatre and support the view that Ireland’s post-dramatic theatre may simply fit in as another form of expression. Overall, the focus of this research will be the relatively sudden emergence and substantial growth in experimental and post-dramatic forms of Irish theatre.

## **Performance**

As Lehmann argues, the theatre event is no longer created from a set of possible theatrical signs:

“but from the intention to produce and render possible a communicative event. In this postdramatic theatre of events it is a matter of the execution of acts that are real in the here and now and find their fulfilment in the very moment they

happen, without necessarily leaving any traces of meaning or a cultural monument" (Lehmann 104).

These transitions in theatrical form are clear to see in contemporary Irish theatre productions, and yet, our examples raise more questions than they settle. Our patterns of critical reception under the dramatic model are pushed to their limits as much as theatrical form in post-dramatic theatre. As such, performance will be considered in terms of how both the means of analysis and the subject of analysis have changed in contemporary theatre. Crafting a performance in a postmodern culture offers particular challenges and Irish theatre-makers benefit from both exposure to a broader array of theatrical forms and increased availability of education and training. Beyond the act of performance, processes of documentation continue to struggle against the ephemerality of performance and how – even in contemporary theatre – it is possible for aspects of the performance to disappear. Moving on from creation and analysis, attention will turn to the performing body in postmodernity and how the Aristotelian character has evolved and separated into various performance possibilities. Presence and absence of the performing body will be shown to not adhere to a fixed opposition, disrupted through ambivalence. This disruption extends beyond the body and throughout performance. As such, post-dramatic theatre will be observed challenging critical reception and interpretation at every turn, conscious of not only its own performance but also of how it communicates with each spectator.

### **Spectatorship**

In our contemporary experience, spectating has become an everyday act. This poses difficulties in identifying what might be unique to spectatorship in theatre or indeed if there is a difference by context to the act of spectating. Dennis Kennedy speculates that 'if there is a universal in a gathered group it must be *the gathering itself*, in the simple act of being present, as simultaneous witnesses or participating observers, at an event offered for display *precisely for this group*' (Kennedy 14). These modes of experience are tackled by post-dramatic theatre in altering the spectator's established patterns of reception. As such, this chapter will investigate a range of engagements that vary from

the immersive intimacy of ANU's Monto Cycle to the collective engagement of The Company's *Politik*. A number of performance strategies will emerge, showing that theatre-makers can alter a spectator's perception. However, the spectator remains an individual with their own agency and capacity to engage or disengage. Above all else, there is the contract between performer and spectator and ultimately a duty of care that applies on a human level of engagement. The capacity of performer and spectator to shape the performance experience is an area of immense interest while observing post-dramatic theatre, particularly as a micro-cosmic display of the potential to activate social or political engagement. In our contemporary era, these concerns extend beyond the theatrical performance and into the digital space, where theatre-makers and their audiences may remain engaged through social media. So, what does post-dramatic theatre do to bring people together? How are spectators mobilised, engaged, manipulated or cared for in post-dramatic work? This chapter considers, in contemporary experience, if the act of spectating ever truly ends.

### **Space**

In post-dramatic theatre, space is more than the medium in which performance and spectatorship meet. Space can be a sensory quality of its own, engaging our experience of landscape, architecture, and design. Henri Lefebvre categorises theatre among 'non-verbal signifying sets' that are "characterized by a spatiality which is in fact irreducible to the mental realm. There is even a sense in which landscapes, both rural and urban, fall under this head" (Lefebvre 62). In the post-Celtic Tiger era, Ireland is defined by spatiality. Indeed, there is an attribution of identity that aligns with space in Ireland, considering the geographical implications of urban, regional, and rural experience. And yet, post-dramatic theatre is viewed as intrinsically cosmopolitan. When considering space in the context of Irish theatre, this chapter asks if it is possible for post-dramatic theatre to communicate with other spatial experiences; to be rural as it is urban or to be cosmopolitan and regional in a similar way. Of course, there is an added challenge in Irish culture where theatre buildings are places in their own right, identifiable for their architecture and often synonymous with particular theatrical forms. Irish post-dramatic practitioners present work in all manner of venues, yet the example of ANU's Monto

Cycle and its engagement with inner-city Dublin demonstrates an ability to counteract not only the ability to disrupt a perceived spatial narrative, but also how much influence the identity of a space holds in contemporary Irish society. Such disruptions and interruptions of our concepts of space need not take place outside a theatre space to have an impact. A considered use of space can activate sensory reactions in the spectator that are at least difficult to articulate if not otherwise incomprehensible. This chapter will consider Pan Pan's productions of Samuel Beckett's radio plays, *All that Fall* and *Embers*, and the clashes in both productions between the sensory space and experience. While other aspects of theatrical space will also be discussed, the notable qualities of space in post-dramatic practice are those strategies which render space ambivalent – through disruption, interruption and intervention.

### **Text**

As an element of performance creation, text has changed considerably through postmodernity. Most notably, the forms that we now accept to be 'texts' have expanded beyond the written word to a rather more diverse selection. Indeed, Christopher B. Balme notes that "Postdramatic theatre may be created from a set of images, a selection of objects or physical exercises; it may or may not result in a text before or after the fact" (Balme 126). Yet, as with earlier arguments on what post-dramatic is not, we are led to believe that text has been abandoned by post-dramatic theatre and this is simply not the case. Accounting for the social and cultural changes that postmodernity has wrought elsewhere, the theatrical text becomes a site of interest in contemporary theatre for how it has absorbed postmodern attitudes to text and evolved in response. Far from abandoning text, the post-dramatic may be better perceived as a form overloaded with text. Of course, the strategies of ambivalence are evident in subversion of narrative structure and comprehensibility to generate exchanges that are actively provoking new forms of response from spectators. This chapter will look at examples from The Emergency Room's *riverrun* to The Company's *As You Are Now So Once Were We* and show a distinctly ambivalent engagement with existing texts and means of generating text. In the post-dramatic form, text has not been abandoned but is certainly less literal.

Overall, this project will investigate similarities between dramatic and post-dramatic modes through these standard theatrical structures: performance, spectatorship, space, and text. Locating Ireland within both European and International theatre discourse, the research outcome will confirm that contemporary Irish theatre is not only a singular dramatic tradition, but also successful in nurturing and producing competing theatrical modes to national and international acclaim. That is to say, the perception that Irish theatre is defined by writer-led dramatic theatre will receive necessary revision through consideration of alternative, post-dramatic practice. As Morash states:

“Theatre transforms itself continually, sometimes reinventing itself with unexpected suddenness, sometimes remaining apparently static for decades; theatrical forms borrow from each other, from other art forms, and from new technologies; archaic forms are resurrected and made new, while once-vibrant forms reveal their conventionality, grow stale and wither” (Morash 273-274).

This thesis investigates the process of reinvention that Irish theatre has undergone in the Post-Celtic Tiger years, the relative suddenness with which post-dramatic theatre has entered mainstream theatrical discourse and what these developments may indicate for the future of Irish theatre.

## Locating Post-Dramatic

In the context of Irish theatre, the foundation of the Abbey Theatre in 1904 presents not only a national theatre, but one with writer-led drama as its core. While the Gate Theatre emerges as a rival theatre in 1928, its repertory is also committed to writer-led dramatic theatre. Yet, there is a complex relationship between theatre and nation in Ireland, captured eloquently by Ian R. Walsh who observes that “in Ireland, the first country to have a state subsidised national theatre, the stage has been the primary instrument in the creation of a national identity” (19). Through the Abbey Theatre asserting itself as Ireland’s national theatre and with The Gate as a mild alternative, dramatic theatre is made synonymous with Ireland, if not Irishness itself.

However, it was within the Gate Theatre that an experimental fringe took shape, through the Project multi-arts festival of November 1966. The following year, the Project Gallery was opened on Lower Abbey Street. But it was not until 1975 that the Project Arts Centre found a permanent location on Dublin’s East Essex Street, albeit with closures in 1982 due to fire damage and again in 1998 for redevelopment. Nevertheless, alternative cultural forms now had a space to develop where previously, experimental theatre “had a difficult time finding a place in the subsidised theatres, and in the absence of subsidies for new theatre companies, there was little scope for the emergence of new alternative theatre companies” (C. Morash 248). Indeed, Morash acknowledges the fringe work of Jim and Peter Sheridan in the Project through 1970s, paving the way for Passion Machine in the late 1980s. The 1980s also see the emergence of Rough Magic and Operating Theatre; the latter with Olwen Fouéré as a co-founder, who continues to be an influential experimental performer and theatre-maker to the present. In 1995, the Dublin Fringe Festival was established in association with the Dublin Theatre Festival to provide an expanded platform for new and emerging performing artists, both national and international. Sara Keating identifies Pan Pan Theatre Company as one of a contingent of new theatre-makers to showcase their work in 1995, retrospectively stating: “These were theatre artists that would become some of the most influential of their generation, whose success is now such that their work regularly headlines the Dublin Theatre Festival” (Keating, *Irish Times/Blogs/Festival*

*Hub*). Although the inaugural Dublin Fringe Festival may be contextually aligned with the early stages of the Celtic Tiger, the end of the twentieth century leads Fintan O'Toole to proclaim:

There is no dramatic conflict between tradition and modernity in Ireland any more. Daniel Corkery's holy trinity of traditional Irishness – land, nationality and religion – has been dethroned. Insofar as it still exists, traditional Ireland is alienated, angular and embattled, as strange, with its moving statues and paranoid visions, as any avant-garde has ever been (Furay and O'Hanlon 148).

Far from being problematic, a lack of dramatic conflict between tradition and modernity or alienation from traditional Ireland and Irishness are prominent features of experimental theatre at the turn of the century. In a connected way, Róise Goan acknowledges the cultural antagonism of the Dublin Fringe Festival towards traditional Ireland in the early years, but insists that “it is not about being ‘counter’ all the time any more – although at times that opposition still has its place. It is about being ahead of the curve, identifying trends and artists and new modes of production before they have been heard of in [a more mainstream theatre context]” (Keating, *Irish Times/Blogs/Festival Hub*). It is against this established order that those fringe and alternative elements of Irish theatre transition into the mainstream in a notable fashion between 2009 and 2014. Of particular interest, theatre-makers that could be perceived as practitioners of post-dramatic – with Pan Pan leading the way – break through in an unprecedented way.

While this thesis will offer some clarification on the differences in dramatic and post-dramatic form, its guiding question will be less what post-dramatic is and more so why it is that post-dramatic theatre becomes an established part of Irish theatre in this period. Thus, to understand this cultural form, it is first necessary to place it in the context of contemporary experience.

## Beyond the Modern; Disruption and Unconscious Postmodernity

Far from representing a coherent project, let alone a coherent society, post-dramatic theatre is present in an Irish culture of the Celtic Tiger and Post-Celtic Tiger eras that is unconsciously postmodern. Frederic Jameson argues that “we are *within* the culture of postmodernism to the point where its facile repudiation is as impossible as any equally facile celebration of it is complacent and corrupt” (Jameson 29). This view of our unconscious experience draws parallels with society as well as culture. In this same period, Emilie Pine observes what she terms as *social agnosia*, “a wilful refusal to see injustice and thus to name it” (Collins and Caulfield 211). This describes a prevailing social condition of the Celtic Tiger, a condition which slowly dissipated following the collapse of Ireland’s financial institutions. Social agnosia provides an interesting contrast to unconscious postmodernity, which might be similarly described as a wilful refusal to see that our experience of everyday life is defined by the condition of postmodernity, a condition that modernity provokes. As Jean-François Lyotard states, “Postmodernity is not a new age, but the rewriting of some of the features claimed by modernity, and first of all modernity’s claim to ground its legitimacy on the project of liberating humanity as a whole through science and technology” (Lyotard, *The Inhuman* 34). In this sense, postmodernity is a condition that is not bound to temporal restrictions and may emerge at any point framed as a historical era. Yet, it is also useful to consider the modern and postmodern as inter-connected, even shifting positions; not postmodern as a mode that replaces the modern, nor the modern as a mode that precedes the postmodern. Rather, in the pursuit of a “modernizing” project, there is always-already an element that would reinvent the project’s scope; this is what we might call the postmodern. Indeed, Jacques Rancière offers further critique of fixing a binary opposition between modern and postmodern:

The simplistic opposition between the modern and the postmodern prevents us from understanding the transformations of the present situation and their stakes. It forgets in effect that modernism itself has only ever been a long contradiction between two opposed aesthetic politics, two politics that are opposed but on the basis of a common core linking the autonomy of art to the anticipation of a community to come, and therefore linking this autonomy to the



promise of its own suppression (Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: the distribution of the sensible* 128).

Here, Rancière shows that to look beyond contradictions within the modern or the postmodern is to simplify both ideas in themselves, before proceeding to their possible common cores. If humans experience the world in terms of discrete macro-physical entities such as a chair, a tree, or a person, as Marvin Harris suggests, “anyone can see these things as wholes, but no one has ever seen an institution, a society, a culture, or a sociocultural system as a whole” (Harris 51). To observe the parts of these positions and either interpret them as the entirety or base interpretations on only such a limited sample is the very simplification that both Rancière and Harris would have any reader of theory avoid. Rancière insists that there is no need to imagine the emergence of a postmodern rupture, “blurring the boundaries between great art and the forms of popular culture. This blurring of boundaries is as old as ‘modernity’ itself” (Rancière 49). This is not to say that Rancière asserts the postmodern in his argument; yet, his point illuminates Lyotard’s view:

Rather we have to say that the postmodern is always implied in the modern because of the fact that modernity [...] comprises in itself an impulsion to exceed itself into a state other than itself. And not only to exceed itself in that way, but to resolve itself into a sort of ultimate stability, such for example as is aimed at by the utopian project, but also by the straightforward political project implied in the grand narratives of emancipation. Modernity is constitutionally and ceaselessly pregnant with its postmodernity (Lyotard, *The Inhuman* 25).

As an expression of rapid modernisation, the Celtic Tiger certainly displayed the impulse to exceed itself that Lyotard describes. However, rather than achieving any sort of ultimate stability or emancipating Ireland from the defining grand narrative of economic struggle, the Celtic Tiger ends in collapse. A ripple effect is instigated by this collapse, where not only the economic situation had failed, but the narrative of the Celtic Tiger itself. Fintan O’Toole argues that “The problem with the world of the Celtic Tiger was that there wasn’t a single big narrative that could be shaped into a clear conflict. The personal choices thrown up by social change were rather less heroic” (*Ship of Fools* 186). Instead, expressions of postmodernity through Irish culture and indeed theatrical

productions are reflected by a burgeoning attitude of scepticism towards modernism's structures. If the modern impulse is to exceed itself, perhaps the postmodern is not a succession of the modern but rather to be found at points of excess. Lyotard's focus on the grand narrative of emancipation draws further criticism from Rancière, who says that "the postmodern was never used as a sort of artistic or theoretical flag; at the very most it served as a descriptive category and as a diagnostic. And this diagnostic had an essential function: to extricate artistic modernism from political emancipation, to disconnect it in order to connect it with another historical narrative" (Rancière 103). For Rancière, there is no end to this pursuit of emancipation, even in the postmodern. There are only other grand narratives from which to be emancipated. Grand narratives will be considered in more depth further on in this chapter, but for now, let us assert that the friction between modern and postmodern is not simply one of historical or oppositional distinction. Rather, friction occurs at the points within the modern where the postmodern seeks to exceed the modern. As Fredric Jameson observes, "paradoxically, the new return to an older problematic of the modern and of modernity is not really to be grasped as an attack on that of postmodernity; it is itself postmodern" (Jameson 98).

Thus understood, unconscious postmodernity offers less of a historical narrative than it questions our experience of reality. David Lyon notes that one way of seeing the postmodern is that "it is a debate about reality" (Lyon 2). For Lyotard, the crux of the matter in either modernism or postmodernism is the interpretation of reality; how reality is conceived, perceived, or presented in or through society. Lyotard argues for an atemporal understanding of reality, stating that, "in an amazing acceleration, the generations precipitate themselves. A work can only become modern if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant" (Lyotard 79). As such, neither modernism nor postmodernism should be categorised into neat historical periods, interpreted as a chronological progression of theory, but as human responses to temporal conditions which are inherently limited in scope. Paul Ricoeur surmises that "the imaginary is defined in opposition to the "real" and history continues to be the model for realism of representation" (Ricoeur, *Volume 1* 163). In this sense, Ricoeur shows that our reliance on the opposition of real and imaginary is the essential legitimation of history as shaping

our reality. Bauman argues that modernism's pursuit of the cultural ideal, "the hope of converting the world to better standards of truth, judgment or taste was at best naive; indeed, it would be naive in the extreme to hold it still today. Yet the worst naivety was to suppose that the validity of the 'civilizing' enterprise of cultural discourse was at any time dependent on realism or irrealism of that hope; on the feasibility of proselytizing success" (Bauman 20). For Bauman, the role of the postmodern should be as a form of rectifying the intellectual imperialism of Western thought as carried out under the flag of modernism.

As such, postmodernity is separate from postmodernism in that it reflects a lived experience. Barry Smart suggests that "postmodernity indicates a modification or change in the way(s) in which we experience and relate to modern thought, modern conditions and modern forms of life, in short to modernity" (Smart 39). Cathy Leeney suggests that postmodernity has fractured Irish experience during the Celtic Tiger, generating a kind of "between-ness" that is also a relevant image in Irish theatre. Leeney offers the example of successful individuals during the boom who "might move with ease between the pre-modern world of their grandparents, perhaps materially poor but supposedly rich in cultural and spiritual resources, and the postmodern sophistication of highly technologized communication, travel and international business and property interests" (Blandford 22). For some critics, this poses the same concern that placing postmodernism as a cultural dominant does, and that is replacing modernism with another oppressing ideology. Hassan argues that the word postmodernism "sounds not only awkward, uncouth; it evokes what it wishes to surpass or suppress, modernism itself" (Docherty 148). Bauman proposes that postmodernity "is an aspect of a fully-fledged, viable social system which has come to replace the 'classical' modern, capitalist society and thus needs to be theorized according to its own logic" (Bauman 52). For their part, Milner and Browitt state that postmodernity "is best understood neither as a distinctive style nor as a distinctive set of themes, but rather as a distinctive social relation between art and capitalism. In short, postmodernism is modernism stripped of its avant-garde redemptive functions" (Milner and Browitt 167). Even in these attempts at understanding the postmodern, it is clear to see that other factors influence the frames of reference. Docherty observes ambiguity from the very inception of the

postmodern, finding that, “on the one hand it is seen as a historical period: on the other it is simply a desire, a mood which looks to the future to redeem the present” (Docherty 2). This initial ambiguity has remained at the centre of postmodern debate, one that is divided into theorists arguing for a historical postmodern period (a subset of whom believe that period has passed), theorists who argue that the postmodern is an atemporal condition, and others who argue that the postmodern is simply an aesthetic.

If one were to observe an aesthetic of postmodernity, it would likely be found in a decentred approach to culture. Bonnie Marranca observes that the work of the Wooster Group does not set its goal as “the acquisition of knowledge as a civilizing activity or foundation of cultural or social values, but exactly its opposite: the decentering of the human being and the destabilizing of knowledge and beliefs” (Marranca 53). This aspect of the Wooster Group’s work is indicative of a broader condition in postmodernity, one in which our culture has become de-centred to the point of having no centre on which to grasp, particularly if we accept that history is another narrative being used to frame our experience. This leads to an undermining of history as a structuring force. David Barnett suggests that postmodernity “is a site of uncertainty. It can no longer be articulated with the minutiae of knowable details; its elements are complex and do not submit themselves to harmonising hierarchical structures” (Jürs-Munby, Carroll and Giles 52). The absence of a hierarchical structure, or more particularly, the absence of a historical line to continue along is most often the troubling contention of the postmodern. Even though this guiding structure is taken apart, Jacques Derrida observes the paradox that “it has always been thought that the center, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality” (Derrida 352). In a sense, something of the structure of history has always been required to guide the pursuit of progress. Jean Baudrillard does not labour on the idea of history as theoretically structural, however:

History is a strong myth, perhaps, along with the unconscious, the last great myth. It is a myth that at once subtended the possibility of an “objective” enchainment of events and causes and the possibility of a narrative enchainment of discourse (Baudrillard 47).

For Baudrillard, history is only one line of discourse and not an inherently legitimating idea. In Baudrillard's conception of the postmodern, truth is replaced by legitimation (as well as delegitimation), progress is at an end and beauty is no longer possible as genocides like the Holocaust have reduced humanity to its lowest form. The question is posited: if this is where modernity and history have been leading, why continue in this way? Derrida conceives of postmodernity as rendering the centre as a function, "a sort of nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play. [...] that is to say, a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences" (Derrida 353-354). Thus, the modern is not a completed project. Failures of modernity are listed (if the main goals are understood to be truth, progress and beauty) but the sense that it has not achieved completion is the chief failure of modernity. Baudrillard argues that it is "no longer possible to fabricate the unreal from the real, the imaginary from the givens of the real. The process will, rather, be the opposite: it will be to put decentered situations, models of simulations in place and to contrive to give them the feeling of the real, of the banal, of lived experience, to reinvent the real as fiction, precisely because it has disappeared from our life" (Baudrillard 124). Of course, the postmodern is effectively a rupture of the modern and it cannot succeed where the modern has failed. Yet, the postmodern does not aim for completion but for renewal, to see if cultures can take failure in modernity's ideals and recycle it into a diffuse approach to lived existence. At the very least, the postmodern can be interpreted as an attempt to disrupt the prevailing sameness of modernity:

What we now begin to feel, therefore – and what begins to emerge as some deeper and more fundamental constitution of postmodernity itself, at least in its temporal dimension – is henceforth, where everything now submits to the perpetual change of fashion and media image, that nothing can change any longer (Jameson 59).

Jameson's view is not so dissimilar to Fintan O'Toole's claim that there is no longer any dramatic conflict between tradition and modernity. After all, the extent of modernity has been the widespread homogenisation of culture through globalisation; leading to what Jameson refers to as "the realization that no society has ever been so standardized

as this one, and that the stream of human, social and historical temporality has never flowed quite so homogeneously” (Jameson 59). This shrewd assessment of the postmodern condition from Jameson identifies how it is that Ireland – through a period of intense globalisation – has transitioned into unconscious postmodernity, rather than what Jameson asserts elsewhere as a postmodernity that has passed. Postmodernity emerges as a disruption of this standardisation, particularly in theatrical practice where the dominance of dramatic theatre is a clear expression of cultural homogeneity.

A social and cultural understanding can combine in this research to effectively engage with the experience of theatre-makers in Post-Celtic Tiger Ireland. No piece of theatre is made in isolation and even less so the experimental theatre of this period. The reasons are as varied as our responses to postmodernity itself; social, cultural, political, economic - all of the aspects of lived experience in Ireland that bear on each citizen and that are ultimately expressed in the work of Irish theatre-makers during this time. From the reality that found legitimacy in historical structure, we proceed into a fracturing and multiplication of realities in the postmodern. In this experience of hyperreality, Baudrillard argues that we now exist in a universe of simulation:

...the double has disappeared, there is no longer a double, one is always already in the other world, which is no longer an other, without a mirror, a projection, or a utopia that can reflect it - simulation is insuperable, unsurpassable, dull and flat, without exteriority - we will no longer even pass through to “the other side of the mirror,” that was still the golden age of transcendence (Baudrillard 125).

Indeed, Baudrillard’s argument is not only useful in disrupting fixed binaries, but also in expanding the idea of fracture in decentred postmodernity. Commentators observe that the production of *Riverdance* at the 1994 Eurovision Song Contest in Dublin signifies a distinctly postmodern Irish moment, a nostalgic presentation of pre-modern Celtic-Irish identity that is closer to Baudrillard’s simulation than it is to authenticity. As Kuhling and Keohane state, it is cultural representations such as *Riverdance* that “capture various dimensions of the Irish experience of globalisation: they appeal to and invoke premodern Celtic culture and or traditional solidarity at the same time as they exhibit and aspire to ideas of a postmodern, hybridised cosmopolitan culture” (Kuhling and Keohane 77). Where a real Celtic identity or performance is not accessible, this

simulation takes its place; thus, the copy of the real accepted as real in place of the real - Baudrillard's hyperreal. Yet, Gilles Deleuze argues for distinction between artificial and simulacrum, as he claims that these are not the same thing. Rather, Deleuze insists that artificial and simulacrum "are even opposed to each other. The artificial is always a copy of a copy, which should be pushed to the point where it changes its nature and is reversed into the simulacrum (the moment of Pop Art)" (Deleuze 265). There is a connection to be observed between multiplicity and fragmented experience and the relatively late arrival of postmodernity to Ireland; and as such, the connected lateness with which the metanarratives of church, state, and other institutions have had their credibility tested. Share and Corcoran identify globalisation as a root cause for tensions in Irish modernity that "point at times to crises of legitimacy" and as having brought about "a hybridisation of experiences and identity, and associated states of ambivalence, uneasiness and uncertainty. These have led to a decline in trust in institutions and in conventional religious expression, with a concomitant shift towards more individualised and personalised solutions" (Share and Corcoran 5). Ireland's accession to the European Union in 1972 is hailed as a significant shift in our otherwise insular political position. In a literal sense, this action allowed Ireland to advance and expand from its ongoing postcolonial identity in relation to the United Kingdom and take on the drive of cosmopolitanism that Europe made available. Elsewhere, Perry Anderson suggests that "the immediate vector of postmodern culture was certainly to be found in the stratum of newly affluent employees and professionals created by the rapid growth of the service and speculative sectors of the developed capitalist societies" (Anderson 62). However, even though the arrival of the Celtic Tiger aligns with a rapid growth across these sectors in Ireland, its failure has been used to suggest that a somewhat naive Irish nation still has not matured fully as a state. In other terms, this failure is used to argue that Ireland cannot be postmodern without fully realising its modernity. Alternatively, Share and Corcoran argue that the Celtic Tiger was an illusion and that the world described by economists was a fiction, "one where financial markets could regulate themselves, where wealth trickled down to the neediest in society and where scarce goods were effectively allocated according to the combined actions of rationally acting individuals" (Share and Corcoran 2). Whether it was illusion or delusion,

the failure of the Celtic Tiger activated a critical interrogation of established narratives and a reflexive questioning of the reality of experience.

Once again, the connected ideas of social agnosia and unconscious postmodernity emerge, reflecting the fragmentation and incoherence of our lived experience. However, if the preceding discussion has shown anything, it is that postmodernity takes multiple forms and as such, post-dramatic theatre may be one of many postmodernisms in a theoretical sense. This position is underpinned by Hans-Thies Lehmann as he notes that postmodern studies since 1970 have produced an abundance of terms and keywords, but urges caution: "Such keywords, as much as they often hit upon something real about the new theatre, can neither be cogent individually, nor can they collectively offer more than catchphrases which necessarily have to remain very general or name very heterogenous traits" (Lehmann 25). Ultimately, it is not for postmodern theory to precede theatrical practice, but perhaps instead to interpret the performance / theatrical production.



## Postmodernisms; Lived Experience and the failure of Grand Narratives

Simon Malpas insists that the postmodern is not a unified movement, suggesting instead that postmodern theory:

...has become a space in which practically the whole range of modern critical enquiry intersect: many feminists are concerned with the implications of postmodernity, as are writers on race and colonialism, political theorists and philosophers. Each group brings different interests and discussions to bear on the postmodern, and draws different conclusions about its usefulness (Malpas 1).

Writing in the early 1990s, Barry Smart observes that, for some, “it is already a question of what postmodernity was” (Smart 12). How then can it be argued more than a decade later that the postmodern is an ongoing process? While there are theorists and critics who will state that postmodernism was and has been, this thesis discerns between the postmodern condition which is atemporal and postmodernisms which may be bound by other factors. Perhaps, the condition persists as Zygmunt Bauman proposes in that we find ourselves neither in solid modernity nor in solid postmodernity, but in a liquid modernity – or, as it follows, even a liquid postmodernity that one might observe as an unconscious postmodernity. If this is the case, we are in an unstable state brought on by the postmodern dissolution of the grand narratives that Ireland’s modernity was built upon. This idea has particular relevance to contemporary Ireland where our institutions have perceptively failed and if we were not questioning the grand narratives of our institutions during the Celtic Tiger, there is little else to do but analyse the structures which brought about the economic collapse and subsequent loss of sovereignty of our adolescent state. As such, postmodernity is a condition of lived experience while postmodernism and its various expressions form more of an intellectual project.

As an intellectual project, postmodernism takes up and inverts those aspects of the Enlightenment that modernism also pursues: truth, knowledge, reason, and progress. Critics of postmodernism would argue that postmodern thinking aims for the

exhaustion of modernity and the end of progress. Gerard Delanty suggests that postmodernism is “merely the bringing to completion of what had already taken place in the spheres of knowledge and politics, for its greatest impact has been on the self” (Delanty 131-132). Conversely, postmodernism has been critiqued as the deconstruction of expression and the disappearance of the individual subject. However, this creates a theoretical problem that requires separate understandings of deconstruction as critical theory and deconstruction as a cultural activity. As a critical theory and as a philosophical discourse, deconstruction exists in its own right. Yet, as a cultural activity, Jacques Derrida insists that the “movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures. Inhabiting in a certain way, because one always inhabits, and all the more when one does not suspect it” (*Of Grammatology* 4). Indeed, this point not only clarifies the activity of deconstruction but also underscores the lived experience of unconscious postmodernity – because one always inhabits. As part of a process that may even be expressive of the postmodern condition, cultural uses of deconstruction have diversified beyond critical theory. In contemporary popular culture and activities as diverse as fashion to cooking, deconstruction is an act far removed from that of critical reading. Indeed, there is a kind of deconstruction that is specific to theatre practice, particularly taking place in post-dramatic theatre. This is evident in Peter Crawley’s review of Pan Pan’s *The Rehearsal; Playing the Dane*, where he describes “Pan Pan’s absorbing, sometimes mind-blowing, and often infuriating deconstruction of the part [Hamlet], the play, and its perception” (Crawley, *Irish Theatre Magazine*). These aspects of the original are not removed or destroyed, but observed in other contexts and presented in alternative forms to communicate something beyond the contents of the written text. There is a playfulness in the style of theatrical deconstruction that Pan Pan employ, a process informed by postmodern experience more so than critical discourse.

Yet in some ways, the similarity of decentred theory connects deconstruction and postmodernism, only not deconstruction as critical theory. In his work, Docherty speaks of “the spectre of the postmodern” leaving traces in every cultural discipline, and attempts to establish a chronology for postmodern theory. So, what might we understand of postmodernism in an independent sense? Docherty’s pursuit offers dates

as far back as 1939 through Arnold Toynbee who in turn argues that modernity was at an end in the late 19th century. Indeed, Toynbee may be credited with the first use of the term “post-modern” as it appears in the fifth volume of his work, *A Study of History*, published in 1939 (Docherty, *Postmodernism: a reader* 1). Perry Anderson claims that it is actually the eighth volume, published in 1954, in which Toynbee coins the term “post-modern” as he dubbed the epoch that opened with the Franco-Prussian war (Anderson 5). Anderson explores beyond this and finds that postmodernism first surfaced in the Hispanic inter-world of the 1930s that Federico de Onís first coins the term *postmodernismo* to describe “a conservative reflux within modernism itself: one which sought refuge from its formidable lyrical challenge in a muted perfectionism of detail and ironic humour, whose most original feature was the newly authentic expression it afforded women” (Anderson 4). For Anderson, postmodernism is either historical or an aesthetic. Milner and Browitt suggest that the postmodern begins after the Second World War as “the generations that attempted to theorise these many and varied postmodern conditions had grown up in a world that considered itself quite decisively ‘postwar’” (Milner and Browitt 167-168). David Lyon posits that Friedrich Nietzsche, Georg Simmel and Martin Heidegger represent the prehistory of postmodernism (Lyon 7-10). Indeed, these philosophers are routinely engaged with by the central figures of postmodern theory. Of course, we may trace the clearest intellectual origins of postmodernism as it is understood in a contemporary sense to thinkers such as Jean-François Lyotard, Fredric Jameson, Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, Jürgen Habermas, Gilles Deleuze, and Felix Guattari. As a point of connection between these theorists, Gerard Delanty offers that “postmodernism can be seen as an expression of political disappointment, akin to the disenchantment that inspired French intellectuals to turn to poststructuralism after 1968” (Delanty 147). Indeed, Anderson also argues that postmodernism “should be seen as a product of the political defeat of the radical generation of the late sixties” (Anderson 80). These theorists are joined in recent discourse by others from an array of cultural disciplines such as Gianni Vattimo, Umberto Eco, Michael Nyman, Andreas Huyssen, Charles Jencks, Richard Rorty, Ernesto Laclau, and Alice Jardine (Docherty, *Postmodernism: a reader* vii-ix). If Anderson is correct in asserting postmodernism as a product of the 1960s, what produces postmodernism in our contemporary generation? When we talk about postmodernism,

are we already beyond postmodernism itself? As such, are we discussing what postmodernism was more than what it is or might be?

Here we can see the emergence of unique postmodern experiences; those that we might call 'postmodernisms'. Jameson observes the emergence of postmodernism as a reaction against established forms of high modernism, "the reified monuments one has to destroy to do anything new. This means there will be as many different forms of postmodernism as there were high modernisms in place" (Jameson 2). Indeed, it is necessary to contemplate postmodernism as a non-linear entity in its formation given that the postmodern is a non-linear experience. For Harvey, postmodernism "seems to depend for its validity upon a particular way of experiencing, interpreting, and being in the world" (Harvey 52-53). It is that essence of particularity that gives us different postmodernisms, particular ways of experiencing, interpreting, and being in the world that – when considered in practice – must produce different results depending on society, culture, ethnicity, gender. In short, we may arrive at individual postmodernisms. Jameson suggests that "any attempt to say what postmodernism is can scarcely be separated from the even more problematic attempt to say where it is going – in short, to disengage its contradictions, to imagine its consequences (and the consequences of those consequences), and to conjecture the shape of its agents and institutions in some more fully developed maturity of what can now at best only be trends and currents. All postmodern theory is thus a telling of the future, with an imperfect deck" (Jameson 50-51). Such is the fragmentation demanded by postmodernity – the rupture of experience, leading not to a reinvention or something that is utterly new, but to a desire for difference. Charles Lemert argues that, without precisely knowing what postmodernism is about, "it must be about one question above all others: Does the modern world still realistically offer what for so long it had promised?" (Lemert 3). Arguably, not knowing a destination or trajectory for postmodernism becomes irrelevant where the postmodern condition may be broadly understood as dissatisfaction with modernism as a project. As Harvey puts it, while there is no universal agreement on the term, perhaps postmodernism "represents some kind of reaction to, or departure from, 'modernism'" (Harvey 7). This view is similar to that of Jameson, who remarks that postmodernism "is better grasped as a symptom of the deeper structural changes in our society and its culture as a whole, or in other

words, in the mode of production” (Jameson 50). Jameson and Harvey align in this logic, which Harvey extends by suggesting “Postmodernism also ought to be looked at as mimetic of the social, economic, and political practices in society. But since it is mimetic of different facets of those practices it appears in very different guises” (Harvey 113). As both theorists are keenly aware, postmodernism may emerge from a variety of cultural structures; society, economy, even politics.

Of course, not only are there varied interpretations and experiences of postmodernism, but those experiences are also taking leave from multiple points within modernism. In many ways, the only logical approach to postmodernism is to incorporate fragmented experiences – especially when even the larger concept of postmodernism is fragmented itself. For example, Johannes Birringer claims that “postmodernism has not yet taken place” (Biringner 1). Charles Lemert claims multiple levels of modernism and postmodernism are in simultaneous operation; indeed, he proposes three groups, beginning with radical modernism that he accompanies with two kinds of postmodernism, radical and strategic; radical “considers modernism done with” and strategic “considers modernity at least in need of a thorough remaking” (Lemert 20). There is no consensus on what the postmodern is or what the parameters of the postmodern must be and, ultimately, it is this unknowable quantity of the postmodern that allows it to disrupt modern structures. Many commentators suggest a close relationship between postmodernism and post-structuralism. Best and Kellner observe that “Postmodern theory generally follows poststructuralist theory in the primacy given to discourse theory” (Best and Kellner 26). Of course, this is just one of the existing theoretical positions that is re-considered in the postmodern. As Docherty observes, due to the legacy inherited from the Frankfurt School, “the issue of the postmodern is also - tangentially, at least - an issue of Marxism” (Docherty, *After Theory* 3). This position is further complicated by the fall of Communism in recent history where theory can even be considered to move into Post-Marxism. Channelling Fredric Jameson, Milner and Browitt argue that postmodernism is “a thoroughgoing commodity culture” and that it “can have no defining normative standards of its own: its value is what it will fetch in the market” (Milner and Browitt 187). For Perry Anderson, the link of capitalism and the postmodern is unavoidable, given that “Postmodernism emerged as a cultural dominant in unprecedentedly rich capitalist

societies with very high average levels of consumption” (Anderson 121). However, Zygmunt Bauman broadens the argument and asserts that the postmodernist discourse “is about the credibility of ‘modernity’ itself as a self-designation of Western civilization, whether industrial or post-industrial, capitalist or post-capitalist. [...] The postmodernist debate is about the self-consciousness of Western society, and the grounds (or the absence of grounds) for such consciousness” (Docherty, *Postmodernism* 134). Feminism emerges in postmodern discourse, but most often as a critique of extensions of patriarchal structures. Linda Hutcheon observes a major difference between feminisms and postmodernism in stating that postmodernism is “politically ambivalent for it is doubly coded - both complicitous with and contesting of the cultural dominants within which it operates; but on the other side, feminisms have distinct, unambiguous political agendas of resistance. Feminisms are not really either compatible with or even an example of postmodern thought” (Malpas 102). For Hutcheon, the postmodern offers an opportunity to further deconstruct oppositional boundaries; even though it is this ambivalence that is overlooked in this instance. Anderson continues on the use of the postmodern in deconstructing oppositions, observing that “New poles of oppositional identification have emerged in the postmodern period: gender, race, ecology, sexual orientation, regional or continental diversity. But these have to date constituted a weaker set of antagonisms” (Anderson 104). bell hooks asserts that postmodernist discourses “are often exclusionary even as they call attention to, appropriate even, the experience of ‘difference’ and ‘Otherness’ to provide oppositional political meaning, legitimacy, and immediacy when they are accused of lacking concrete relevance. Very few African-American intellectuals have talked or written about postmodernism” (Malpas 128). The variety of interpretations that emerge here, while at times in conflict, all suggest that it is fairer in contemporary discourse to speak of postmodernisms rather than any kind of unified postmodernism.

Running counter to the notion of postmodernism as ongoing is the argument for a postmodern period, notably one that has ended. Linda Hutcheon claims that “the postmodern may well be a twentieth-century phenomenon, that is, a thing of the past. Now fully institutionalised, it has its canonised texts, its anthologies, primers, and readers, its dictionaries and its histories” (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 165). When addressed in this manner, it is easy to see the postmodern as more of an

academic artefact than an active theory. The position of postmodernism in various academic disciplines – whether as introductory course or part of a cultural theory module – seems to detract from the vitality and urgency that has been instilled by Lyotard and others. It would appear as though postmodernism is no longer a far-reaching cultural experience. Yet, this intellectual reduction in status or perceived status is not automatically a detraction from postmodern theory, nor does it undermine the relevance of postmodernism to contemporary discourse. Furthermore, the perception that postmodernism has ended necessitates that the postmodern belongs to a historical period. Ihab Hassan states that “Modernism and postmodernism are not separated by an Iron Curtain or a Chinese Wall; for history is a palimpsest, and culture is permeable to time past, time present, and time future. We are all, I suspect, a little Victorian, Modern, and Postmodern, at once” (*Docherty, Postmodernism* 149). It is possible to see end points within certain interpretations, but Hassan here opens the possibility for an ever-shifting temporal relationship in the application of theory. Or perhaps, as Docherty argues; “The postmodern is not synonymous with the contemporary” (*Docherty, After Theory* 16). Placing the postmodern in a historical timeframe is a negation of its philosophical reach and, indeed, of the greater debates of reality and progress that both modernism and postmodernism contribute to. As Delanty posits, postmodernity is “an expression of the creative appropriation of the past and present. The reinvention of the past is part of the aestheticisation of everyday life which ... is one of the main markers of postmodernism” (Delanty 153). However, Nick Kaye argues that this relationship with history is not without problems:

Ironically, this model even set out a stylistic paradigm of a ‘postmodern’ pluralism and fragmentation for which there is no ‘modern’ correlate precisely because of the contradictory and fragmentary nature of modernism in the arts. It follows that, despite its declaration of a new ‘complex’ relation to the past, this model of the postmodern risks a characteristically ‘modern’ shrugging off of past and present alternatives (Kaye, *Postmodernism and Performance* 13).

And yet, postmodernism must occupy a space outside of a historical period as postmodernity is not (and frankly, cannot be) a completed project. Rather, it is and must always be an ongoing project. Milner and Browitt insist that “it is perfectly possible to

disagree with postmodernist theories of culture or of society, but to accept that important instances in our cultural life are indeed postmodern" (Milner and Browitt 169). Our understanding of modern or postmodern is trapped in our contemporary time and ultimately these ideas must be separated. Postmodernism, as understood to be atemporal, infers that one generation's sense of modernity must undergo a process of post-modernity in order for a new modernity to begin. Lyotard argues that the motivation of progress, specifically a slogan like "things are getting better", only hold in our reality as a result of cultural conditioning; namely, the desire for progress encourages us to seek out and identify progress in any form. As such, Lyotard observes that "if humanity were progressing toward the better... they would supply the very proof of progress by the sole fact of their susceptibility. This progress could therefore be compatible with the general feeling that "things are getting worse" (Lyotard, *The Differend* 180). In a similar way, Mikhail Epstein states that "postmodernism works against two major postulates, that of the individual and the absolute, whose tortuous dividedness gave rise to the inexorably tragic sense of modernism, combining extreme optimism and extreme pessimism" (Epstein, Genis and Vladiv-Glover 465). For Lyotard and Epstein, the evidence of modernism in the reality of progress or regression is inferior to the human perception of progress or regression. This is a useful argument against Standard Indexes, for example; transfer rates, inflation rates, cost of living, average incomes, average expenditures – these measures of economic progress are reported as though they contain within them the value or worth of our societies when the reality is that such generic data applies to everyone and no one in equal measure. As Jameson insists:

It seems to be easier for us today to imagine the thoroughgoing deterioration of the earth and of nature than the breakdown of late capitalism; perhaps that is due to some weakness in our imaginations. I have come to think that the word postmodern ought to be reserved for thoughts of this kind (Jameson 50).

Like these indexes, modernism is presented as a narrative structure for humanity to participate in. In postmodernity, such positioning of narratives as prescriptive of experience do not hold as solidly as they once might have.



As Lyotard explains, “the people are only that which actualizes the narratives: once again, they do this not only by recounting them, but also by listening to them and recounting themselves through them; in other words, by putting them into “play” in their institutions” (Lyotard 23). This process of identification with and through the conveniently available narratives has, in postmodernity, run its course. There is greater potential for actualising other narratives and yet, alternatively, postmodernism is a means through which these structuring narratives may be challenged altogether. Indeed, Lyotard observes “the pre-eminence of the narrative form in the formulation of traditional knowledge. [...] Narration is the quintessential form of customary knowledge, in more ways than one” (Lyotard 19). These functions Lyotard analyses in narrative knowledge - criteria formation, the unification of areas of competence, and social regulation - all contribute to a lethal condition that Lyotard summarises as follows: “a culture that gives precedence to the narrative form doubtless has no more of a need for special procedures to authorise its narratives than it has to remember its past” (Lyotard 22). In this notion, Harvey observes an emerging drive for postmodernism, but also a problematic contradiction. Harvey claims that, in eschewing the idea of progress, “postmodernism abandons all sense of historical continuity and memory, while simultaneously developing an incredible ability to plunder history and absorb whatever it finds there as some aspect of the present” (Harvey 54). In this claim, Harvey is exposing what may well be a productive contradiction in postmodernism, in that the historical reality that we inherit is only one narrative of past events which it would be false to blindly continue.

Miriam Haughton cites the particular example of ANU Productions’ *Laundry* which “created a space for audience participants to witness, acknowledge, engage with, and feel the shame of particular Irish histories and certain oppressive ideologies that resulted in slavery, incarceration, premature death, and children lost to an unknown, and unquantifiable extent” (Haughton, “From Laundries to Labour Camps” 72). The example of *Laundry* should not be perceived as a plunder of history. Instead, *Laundry* recovers a hidden history that the continuity of established history would not allow. Of course, ANU are only one example of a notable preoccupation in theatre of the last decade with recovering lost histories. For example, Brokentalkers’ *Silver Stars* aimed to

present the various stories and experiences of gay Irish men, experiences that remained private given that homosexuality was not decriminalised in Ireland until 1993. Indeed, Fintan Walsh suggests that testimonial or documentary-style work such as that of Brokentalkers, ANU, Veronica Dyas, and Úna McKeivitt may present a Post-Celtic Tiger reaction to the criticism that Irish people “suffered from collective amnesia about the past, in the giddy rush to get ahead” (F. Walsh 13). Reasserting her observation of social agnosia, Emilie Pine argues that in reviving Gerard Mannix Flynn’s *James X* (2003) as part of *The Darkest Corner* series in 2010, the Abbey Theatre production “paradoxically also shows the extent to which revelations of abuse provoked no further action on behalf of the state or society” (Collins and Caulfield 208). Productions such as these are not only vital to revising the historical record, but in restoring to individuals their capacity to question established narratives.

In postmodern experience, scepticism is less the active term than incredulity. As Lyotard explains; “The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation” (Lyotard 37). The postmodern position of incredulity in response to modernism is not a rejection of modernism in its entirety; rather, it forms a necessary project of challenging coherent narratives against an experience of an incoherent reality. Share and Corcoran argue that Ireland has “attained a ‘chimerical quality’ [...] where, in an absence of grand modernist narratives, ‘Irish people are literally making up the script as they go along’” (Share and Corcoran 5). This is not by any means to say that other narratives are not formed as a result, but that the process of interrogating those narratives is given greater prominence in postmodernity. As John S. Rickard states, “the question of whether there is anything essentially “Irish” in Irish culture, anything that is not an adulterated and conglomerated construction built on centuries of melded colonial culture, is always open” (Rickard 14). In always being open, Irishness and postmodernism may yet offer greater points of intersection.

Given that the experience of postmodernity is as fragmented and multiple as its theoretical origin, it is necessary to formulate an experience of postmodernity that is specific to this project. John S. Rickard suggests that, like Irishness, “modernism and postmodernism are constructions whose uses are as interesting as any actual meanings

they may have” (Rickard 15). While it is already clear that an actual meaning is our pursuit, perhaps what is more interesting in terms of these ‘constructions’ is where uses of Irishness and postmodernism intersect. In this way, we might frame the project as an engagement with Irish postmodernism – if only to go some way to refining the project’s parameters. We may look to Lyotard once more, in arguing this case for a uniquely Irish postmodernism. Lyotard states that the transition for societies to the post-industrial age and cultures to the postmodern age has been under way since at least the end of the 1950s. However, of vital importance to this project is Lyotard’s claim: “The pace is faster or slower depending on the country, and within countries it varies according to the sector of activity: the general situation is one of temporal disjunction which makes sketching an overview difficult” (Lyotard 1). It is important to see the postmodern as a project that has not developed at an even pace internationally; one simple argument in favour of postmodernisms. Indeed, international contrasts produce an interesting parallel in Russia. Mikhail Epstein raises questions about the interpretation of postmodernism “as a profoundly Western phenomenon whose appearance in non-Western cultures, such as the Japanese, is but part of an inevitable and growing process of Westernization” (Epstein, Genis and Vladiv-Glover 3). Epstein argues that such interpretations of twentieth-century discourse persist “in spite of the fact that Russia was isolated from the West and in fact set itself in vigorous opposition to it during this period” (Epstein, Genis and Vladiv-Glover 3). While Ireland can lay claim to direct influence from the United Kingdom, Europe, and USA towards the postmodern, these exact entities run counter to Russia in the same period and yet, as Epstein observes, the postmodern condition finds expression, albeit in different circumstances. Perhaps there is something alternative about the Russian experience of post-modernism, in what Epstein refers to as “postcommunist or postutopian culture” (Epstein, Genis and Vladiv-Glover 4). So, is it possible that David Harvey’s earlier argument that the postmodern abandons all sense of historical continuity and memory does not hold? Rickard echoes Seamus Deane, who suggests that to move simply and predictably from a seemingly provincial, essentialist nationalism into a supposed modern or postmodern condition “in which the postmodernist simulacrum of pluralism supplants the search for a legitimating mode of nationalism and origin, is surely to pass from one kind of colonizing experience into another” (Rickard 16). Deane’s suspicion of the potentially colonising

experience that postmodernism may form is, of course, necessary. After all, the postmodern is deeply pervasive. Instead of moving simply and predictably into it, the postmodern condition – noted for its reflexivity – should be interrogated accordingly. However, to discredit postmodern experience because it subverts the legitimization of nation and origin is not merely a conservative position, but a disregard for the failures of modernism which bring the postmodern into being. The concern is less about postmodernity abandoning historical continuity and memory as it is the legitimacy of those structures being challenged. As such, Ireland, its history and even Irishness as cultural memory are not exempt from the postmodern. Indeed, Diane Negra argues the case of commodified Irishness as a prime example:

In the realm of commodified Irishness there is now a price point for every taste and budget. [...] Virtually every form of popular culture has in one way or another, at one time or another, presented Irishness as a moral antidote to contemporary ills ranging from globalisation to postmodern alienation, from crises over the meaning and practice of family values to environmental destruction. While fantasies of Ireland posit a culture unsullied by consumerism and modernity, Irishness is nevertheless a buy-in category and it comes in a staggering variety of consumable forms available across a broad spectrum of outlets (Negra 3-4).

Perhaps it is unconscious postmodernity that Negra describes here, rendered inconspicuous through the excessively conspicuous consumption of culture. Morash and Richards observe that “the experience of globalisation in Ireland has not simply been one of Irish people travelling to, communicating with, or doing business with, the rest of the world; it has also been the experience of people from other parts of the world coming to live in Ireland, producing that uneasy mix of the putatively multicultural and the transcultural that characterises most of Europe in the twenty-first century” (Morash and Richards 136). In Irish theatre, so much of the work created post-2008 is about re-constructing the narrative of Irish identity, perhaps even re-claiming Irish identity from its misrepresentations. The rigid posture of *Riverdance* gives way to productions such as THEATREclub’s *Heroin*, giving light to a contemporary Irish experience that is far removed from any new age expression of Celtic identity. As

Rickard states: "Irishness as a category is always in transition, under construction, and in tension with other definitions" (Rickard 15). While it may not always be possible to give precise definitions of Irishness, the utility of the postmodern experience is that fragmentation and multiple possibilities are actively encouraged. There is no one single or unified narrative of Irish identity; if modernism continues to pursue that end, it is reasonable for postmodernism to emerge as a necessary disruption.

When we look at cultural activities in postmodernity, we cannot apply our established patterns or forms of engagement unless we only wish to observe what is absent from the work. Indeed, definitions of postmodern art are too often expressed in negative terms; explaining what the work is not, rather than what the work is. Engaging with theatre practice through the theory of postmodernism is a challenging proposal, particularly when one considers this claim of Lyotard:

A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgement, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and the writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done (Lyotard 81).

Lyotard is clearly stating that the rules of the creative process are created in that process, not before. When we engage with work that is made in this way, it is important to observe the work itself in isolation – at least, in the first instance. Connections have been created by contemporary Irish theatre and practitioners to what may be termed post-dramatic theatre; but, certainly experimental when compared with dramatic theatre. Birringer does not think it is possible to locate a historical moment of transition to postmodernism in theatre and performance art. Birringer argues that the theatre never advertised or formulated the changes that it overtook, that theatre work made its way into the 1980s without knowing the discourses of postmodern theory. As he states, "Practitioners of such theatre work had no critical understanding that it was becoming a visible symptom of the changed cultural conditions under which the margin

of survival for radical and disruptive experimentation has disappeared to the extent that we perhaps no longer recognise a radical performance even if we were to see one” (Birringer 44-45).

It would, of course, be a gross over-simplification to suggest that the post-dramatic is a theatrical rendering of postmodern theory. Although it may bear certain hallmarks belonging here or there in the grand scheme of theory, the post-dramatic has escaped theorisation by pre-empting it at every turn; it is self-conscious, self-critiquing and reflexive. Post-dramatic theatre “engages deliberately and self-reflexively with theatre’s aesthetic practices and forms, the ways it offers itself for perception. [...] this engagement is always explicit in rehearsal and remains so in production” (Harvie and Lavender 13). So why attempt to define the post-dramatic? Admittedly, this thesis was born out of frustration with post-dramatic form and its reflexivity, its refusal to yield to definition – and, as such, this is how the form remains. As Peter Crawley observes of the post-dramatic, “it is easier to say what the subject of our enquiry is not than to settle on a single classification” (Crawley and White 11). The purpose of this study is not to neatly categorise the post-dramatic; rather, it is an attempt to offer some positive expression of a theatrical form in which any given centre cannot hold. Similar to Lyotard’s claim that the postmodern artist seeks the rules of creation in creation, Jen Harvie and Andy Lavender suggest that post-dramatic theatre’s “characteristic aesthetic effects result often directly from its processes of creation” (Harvie and Lavender 12). To this end, theory does not precede the post-dramatic. Instead, it must be observed in the product that is the finished performance. However, Birringer concludes that if we are to understand the perception of any contemporary performance as postmodern, “we must first understand why the theatre’s negation of its own history is always an unfinished and unfinishable experiment” (Birringer 47). For the sake of critical balance, it is useful to assess the post-dramatic as a disruption of drama, as an undoing of theatre by theatre itself. Birringer alludes to this aspect of theatre effectively recycling itself from within as an unending process where post-dramatic forms may simply be the most recent development. This is worth bearing in mind as we continue to explore aspects of the post-dramatic. Harvie and Lavender claim that “Post-dramatic practitioners do not have a common agenda, a shared animus” (Harvie and Lavender 242). Nevertheless, if

we consider the points of rupture in drama that post-dramatic most often utilises, we will see common methods in play.

## Post-Dramatic; From Unity to Rupture

In resisting meaning, it becomes easy to portray post-dramatic theatre as meaningless. This critique is often levelled against postmodern culture, where thinkers such as Baudrillard argue that:

Art has disappeared as a symbolic pact, as something thus clearly distinct from that pure and simple production of aesthetic values, that proliferation of signs ad infinitum, that recycling of past and present forms, which we call 'culture'. There are no more fundamental rules, no more criteria of judgement or of pleasure (Baudrillard 14).

For Baudrillard, art and culture become separated without rules or criteria of judgement. As such, if the post-dramatic is simply divesting itself of the criteria for drama, it enters a space where it becomes necessary for the post-dramatic to formulate a criteria or rules of its own. This is a variation on Lyotard's earlier point, where the rules are a part of the creative process. Whether as a disruption of meaning, or as a rendering of meaning as shifting and undecidable, Kaye surmises:

...the corollary of the postmodern disruption of the modernist claim to foundation is that the postmodern cannot, with consistency, be defined in terms of a given set of formal elements without a reversion to the modernist claim that meaning (and so the signified) resides 'within' and so is 'present to' the work of art in its own terms. One can conclude here, then, that the postmodern cannot be identified with particular figures and forms precisely because the 'postmodern' occurs as a displacement and subversion of the very terms of which it would seem to consist (Kaye, *Postmodernism and Performance* 17).

Kaye shrewdly observes that the postmodern occurs in displacement and subversion, yet the terms of the postmodern that are displaced and subverted persist nevertheless. Indeed, Gunter Berghaus sets out some examples (self-consciousness, ambiguity of meaning, incongruity of composition, crossing of genre boundaries, mixing of media, etc.) as the 'Key Characteristics of Postmodern Art' (Berghaus 72). In fact, these terms will reveal themselves at various points throughout this thesis; for example, incongruity



of composition in Performance, self-consciousness in Spectatorship, mixing of media in Space, and ambiguity of meaning in Text.

Berghaus argues for John Cage and Merce Cunningham's Black Mountain College event in 1952 as the precursor to experimentation, happenings, and fluxus that become hallmarks of postmodern art. Initially, this appears as a convenient origin narrative. Yet, there is undoubtedly greater complexity to how this sense of experimentation transcended other forms, if indeed this event had any significant influence on experimental performances elsewhere. Nevertheless, it seems as good a point as any to connect with in order to frame the non-theatrical experimentation that would inevitably come to bear on theatrical form. Shepherd and Wallis detail the origins of performance from performance art, a form aiming "to be reflexive, presentational rather than representational, and to situate the audience as participants rather than as spectators. The focus was on the 'performative' of theatre, in the sense of its being here and now" (Shepherd and Wallis 83). As a point of origin, this concept for performance was experimental and appealed to what Aronson details as the occupation of the avant-garde who adopted this practice. If the theatre is to be a place for art, "that is, for an experimental alternative to everyday life, then it must, according to the avant-garde, present a work or event not available through normal systems of behaviour" (Aronson, *American Avant-Garde Theatre* 10). For many, these performance interventions outside of perceived theatrical spaces are a clear socio-political act. "By moving theatrical activity outside traditional buildings, popularizing performance events, inviting forms of non-traditional audience participation, performance critiqued traditional social formations, scriptural primacy, spatial indoctrination, and artistic elitism" (Meisner and Mounsef 89). All of these qualities are present in the development of performance and, at the same time, each quality now also exists as theoretical subject matter.

Where the symptoms of post-dramatic expression are instability and rupture, we might ascertain a cause in asking what these practitioners are rupturing. Arguably, it is the dramatic form as understood through Aristotle's theories of the unities of time, place, and action as well as the importance of mimesis (representation). Aristotle's definition is useful as it is balanced between what performance communicates and the craft of making a performance. Yet, the typical assumption that is made about the

dramatic and post-dramatic forms is that they are in opposition to one another. Natalie Meisner and Donna Mounsef argue that placing forms in opposition is often reductive, and that rupture “does not always have to take place for radical forms to emerge... Declarations of entropy, death, post-, and ruptures help define a movement paradigmatically but, at the same time, risk foreclosing upon otherwise syntagmatic sites of productive frictions” (Meisner and Mounsef 91). In many ways, it is better to consider the two modes of dramatic and post-dramatic as connected yet competitive discourses outside of a chronological frame. Lehmann acknowledges that the prefix of ‘post’ implies that the post-dramatic – even considered as existing outside of modernity – remains as some kind of reference to the dramatic.

What it does not mean is an abstract negation and mere looking away from the tradition of drama [...] Post-dramatic theatre thus includes the presence or resumption or continued working of older aesthetics, including those that took leave of the dramatic idea in earlier times, be it on the level of text or theatre (Lehmann 27).

Asserting differences between dramatic and post-dramatic is normally achieved through negation. That is to say, a post-dramatic work is judged to be so because of the dramatic qualities it does not possess. However, if we align the theoretical approaches of modern and postmodern, dramatic and post-dramatic, there is reason to focus on points of connection rather than separation and to argue that these are not styles entirely in opposition. Even further, this challenges theoretical notions of dramatic and post-dramatic as binary oppositions. But as Lehmann states, “what is still missing is an attempt to survey the new theatre and the diversity of its theatrical means in more detail in the light of post-dramatic aesthetics” (Lehmann 26). To this end, Lehmann deconstructs Peter Szondi’s evaluation of the dramatic form while developing the aspects of post-dramatic theatre. However, Meisner and Mounsef lean towards Jean-Pierre Sarrazac’s reading of Szondi as “more subtle and sensitive to the complex landscape that makes up modern drama.” Furthermore, Meisner and Mounsef urge caution around Lehmann’s treatment of Szondi, stating that:

Unlike Sarrazac, Lehmann insists on a wholesale condemnation of Szondi’s theory and emphasises the idea that new theatre is much more immediately

informed by cultural practices other than traditional drama (from visual art and live art to movies, TV channel hopping, pop music, hypertext, and to the internet), Where Szondi identifies a problem in modern content, Lehmann sees a problem in postmodern form; Sarrazac, a problem in expression (Meisner and Mounsef 92).

In many respects, the dramatic and post-dramatic develop their own specific vocabularies of practice from theory. Discourses of dramatic and post-dramatic compete to apply their terminologies to how we study theatre. Charting the recent history of developments in theatre and theory, we see three separate terms emerging: drama, theatre and performance. Variations are established in the practices categorised by these terms and, seeing themselves as different from each other, each style seeks separation. Immediate separation is achieved by re-conceiving terms that are connected; for example, theatre or performance are applied in place of drama, actors are instead referred to as performers, and so on. In some regards, the object in question has the same role in dramatic as post-dramatic form. Naming rights seem to be the main assertion of a separate identity and yet, the separation is often theorised as a momentous change.

In attempting to differentiate between dramatic and post-dramatic, there is no one clear point where post-dramatic form succeeds that of the dramatic. Even in the present sense, the creative friction of dramatic and post-dramatic is found in the co-existence of these forms and not in the success of one over the other. Johannes Birringer comments that there may not be a “historical moment of transition to postmodernism in theatre and performance art. Unlike architectural or fashion discourses, the theatre never advertised or formulated the changes that it overtook” (Birringer 44-45). In this sense, if there is no point at which we can say the postmodern replaces modernity in theatre (as both conditions continue to co-exist at present), it becomes equally problematic to suggest that post-dramatic is an entirely separate entity. Placing a theoretical concept in a framing historical period is the standard practice, as with Shepherd and Wallis who credit the transition from established theatrical form to performance art with “1960s avant-garde theatre practices that opposed dominant text-based theatre” (Shepherd and Wallis 83). While one argument

is practice-based and the other is theory-based, the perception is that following World War Two, somewhere between the 1940s and 1960s, there is a theoretical shift which transitions into theatrical and wider artistic practice. Yet, to say that the absence of a text defines a postmodern performance is to overlook a variety of forms: dramatic symbolism, clowning, physical expression in modern dance or even mime, Tim Etchells' textual contributions to Forced Entertainment or the re-interpretations of dramatic classics by groups like The Elevator Repair Service or Pan Theatre Company, as well as the variety of devised work pursued by dramatic practitioners. Indeed, Meisner and Mounsef suggest that the development of independent forms in this manner, rather than simply being a positive development, presented a kind of paradox in as far as "the more drama, theatre, and performance went their separate ways the more they lost their specificity" (Meisner and Mounsef 87). To some extent, this loss of specificity causes little concern for practitioners. Instead, the problem is for theorists and critics to discern between forms that willingly blur the pre-existing lines and parameters of their art.

Presentation, representation, participation, spectatorship and liveness are all concepts that have been theorised in relation to theatre and, more broadly, performance. Taking these elements into consideration, it is fair to assert that the performance is a composition; it is assembled. The act of theatre is contrived, it is formulated and it is – regardless of intent – an artificial act. Even theatre that aims to reflect real life heightens reality through performance, becoming an exaggeration of reality. In assessing the work of Allan Kaprow, it was noted that Kaprow used *happening* in contradistinction to *theatre* or *performance* to evoke the idea that the event, in Kaprow's words, "just happens to happen". Yet, Marvin Carlson observes, the event was typically "scripted, rehearsed, and carefully controlled" (Shepherd and Wallis 87). Particularly evident here is the production which takes place prior to the acknowledged theatre act, wherein the accepted use of the term production is an indicator in and of itself. Henri Lefebvre proposes that products are unnatural, arguing that nature does not produce or create, that individual beings simply surge forth or simply appear and nature knows nothing of these creations – "to say natural is to say spontaneous" (Lefebvre 70). This point is most interesting when set in opposition to devised work,

where the aim is to develop a performance through spontaneous and improvised contributions and yet in truth, the final performance is composed of the artificial replication of these spontaneous acts. From deviser or writer to director and performer, the human control of how the performance is put together ensures that theatre is never a direct match of reality.

These experiments explore beyond mimetic representation and press at the artificiality of performance itself. Lyotard reads further into our drive to make visible ideas in a manner not in keeping with authentic experience, claiming that we conceive the infinitely great or powerful but ultimately, that these are ideas “of which no presentation is possible” (Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* 78). Aiming to present the unrepresentable is the height of artistic ambition. In terms of composition, an act of theatre is infinite in possibility when it is first conceived but becomes a finite production by the time of presentation. While the experimental durational work of Richard Foreman, Robert Wilson, Forced Entertainment and others strive to engage the infinite potential a performance contains, ultimately all that is reiterated is the plethora of ways in which potential might remain unrealised. By remaining unrealised, the potential of any act of theatre nevertheless serves a purpose. In analysing any composition, the critical response considers not only present elements but those that are absent. This raises the idea of assembly as a means for composing the performance. Recent experiments in the style of documentary theatre even afford themselves the luxury of assembly. The work of Una McKevitt or Rimini Protokoll is a paring back of performance to its minimum, but a process of rehearsal or devising inevitably leads to an assembled product comprised of performance vignettes, confessional acts, replayed recordings or other devices of this style. A narrative need not be obviously present, or intended, but the assembled performance follows a construction all of its own; creating its own rules, as it were.

Artists can leave gaps unfilled and ideas unrealised and yet these hollows will have their place within a composition as long as the composition can bear them. Where these gaps are simply gaps and do not provoke thoughts to fill them, the composition is weakened to the same extent as if there were no common thread throughout it. Critics analyse these moments as ‘jarring’ events in a performance; this is where the wholeness

of the composition is disrupted. Control of the composition, while artificial, delivers a product worth engaging with. How can one hope to convey truth in an intrinsically artificial form? The seeming impossibility of this task is a quality Lyotard credits the postmodern with pursuing in an alternative way.

The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself [...]; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable (Lyotard 81).

This idea of conveying what is presented as only a fraction of an unrepresentable whole is a clear distinction of post-dramatic form from the dramatic. Even in a play that leaves open questions, a dramatic piece is constructed to be its entirety.

In terms of attempting to present the unrepresentable, an exemplary production is Brokentalkers' *Have I No Mouth?*, which premiered in the Project Cube as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival in 2012. Mixing documentary and theatricality in their inimitable style, the prevailing theme of the Brokentalkers' production is death – both as tragic loss and sense of mortality. Joined onstage by psychotherapist Erich Keller, Feidlim Cannon and his mother Ann work through the sensitive topic of a family tragedy from their past. Jennifer Lee elaborates that, for Ann;

...the death of her third son Seán, just fifteen hours after his birth, was an inconceivable tragedy, but having to explain that she had 'lost the baby' to his seven-year-old brother Feidlim, was equally shattering. Like any other child of seven, Feidlim believed that what is lost might be found (Lee, *Irish Theatre Magazine*).

Peter Crawley suggests that, for anybody already familiar with Brokentalkers, the production of *Have I No Mouth?* will still come as some surprise. Cannon's contribution to the performance, Crawley observes, is not only that he has "mined a painful history for raw material or anticipated our defences against onstage therapy. It's that he can transform an acutely personal story into something universal" (Crawley, *Irish Times*). In this sense, there is a connection between *Have I No Mouth?* and Lyotard's assertion that "it is not the business of our understanding whether or not human sensibility or

imagination can match what it conceives" (Lyotard 79-80). In *Have I No Mouth?*, Crawley observes that Brokentalkers' use various combinations of therapy and theatre to present, revisit, and re-present events – for example, a young, angry Feidlim "asking how someone could "lose" a child; Ann presented under the ice of depression; a recreated Christmas scene in which Keller, bandaged and mute, substitutes for Cannon's father. Some of these sequences are balanced so precariously on a knife-edge between comedy and trauma they create an emotional short circuit" (Crawley, *Irish Times*). Practitioners and artists conceive of great ideas, but are often incapable of realising the totality of an artistic vision. Central to the post-dramatic is a fragmentation of form, moments where the flow is halted in order to be recycled or started anew. This creates a sense of giving in to our inability to convey the depth of meaning in any presentation. Jen Harvie and Andy Lavender suggest that post-dramatic is beyond postmodernism and has moved on from "the postmodern paradigm of performance towards a newer paradigm of presentation [...]; that can include representation, rather than hoping to supersede it, as in some postmodern theatre, or be effaced by it, as in much realism" (Harvie and Lavender 14). This is a useful frame to apply when Crawley questions the seeming reluctance to express deeper emotion; not only in *Have I No Mouth?*, but also in the devices of contemporary theatre itself. Rather than giving way to either artificiality or striving for greater sincerity, Crawley realises in Brokentalkers' ambivalent presentation "that resistance supplies an utterly compelling friction, one that is equal to the emotional wattage of the material" (Crawley, *Irish Times*). With this in mind, one might identify an echo of Hans Thies Lehmann's proposal that post-dramatic theatre becomes "more presence than representation, more shared than communicated experience, more process than product, more manifestation than signification, more energetic impulse than information" (Lehmann 85). Above all, what is most evident is a case of practice leading theory – a performative practice that departs from its antecedents through experimentation with the potential of its form. To this end, Lehmann considers the work of directors such as Robert Wilson and Robert Lepage, Pina Bausch, and Tadeusz Kantor and theatre companies such as the Wooster Group, DV8, Forced Entertainment, Goat Island, Societas Raffaello Sanzio and Gob Squad. In these examples, we may see the precursors for recent theatrical experimentation such as that of Brokentalkers emerging in Irish theatre.

Indeed, the Wooster Group emerge as a strong precursor for the work of interest to this study and for a variety of reasons. The main connection of the Wooster Group with Irish post-dramatic theatre is the significant changes in engagement with text and textual forms. Bonnie Marranca claims that “The Wooster Group has been educating audiences in a new understanding of theatrical experience joined to mediated experience that is closer to reality than the realistic theatrical style inherently criticized” (Marranca 54). In many ways, the Wooster Group offer a useful parallel to the work of Pan Pan; texts are a part of the early stages of performance creation, but both emphasise broadening experience rather than dramatic delivery. Nick Kaye argues that not only do the Wooster Group draw their material from a wide variety of sources, but that “they resist integrating the various aspects of their presentations into a unified whole. Frequently, these conflicts are amplified by corresponding contrasts in style, heightening the sense of quotation, where texts, sequences and images are set against each other in such a way that they come to stand on uncertain and unstable ground” (Kaye, *Postmodernism and Performance* 11-12). Among all of these elements, the emerging quality of post-dramatic work is instability. This connects appropriately with the theme of rupture, where post-dramatic forms disrupt or interrupt the dramatic in creating or exposing instability in its constituent parts – performance, spectatorship, space, and text. For the Wooster Group, instability is a part of the performance experience, as Marranca observes: “Varieties of speech style and performance style overwhelm narrative in productions whose tension grows out of the juxtaposition of talking and reading, live performance and mediated presence, and competing forms of media” (Marranca 44). Indeed, extending the experience of instability can be achieved in a variety of ways, as Kaye finds in the Wooster Group’s *Rhode Island Trilogy* and the trend of “combined excerpts from plays with images, actions, film and sound drawn from a variety of sources to produce often disruptive and alarming performance collages” (Kaye, *Postmodernism and Performance* 11). While the Wooster Group display a clear international example of post-dramatic practice, it is possible to adopt rupture and instability as terms of enquiry in order to better understand the specific examples of post-dramatic work being created in Ireland.



## Theatre in Post-Celtic Tiger Ireland; an overview

When something is said to be in emergence, there are interesting details to be observed in conditions that precede the emergence. Entering the new millennium, Irish theatre would continue to be dominated by the traditional dramatic form. With playwrights gaining prominence through the 1990s – Enda Walsh, Conor McPherson, Marina Carr, and Martin McDonagh, seen as the potential inheritors of the dramatic tradition from Brian Friel, Tom Murphy, and Thomas Kilroy – it appeared as though the playwright could continue to form the centre of the Irish theatre well into the future. Haughey, O'Brien and Tobiessen critique the traditionalist approach in theatre and those who are “determined to hang on to the tried and trusted forms of expression” (Haughey, O'Brien and Tobiessen 126). They propose an optimistic outlook for as much diversity in Irish theatre as in Irish society in this period, stating in their assessment of Irish theatre in 2001, “a new breed of Irish theatre practitioners is emerging that wants to stay in Ireland, and that wants to build a new audience” (Haughey, O'Brien and Tobiessen 133). It is important to note that there are a variety of platforms available to Irish theatre-makers to share their work nationally. One trend of the Celtic Tiger era that remains with us is the growth of festival culture. While it is true that some of the following festivals have histories predating the boom years, regular Irish theatre festivals now extend to Dublin Theatre Festival, Dublin Fringe Festival, Galway International Arts Festival, Cork Midsummer Festival, Kilkenny Arts Festival, Dublin International Gay Theatre Festival, Baboró International Children's Theatre Festival, and Galway Theatre Festival. Undoubtedly, there may be more besides but even this sample list gives a sense of the potential exposure that Irish theatre of many forms can now avail of or participate in. It is worth observing that, outside of Ireland's own theatre producers, Ireland is recognised as a participant in what might be called the international festival circuit. Lourdes Orozco and Peter M. Boenisch suggest that Ireland is among the English-speaking locations that Flemish theatre can comfortably tour to, most notably with the recent productions of *Ontroerend Goed*. In a sense, the experience of Flemish theatre-makers at international festivals presents an image of Ireland as welcoming of experimental theatre, while other countries find this experimental theatre to be, as

Orozco and Boenisch observe, “irritatingly foreign, specifically within the commercially and policy-driven ‘theatre industries’ of the United States and England. Too often, critics cannot help but discredit the work as ‘Eurotrash’... [...] Yet these disparaging responses testify to the helplessness and lack of conceptual categories demonstrated by critics and audiences when faced by performances that blur, mix and obscure borders, frontiers and territories, while forcefully refusing their marketable reification” (Orozco and Boenisch 403). The latter point is worth exploring further, if only to surmise that if audiences of the United States and England feel helpless before performances that blur and obscure and do not fit into conceptual categories, Orozco and Boenisch are perhaps unintentionally suggesting that Irish audiences feel more at ease with such work. Whether or not this is the case is difficult to say, primarily as a result of a general concern that Irish audiences are not engaged by theatre, traditional or experimental. There is a perception that younger Irish generations, shaped by the 1990s boom, have “seen little that interests them on stage. It is not so much that people in a modern society can respond only to cinematic imagery, but more that few playwrights and companies make plays that aim to attract new audiences” (Haughey, O'Brien and Tobiessen 133). Miriam Haughton goes further, noting that theatre and live performance are no longer “the dominant form of storytelling in contemporary Irish and indeed Western culture. Film, popular print media such as novels and magazines, and the internet (YouTube, access to television channels online, downloading applications) have facilitated less expensive and more accessible forms of entertainment and discourse” (Haughton, *Flirting with the postmodern* 388).

Yet, recent festivals have shown that Irish theatre’s emerging and experimental work is not only highly sought-after, but that there are a range of developmental supports in place for experimental and post-dramatic practitioners. Haughton raises the example of the 2013 Dublin Theatre Festival, where “it was the “In Development” section of the DTF programme that sold out within days, offering patrons the opportunity to be involved at a developmental stage in the creative process of theatre-making by multidisciplinary performance-based companies such as Brokentalkers, ANU Productions and Pan Pan” (Haughton, *Flirting with the postmodern* 379). Elsewhere, MAKE is an initiative of Dublin Fringe Festival, Cork Midsummer Festival, Project Arts

Centre and Theatre Forum for the purpose of generating new performance work, while Irish Theatre Institute host the Information Toolbox – a networking event at the Dublin Fringe Festival. Outside of the incorporated initiatives of these festivals, there is a strong curatorial aspect to Irish theatre festivals in ensuring that Irish audiences are exposed to some of the best experimental theatre available. Haughton notes this quality in “...nationwide festivals and theatre venue programming which increasingly include performance aesthetics and dramaturgies quite far removed from the established Irish tradition of plot driven plays concerning land wars and implosive family tragedies dominated by heavy dialogue, monologue and character tropes” (Haughton, *Flirting with the postmodern* 382). At the same time, it is worth noting that in the stringent funding environment of recent times, theatre organisations are making a variety of attempts to nurture and develop what is most often non-traditional or experimental work. As well as this, there are now more extensive support groups and networks for Irish theatre practitioners to engage with. While the Arts Council of Ireland plays a central role in the development of Irish theatre in the funding strands previously mentioned, there are also funding strands for travel and training, touring, and young ensembles. Support structures have been created by theatre organisations through these funding strands; examples include Project Catalyst at the Project Arts Centre, Six in the Attic at Irish Theatre Institute, The Abbey Theatre’s New Playwrights Program and Outreach and Education programs, Rough Magic’s SEEDS Program, Druid’s FUEL Artistic Residency, Pan Pan’s International Mentorship Program; not to mention a number of companies and venues that support student internships. Indeed, opportunities for students and early-career theatre makers were in a state of decline in the immediate aftermath of the Celtic Tiger. As Nakase and Stack observe, “In February 2009 the Gaiety School of Acting announced that, because of insufficient funding, it would not offer its two-year degree in acting in 2009-2010. Trinity College Dublin already had closed the doors to its bachelor in acting studies in 2009” (Nakase and Stack 124). However, this situation has been corrected in recent years with an ongoing expansion of the theatre education sector – perhaps most notably in the establishment of The Lir as a National Academy for the Dramatic Arts. Other examples include; the Gaiety School of Acting, Samuel Beckett Centre (TCD), Performing Arts at IT Sligo, as well as Drama and Theatre courses at NUI Galway, UCD and UCC. These centres could also be highlighted for

producing a number of Irish experimental theatre makers and companies through recent years; thus serving an important role in the ongoing diversification of Irish theatre. One need only look to an example such as Rimini Protokoll to see that core members – Helgard Haug, Stefan Kaegi and Daniel Wetzel met while studying Applied Theatre Studies at the University of Giessen, a programme notable for hosting visiting professors such as Marina Abramovic, Eugenio Barba, Heiner Muller, Robert Wilson and Hans-Thies Lehmann (Crawley and White 36-37). In an Irish context, Dublin Youth Theatre has produced notable alumni in Gary Keegan and Feidlim Cannon of Brokentalkers, as well as the core members of THEATREclub. The Company's ensemble formed while all core members were enrolled on the BA in Acting course at the Samuel Beckett Centre. Inevitably, creative environments will bring like-minded artists together and, as such, these support structures are essential. In terms of touring, Culture Ireland were responsible for a special initiative throughout 2011, facilitating a “twelve-month program of Irish arts in America, supporting more than five hundred events across forty states” (Van Winkle 146). Dublin Theatre Festival in partnership with Theatre Forum Ireland facilitate The Next Stage; a project that allows emerging Irish artists to gain extensive access to productions and theatre practitioners – both national and international – as they present work at the festival. Irish Theatre Institute has already been mentioned for the Information Toolbox, but their role in advocacy and education should be noted in a broader sense. In the same role of advocacy, Irish theatre practitioners may also avail of Theatre Forum Ireland and the National Campaign for the Arts.

All of these developments and supports provide a worthy case for why it is that post-dramatic theatre has reached such a critical mass in Ireland. International influences through Irish festivals and increasingly broader theatre education and supports are allowing early career theatre-makers to engage with and explore a wider range of theatrical forms than ever before. As such, it is to be expected that experimental forms would appeal to creative minds seeking out new forms of expression. However, a particularly Irish theatre continues to exist and as such, there is an interesting contrast to be drawn between the mass of experimental forms in contemporary Irish theatre and the example of contemporary Flemish theatre which

develops over a similar timeframe, albeit in substantially different circumstances. Luk van den Dries and Thomas Crombez trace the origin of artistic innovation that emerged from Flanders in the 1980s with the following points: “the lack of an established national theatre tradition; the invitations to Flemish theatres and arts centres from new experimental artists from abroad; and the funding available for emerging theatre artists both from independent producers and arts centres and, from 1993, albeit rather hesitantly, also from the Flemish government. As a result, artists have been able to work within their own very personal and local structures. They were not absorbed by existing theatre institutions, but were able to maintain their autonomy” (van den Dries and Crombez 421). These aspects of Flemish theatre operate as a useful counter-point to experimentation in Irish theatre, where non-dramatic theatre is chiefly seen as a reaction to or against the dramatic tradition of national theatre, where there are strong and preferential supports for Irish artists and thus limited opportunities for international practitioners, and finally with the extremely competitive yet limited financial resources available across the board for Irish theatre-makers and organisations. Creatively speaking, the work of Irish theatre-makers is – consciously or unconsciously – always open to being perceived as a departure from the national theatre’s writer-led dramatic model. This is of interest in contrast with contemporary Flemish theatre, which Orozco and Boenisch suggest is “not a coherent artistic ‘movement’ with a shared aesthetic programme or a common artistic background, and the range of disparate artists all have their individual, often even transnational biographies” (Orozco and Boenisch 397). Indeed, Orozco and Boenisch continue to suggest that contemporary Flemish theatre practice is “a continuous flux rather than a coherent narrative” (Orozco and Boenisch 398). In the case of Flemish theatre, there is no national model to depart from and, as such, experimental work must inevitably flourish in an environment that is, by design, without a centre. This sets an interesting precedent for Irish experimental theatre-makers, in that the only way to not be national is, perhaps, to be international.

Miriam Haughton argues that “Ireland does not reflect an isolated or contained nation. Globalisation has fundamentally altered Irish identities, structures, and experience, and thus tensions permeate notions of local and global in a contemporary

Irish context" (Haughton, *Flirting with the postmodern* 379). Patrick Lonergan re-directs this concern towards practitioners of Irish theatre, noting that; "The question for theatre practitioners is whether they are willing to acknowledge that multiculturalism has made Irishness seem in so many ways unrecognizable" (Lonergan 215). In this sense, if the culture of Irishness itself is unrecognisable, what form can Irish theatre take? Deirdre Mask contemplates the recent process of introspection in Ireland and finds that a multiplicity of Irish identities has emerged. "Modern Ireland is quicker to embrace its range of identities, many of them having little or nothing to do with being Irish. Arguably, the only truly common denominator in Ireland today is the hangover from the Celtic Tiger [...] No one play can explain the Irish society for the simple reason that there is no longer a plausible single Irish society" (Mask 129). In this notion, Mask is supported by Lonergan's suggestion that Ireland has passed through postcolonial and into the global - perhaps even beyond. In this multiplicity or even ambivalence of identities, Ireland displays the self-consciousness and reflexivity of postmodernity, following the global nature of its fall and self-examination. Ireland's fall in economic terms has paved the way for essential acts of exorcising our societal and cultural demons to an unprecedented level. In a sense, the multiculturalism of Ireland through this period provides for micro-cultures of the theatre; a proliferation and diversity of theatre practice and forms. Or perhaps, as Chris Morash states: "there is no such thing as *the* Irish theatre; there are Irish *theatres*, whose forms continue to multiply as they leave behind the fantasy of a single unifying image, origin or destiny" (C. Morash 271).

Instead of continuing with traditional drama as a dominant force, Irish theatre shows potential for far more diverse forms to find their place and to find audiences to connect with. Jen Harvie and Andy Lavender suggest that "theatre-making in the first decade of the twenty-first century is plural, contingent, influenced by many sources and open to all sorts of influence and experiment" (Harvie and Lavender 242). As much as the dramatic model shows signs of change in the early 2000s, what was an undercurrent of experimental theatre comes to the fore through groups such as Operating Theatre, Desperate Optimists, Pan Pan and The Corn Exchange. However, the idiom for experimental theatre in Ireland is somewhat narrow at this time. It is observed that "the phrase 'experimental theatre' has other connotations. [...] there are directors and

companies who lend their talents, courage, and reputations to the important task of breaking with the tried and trusted theatrical formulas of Ireland. If they are not experimental in the strict sense of the term, they do provide an alternative theatre for Ireland” (Haughey, O'Brien and Tobiessen 131). The companies that are referred to include Macnas, Blue Raincoat and Island Theatre Company – companies that could be considered experimental for their form, but with evident roots in a dramatic tradition. As the authors continue to explain, however; “In the Irish context “experimental theatre” often simply means “alternative theatre”” (Haughey, O'Brien and Tobiessen 132). This point is emphasised by Nakase and Stack in claiming that “Work built upon ensemble invention rather than a script is experienced as particularly daring in Ireland, a country worshipful of the written word” (Nakase and Stack 129). Nevertheless, even these forays into experimentation with form show the willingness of the part of Irish theatre makers to expand the vocabulary of theatrical forms.

The difficult reality for practitioners aiming to experiment with form is what Lisa Fitzgerald observes in the reformation of Arts funding policies through 2000 – 2009, changes that “resulted in the alignment of contemporary arts practice with cultural enterprise” (Fitzgerald 44). As such, the terms of enterprise were absorbed into funding decisions, meaning that experimentation was aligned with risk and smaller, niche markets. This is not to say that experimental theatre was not supported; rather, the expectations for returns were at a high level. These conditions bred a culture in which the ‘fear of failure’ took priority over the artistic experiment. As Haughey, O’Brien and Tobiessen put it, “Alternative companies are independently funded and, therefore, cannot afford a flop. The precarious year-to-year nature of state arts funding means that those groups that might experiment will not do so for fear of losing what support they have” (Haughey, O'Brien and Tobiessen 132). This condition prevailed throughout the 2000s, as Nakase and Stack highlight in their observations from 2008. “With funding on the line and a difficult economic climate in which to entice theatregoers, 2008 was not a year for big risk. [...] At the Dublin Theatre Festival, for example, about a quarter of the twenty-seven shows playing were adaptations” (Nakase and Stack 127). The economic situation placed a demand of safety before risk upon theatre practitioners in this context. It is in these circumstances that Patrick Lonergan argues that “Irish

practitioners may be faced with a choice: they can represent their country as it is, or they can exploit international audiences' stereotypical views of the country for economic gain" (Lonergan 215). Yet, not far underneath this surface, companies such as Pan Pan, The Performance Corporation, THEATREclub, THISISPOPBABY, Brokentalkers, ANU Productions and others were either creating work that was altogether different from their contemporaries or in development and waiting to emerge. Of this experimental undercurrent, Haughton points out that "a range of companies and individual artists throughout Ireland are continuously producing work that does not reproduce the dominant dramaturgies from the twentieth century. [...] Central to their practice is the notion of live presence and the ephemeral nature of performance. This results in heightened receptive experiences for their audiences, who become part of the focus of their dramaturgies, but also results in challenges for the scholarship that looks to critique it" (Haughton, *Flirting with the postmodern* 382-383). In the main, the challenge for scholarship of these burgeoning experimental forms is to observe each individual work for what it is without insisting on pre-established structures or categorisations. This is most often theatre without a centre; it follows that the observer should embrace a decentred position, also. Of course, while the artistic developments that have been discussed to this point are essential to the development of Irish post-dramatic theatre, theatre-makers and organisations do not operate in isolation from the rest of society. As such, economics and cultural enterprise had a significant role in the emergence of these experimental companies; mainly in terms of dictating the financial conditions and limitations under which Irish theatre practitioners operate.

While the fallout from the government's guarantee for failing Irish banks was not immediate, there was a sense of inevitability about the stringency of future budgets. However, it might be fairer to say that the greater threat to financial support of Irish theatre was not in the actual figures that would be available, but rather in the process of estimating the Arts according to economic criteria. Frederic Jameson posits that such developments originate in the "great movement of dedifferentiation of postmodernity" that effaced the boundaries between culture and economics, making the cultural economic at the same time that it turns the economic into so many forms of culture"



(Jameson 86). This is indicative of the post-Celtic Tiger environment, where theatre practitioners became increasingly subject to cultural commodification. Jameson argues that the finance-capital moment of globalized society is another form of abstraction, whereby forms of “cultural production and consumption themselves [...] are as profoundly economic as the other productive areas of late capitalism, and as fully integrated into the latter’s generalized commodity system” (Jameson 143-144). In these circumstances, though, the conditions for experimental theatre to emerge in Ireland were particularly altered post-Celtic Tiger due to economic and financial instability:

Given the reality that the Arts Council’s resources have recently reduced, and taking into account the medium-term economic outlook, it is clear that the Arts Council will have less money to support theatre in the future (Arts Council of Ireland 3).

Following the declaration of recession in 2008, the inevitable shift in circumstances for professionals in the theatre sector was first hinted at through an Arts Council discussion document, *Examining New Ways to Fund Theatre Production*. Of course, the Arts Council clearly state that problems with the standard funding model had been ‘present for some time’. The point is made that, “While the current economic crisis and the reduction in the Arts Council’s own resources have exacerbated the challenges, they have not of themselves been the cause of this dilemma” (Arts Council of Ireland 5). Arts Council total funding in 2008 was €84.6 million and by 2012, the total funding was €63.2 million. Over that period, total funding dropped by 25% - a significant amount even in the context of the time. Of course, it must also be noted that the companies or venues that dominated Arts Council funding prior to 2008 continued to receive the majority of annual funding after 2008 (Abbey Theatre, Gate Theatre, Rough Magic, Druid). The Arts Council remained adamant that reductions or cuts for theatre companies were not a reflection of the viability on the individual company’s artistic value, but an unfortunate result of the extraordinarily challenging financial constraints. However, theatre companies and practitioners who emerged post-2008 were in a relatively advantageous position as the core principles of the updated Arts Council funding policy went some way towards levelling the field for emerging artists. In asserting the desire to respond

with a new strategy, the Arts Council set out three core principles for re-imagining the funding system:

...offering core funding at realistic and sustainable levels to a reduced number of production companies; directing proportionately more support towards independent artists, including new and emerging artists; this type of support may include providing access to shared administrative resources; ensuring more work is available for audiences nationally, including via the introduction of an integrated touring policy” (Arts Council of Ireland 6).

Essentially, this policy could be summarised as using limited funding for fewer companies and more projects through a ‘production hub’ model and increased emphasis on touring work. Critiquing the Arts Council’s lean towards the production hub, Fitzgerald identifies a “lack of clarity around how this model might operate in practice” (Fitzgerald 47). However, Nakase and Stack surmise that “the concept is not a new one, and the Arts Council has said that it is looking to European models for new funding structures. [...]To some extent the model already is being executed by arts centres and theatre companies around Ireland” (Nakase and Stack 124-5). As an example, the Arts Council cited the Project Arts Centre as a *de facto* production hub.

The main criticism of the production hub as the intended sustainable model is that it would generate individual productions in the short term, but without any sense of long-term consistency or artistic thread. “The production hub model caters to a result – a production – rather than a process: the end without the means” (Nakase and Stack 124). To this end, the production hub only appears sustainable in an economic sense and not creatively; that is to say, that practitioners would resort to individual projects rather than programs or cycles of work. Fitzgerald argues that the change in the funding landscape since 2008 results in “the fear that there is a fixed binary framework for the production of theatre – the either / or model does not work in theory, and it does not work in practice” (Fitzgerald 55). The either / or model that Fitzgerald refers to is the perception that theatre practitioners would focus their energies to apply for either annual funding or project funding – where annual funding was undoubtedly the preferred option.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total Funding</b>	<b>Regularly Funded Organisations</b>
2010	€30,599,000	74
2011	€33,209,103	72
2012	€19,824,900	69
2013	€18,936,600	66
2014	€24,172,550	62

*Table 1 Arts Council Annual Funding (2010-2014)*

However, between 2010 and 2014, the number of theatre companies and venues receiving annual funding (Regularly Funded Organisations – RFO) fell from 74 to 62; while the total funding available in this strand fell from approximately €30.5 million to a low point of under €19 million in 2013, recovering somewhat to over €24 million in 2014. The Arts Council sought to temper expectations in acknowledging that funding would steadily decline and that even though “some artists might choose the production company model as the ideal vehicle through which to realise their artistic ambitions, the level of resources available to the Arts Council only permits a limited number of production companies to be fully supported” (Arts Council (2010) 4).

<b>Year</b>	<b>Applications</b>	<b>Awards</b>	<b>Total Value</b>
2011	R1 = 204	R1 = 43	R1 = €1,063,256
	R2 = 353	R2 = 69	R2 = €1,731,213
2012	R1 = 222	R1 = 48	R1 = €999,942
	R2 = 322	R2 = 72	R2 = €1,768,625.72
2013	R1 = 217	R1 = 48	R1 = €1,442,229
	R2 = 277	R2 = 62	R2 = €1,578,151
2014	R1 = 199	R1 = 46	R1 = €1,084,070
	R2 = 267	R2 = 73	R2 = €1,282,675.50

*Table 2 Arts Council Project Funding (2011-2014)*

In contrast, the Project strand (Project Awards – PA) has proven to be highly sought-after and thus extremely competitive. The pilot scheme in 2010 – titled Theatre Project Awards – received 108 applications, of which only 24 were successful. Following on from this, the strand was changed to make awards in two separate rounds each year. Between 2011 and 2014, the Project Awards strand received 2061 applications of which

461 were awarded funding. While the criticisms of the project awards remain, it is worth noting this variation of funding strands has led to a broader distribution, albeit with ever-limited funds to work with. Furthermore, although sustained funding would be the preference of theatre organisations, emerging artists can avail of project awards without the previously mentioned fear to experiment; in a sense, the individual project is the priority. In many ways, it is the move to a varied system of funding that has allowed Ireland's experimental theatre practitioners to not only develop their craft, but also engage audiences with new forms of theatre practice that were once the preserve of visiting international artists.

As Fintan Walsh observes, "Times, you could argue, are always in a kind of crisis. But over the past six years [2007-2013] in particular, this has been especially true for Ireland, as it plummeted from the heady heights of neoliberal abundance and excess into political, economic, social, and cultural turmoil" (Walsh 2). In recent years, it has become increasingly common to identify interactions that Irish theatre practitioners are making with current events, be it political, social, economic or otherwise. These interactions have not been exclusively through dramatic theatre. Indeed, as Kathryn Rebecca Van Winkle observes - granting that there were a few exceptions - "the most accomplished productions of [2011] were site-specific, documentary, immersive, silent, or solo. None of these techniques is exactly a novelty in Irish theatre, but 2011 marked a profound phase of maturation" (Van Winkle 133). Summarising Irish theatre through 2012, Nelson Barre notes that "From the traditional play to the post-dramatic, Irish theatre looked backward in order to speak to audiences here and now in new ways" (Barre 87). In the space of a few short years, Irish theatre practice has diversified at an unprecedented level. Casting her eye at the broader implications, Haughton suggests that:

Contemporary Ireland has witnessed a paradigm shift in modes of theatre-making in the Celtic Tiger and post-Celtic Tiger eras, such as the increasing volume of site-specific performances or offsite performances, verbatim theatre, and works which request or demand active participation from their audiences. I do not mean to suggest that these forms of theatre-making did not occur

throughout prior to the Celtic Tiger, but rather, in the present moment, there is a noticeable simultaneous wave of overtly politicised theatrical form and content challenging the ideologies and expectations of theatre audiences (Haughton, *Flirting with the postmodern* 375).

The latter point is a vital one when discussing emerging theatre; these forms of theatre-making have not suddenly appeared in Irish theatre, rather they have simply risen to mainstream attention. Too often, creative processes are announced as new when in truth, these forms have been developed over time. Jacques Derrida provides a serviceable distinction for observing emerging work as he describes two inventive processes: “*revelatory* invention, the discovering and unveiling of what *already is*”, as opposed to the production of something new, what Derrida calls “creative invention, the production of what is not” (Derrida, *Without Alibi* 168). The production of entirely new forms is the creative invention of experimental theatre-makers. However, the critical analysis of these forms is, at all times, a revelatory invention.

Another important theme of this recent theatrical practice is not just experimentation in form, but what Haughton identifies as the *overtly politicised*. Challenging ideologies and expectations are also central to recent work; indeed, this process is something that Walsh argues stems from “the gradual erosion of state and Church authority”, a process that “has also pushed questions surrounding the workings of democracy, the function of a republic, and the responsibility of citizens into the limelight for public interrogation” (Walsh 4-5). While a variety of work sought to challenge these core topics, there were a variety of stimuli for theatre-makers to respond to. Van Winkle identifies a clear correlation between theatrical form and social theme, suggesting that “interest in the site-specific is particularly appropriate in an Ireland coming to terms with its complex and recently disastrous obsession with property” (Van Winkle 136-137). Barre observes that the major themes of 2012 extended to “emigration, personal and political responsibility, the need to contemplate the past, the lasting effects of the Celtic Tiger, globalized culture and connections, and the need for creative solutions to present and future problems” (Barre 99). While the thematic preoccupations are in line with the national introspection post-Celtic Tiger, one could argue that experiments in theatrical form are more than an isolated radical

response to the chosen theme; as Meisner and Mounsef point out, “Radical performance does not always translate into radical politics” (Meisner and Mounsef 89). Indeed, Harvie and Lavender would argue that such experiments are not only a rejection of conventional theatrical practices, but also “an urgent seeking for other methods of producing something that feels genuinely important in different ways, that trades in authenticity and that deserves our attention now” (Harvie and Lavender 13). As much as the work of Pan Pan, The Performance Corporation, THEATREclub, THISISPOPBABY, Brokentaklers, ANU Productions and others is important in artistic terms, it is also vital for creating a platform in which Irish society can pause for reflection after an era ultimately defined by failure. As Walsh puts it; “This is theatre that takes us right to the heart of the matter: of history, of neighbourhoods, of buildings, of relationships, of bodies. It forces us to confront our most heinous crimes and our most shameful failings. But it also propels us closer to one another... offering comfort, reflection, and sometimes hope” (Walsh 16). Haughton and Kurdi expand on this notion, observing that while “the momentum of institutional collapse in Ireland roars ahead, the ritual, celebration, and critique facilitated by the arts offers, in varying degrees, access to encounters of integrity, dignity, exposure, truth and community to a shaken Irish society” (Haughton and Kurdi 2). A richly diverse Irish theatre is offering theatre-makers multiple forms and means to express the criticisms and reactions to an event of such magnitude to Irish society that there can be no single, all-encompassing narrative. “Contemporary Irish theatre practice highlights this emerging postmodern influx of micro-narratives which are individual and particular, often lacking reference to or dependence on a fixed centre point in both structure and interpretation” (Haughton, *Flirting with the postmodern* 377).

Overall, the Irish theatre sector has adapted to recent challenges and difficulties while simultaneously evolving into a sector that may be described as aligned with postmodern sensibilities. This change from the dominance of the playwright-centred dramatic model to a more open exchange of theatrical forms and ideas is a radical change when compared with historical contexts as recently as pre-Celtic Tiger. As such, there is something special about the Irish theatre practitioners who are – in a lot of ways – pioneering experimental theatre forms for Irish audiences. As this thesis will consider

the contemporary work of Irish theatre practitioners in the years 2009 – 2014, work which is open to interpretation as post-dramatic or experimental, examples will include Pan Pan Theatre Company, Dead Centre, The Company (Ireland), ANU Productions, THISISPOPBABY, Brokentalkers, The Emergency Room, THEATREclub and Una McKeivitt Productions. Examples of their international counterparts will also be considered, extending to Forced Entertainment, Gob Squad, Tim Crouch, Elevator Repair Service, Ontroerond Goed and Rimini Protokoll.

## Performance

### Crafting a Performance

Whether dramatic or post-dramatic, theatrical performances are crafted through a process of production. By this logic, we can say that there are intentional creative decisions made in terms of what forms the resulting performance. Presented as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival 2010, Pan Pan's *The Rehearsal; Playing the Dane* is, however, an incomplete performance as it presents the audience with three possible Hamlets. Gavin Quinn, the director, explains that the audience will cast the role through an audition process and subsequent vote. The self-conscious theatricality of the first half of the performance is plain to see; Quinn sits at a table to stage right, flanked by stage manager and resident academic, three actors audition for the roles of Hamlet, while other performers wait around the performance space to stand-in for various roles. Even the design of the space, with mirrors on both ends of the large rectangular performance area, is explicitly reflexive. As Peter Crawley observes, the staging of the audition process "seems to crystallise the central idea of the production; each actor delivers a version of themselves, a version of the prince and an absorbing piece of the text. This process, and the workshop games around it, allows Quinn to ration out Shakespeare's text in highlights and jumbled sequence, playing fast and loose with our familiarity and expectations" (Crawley, 2010). Indeed, there is far more going on than the audition process. Quinn has crafted a performance that communicates a variety of ideas in different ways. This form of dispersed communication renders *The Rehearsal* as a performance of 'becoming' for the audience; it is clearly through the audience being present that this performance exists at all, that any or the choice elements become actual through an audience vote. After choosing one of the three actors that could play Hamlet, each spectator is left with an unrealised element: what, if anything, would be different had another actor played the role for the second half? John Smythe is less receptive towards the production than Peter Crawley, arguing that *The Rehearsal* "neither deconstructs nor reconstructs Shakespeare's Hamlet in a form I find challenging, enlightening, provocative or even simply engaging at anything like the



levels a straight production of the multi-layered classic can" (Smythe, 2012). In this critique, we see the pitfalls of crafting a post-dramatic performance; does rupturing the dramatic structure leave us with a chaotic assembly of disparate elements? Or do we lose the heart and soul of a performance when the process prefers intellectual stimulation? In a way, these positions are all available and something between the positions of Crawley and Smythe may in fact be where the crafting of this performance may be observed. As Avra Sidiropoulou proposes, "the performance event realized on stage through the synergetic involvement of many yet ultimately orchestrated by the agency of one (the director), questions earlier assumptions that theatre is merely a scenic illustration of the dramatist's intentions" (Sidiropoulou 136). The argument presented here, in effect, is that there is an intention that provokes every theatre production into being and a certain kind of craft involved in composing the final performance, whether as a linear and narrative drama or a fragmented and pluralistic post-dramatic performance. Patrice Pavis lays out the options in this regard:

Either we push the existing text in a certain direction and according to its own logic, or we create a stage event in making a new object, which owes nothing to any textual source. 'Directing a play' is therefore choosing a direction, an orientation, an interpretation, reducing the range of possibilities (Pavis 118).

Even in the experiment of keeping meaning open, there has to be some consideration for what the performance will prioritise; some aspect of specificity that motivates the performance, for why else should it be produced? This is not to say that the finished performance needs to have a conveniently interpretable message, but as will be discussed in depth further along, all performance is compelled by the need to communicate. Whether the message that is communicated is clear or obscure, single or plural, is of less importance than the impulse to create the performance. However, this does point to the element of choice affecting a theatrical composition; at some point, the theatre-makers decide on such things as whether the communication should be clear or obscure. There is, fundamentally, an element of choice and in critical analysis, it is those artistic choices that we seek out in order to assess performances not only for what they do, but also what they might have done or avoided doing. Such decisions are made in creating any theatrical performance and offers some explanation as to our

fascination with directors as much as with performers. Indeed, while the intent may remain a mystery even to the performer, there is an element of playfully teasing any would-be critic in *The Rehearsal* when Daniel Reardon adds “Postdramatic” to Polonius’s extensive list of theatre genres. Peter Crawley remarks on the moment:

Whether or not the production endorses the term, it readily conforms to the chilly hallmarks of postdramatic theatre, and for all its intertextual digressions... its contemporary asides and acres of commentary, there’s something curiously straight about the performance. The text is still most affecting when its delivery is least affected (Crawley, 2010).

For Crawley, then, *The Rehearsal* provides a ready example of post-dramatic form, all the while – perhaps, most appropriately – slyly resisting the term’s application. This is the style of performance that Gavin Quinn crafts; not only self-reflexive, but anticipating the spectator’s reflexivity at the same time. The work of Pan Pan is thus layered in self-conscious performance to a dizzying extent. John Smythe argues that these layers do not render the performance open to interpretation in a stimulating way and that, instead, “Pan Pan’s aesthetic [...] finally reduces their audience to objective observers of their performative experimentation” (Smythe). However, Sidiropoulou suggests that “the process of stirring up associations through less recognizable routes than immediate recourse to archetypes, makes for much subtler, yet more complex and ultimately rewarding, perceptual strategies relying on the gradual, as opposed to instant, gratification of the spectators’ senses; the immediate objective being to trigger inside the spectator a personal connectedness to images, thoughts, or phrases that may or may not have been also personal to the auteur upon their inception” (Sidiropoulou 82). Quinn’s preference for presenting rather than performing text might be viewed as a subtle reverence for the play-text, were it not for the consistently ambivalent treatment of the text in other parts of the performance; most notably, exploring the lines of Reynaldo and exposing perhaps the least accomplished writing in the dramatic masterpiece. However, John Smythe laments the consistent use of direct address as he claims that “there are virtually no interactive relationships built between characters, not even in the closet scene. And although there is clarity, great tracts of text are spoken

almost mechanically, with little in the way of colouring arising from the character's changing states of being" (Smythe).

In the later production of *Everyone is King Lear in His Own Home*, Sara Keating echoes Peter Crawley in finding that "the most effective scenes in *Everybody is King Lear...* are those where the actors play it straight: the rupture of their relationship – rendered here in the penultimate scene – is genuinely moving. It is a tantalising suggestion of a more faithful King Lear that would elicit empathy and pathos, as well as a cold admiration for the company's intellectual rigor" (Keating). Again, the performances that Quinn crafts are finely balanced between the sublimely insightful and the frustratingly obtuse, never dwelling for too long in either category. Indeed, Lehmann might argue that Quinn's style shows a concentration on theatricality, similar to what Lehmann describes as 'retheatricalization' aligned with the movements of the historical avant-garde (Lehmann 51). Naturally, Quinn may resist any such label, yet with Pan Pan's mission statement effectively declaring a determination to always seek out new forms of expression, it is only fitting to identify Quinn as an avant-garde director or auteur. Avra Sidiropoulou argues that the dual function of an auteur is to reconcile text and performance, so that "rather than relinquishing their talent to the playwright's words, actors collaborate with directors in interpreting the original uber-text, namely the world itself, expelling the author from the stage" (Sidiropoulou 47). Bringing contemporary expression to existing texts is a consistent quality of Pan Pan's recent work, even though the forms and designs may change. For Lehmann, "a directors' theatre is arguably a precondition for the postdramatic disposition" and that is not inherently a demand for abandoning the text by any means; if anything, Lehmann argues that "radical theatre was not motivated simply by contempt for the text but also by the attempt of *rescue*. The emerging 'theatre of directors' was often precisely concerned with wrenching texts away from convention and saving them from arbitrary, banal or destructive ingredients of 'culinary' theatrical effects" (Lehmann 52). Again, Pan Pan are an appropriate example for 'wrenching texts away from convention', finding new forms of presentation in established dramatic texts such as *Oedipus the King*, *Hamlet*, and *A Doll's House* in their recent work.

While the text remains a constituent element of theatrical practice, there is an evolving emphasis on the performance as an event in its own right. As Morash and Richards observe, “The theatre event insists upon its own particularity at every level” (Morash and Richards 5). Performance as a unique, unrepeatable event is crucial to the specificity of theatre itself. In postmodern terms, the spectacle has become the ‘event’; that is to say, our contemporary and generic ‘all-encompassing’ term for performances that do not sit neatly into (more specific) existing categories are bundled together under the vague term ‘event’. Lehmann argues that the theatre event is no longer a question of possible theatrical signs, nor the indecidability between signified and signifier, “but from the intention to produce and render possible a communicative event. In this postdramatic theatre of events it is a matter of the execution of acts that are real in the here and now and find their fulfilment in the very moment they happen, without necessarily leaving any traces of meaning or a cultural monument” (Lehmann 104). In a sense, the post-dramatic prioritises urgency, even immediacy in communication between performer and spectator. Yet, as with any other performance as has been argued, even the event is a crafted performance – whether or not it is mapped to a prescribed mode of experience. The most persistent term to match with this demand for immediate communication is for an encounter, a term that in some way inspires the interpretation of being a self-contained event. In the emergent work of Flemish theatre, Lourdes Orozco and Peter M. Boenisch observe pioneering artists that “blended forms, blurred aesthetics and invented then unknown performance formats, and in so doing firmly established the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium on the map of experimental performance practice” (Orozco and Boenisch 397). Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink suggests that “Ontroerend Goed is fascinated by the potential of the direct encounter of performers and spectators in the theatre. This is far from unexplored territory... [...] However, the collective does not see this as a burden. Their attitude is astutely captured in the company’s motto: Everything has been done before, but not by us, and not now” (Nibbelink 417). Not only does Nibbelink give a clear interpretation of what encounter might mean as a communicative act, but she also shows that the immediacy of encounter can overcome any concern for originality; the important elements of Ontroerend Goed’s ethos are the communication between people (by us) and the urgency of that communication (now). In a similar way, Crawley and White assert:

“Encounter is an important motif and motive in the work of Rimini Protokoll” (Crawley and White 35). Lyn Gardner considers the group’s production, *Radio Muezzin*, and details the vitality of the encounter:

Not only does *Radio Muezzin* give you a direct conduit into other people's lives and another culture, this low-key piece also grapples with the very form of theatre itself – in particular, the issues of co-authorship, ownership and exploitation that arise in documentary theatre. [...] the authors of the piece are present on stage: they present themselves. There is no intermediary. (Gardner)

The encounter provides, as Gardner notes, a direct conduit into other people’s lives. This is a kind of communicative act that is immensely engaging precisely because it is urgent. It is the authors of that are present on stage; people that, as Chistine Kuhl explains, “Rimini Protokoll refer to as “everyday experts”. The characteristic feature of Rimini Protokoll is that these people are always on stage in person. Their experience is not embodied by actors, instead they tell their own stories themselves” (Crawley and White 33). In traditional theatre forms, it is not only that there is usually some degree of mediation going on, but that it is the craft of the mediation that the spectator is expected to appreciate. While there is assuredly some degree of mediation in what Rimini Protokoll present, the priority is for people to share the encounter. Gardner contends that *Radio Muezzin* “raises more questions than it answers. Foremost among them is this: why it is that this piece of theatre feels far more real than any TV documentary?” (Gardner). One possible answer comes from Stefan Kaegi of Rimini Protokoll:

The person standing there is standing there because he is an interesting person. Therefore, you do not ask, “What is the writer trying to tell me?” You ask yourself, “Who is this person?” And you can draw your own conclusions (Crawley and White 34).

In this way, Rimini Protokoll present an encounter with reality between people, returning the sense of immediacy to the theatrical act of communication. This production will offer useful parallels with the work of ANU Productions and their Monto Cycle, yet the encounters in the work of ANU contrast in terms of their mediation, albeit

from real testimonies. Of course, Crawley and White conclude that even though the Muezzins are non-professional performers, which asserts the authenticity of their stories, “they have been given no less consideration than anything else placed within a theatrical frame and the audience’s interaction is crucial to Rimini Protokoll’s dramaturgy: the experience communicates meaning. It is a theatre that may have lost its illusion, but not its capacity to illuminate” (Crawley and White 14). A criticism of this style of encounter, and documentary theatre in general, tends to be that reality or authenticity is compromised in theatre; to perform is artificial. As Crawley and White shrewdly note, this is theatre where illusion is explicitly absent, yet it remains theatre for the fundamental pursuit of encounter and of human communication.

While this idea will be considered in greater depth from the spectator’s perspective, there is an aspect of post-dramatic composition that resists completion. The effect may be that the performance remains with each spectator beyond its duration; arguably something that all productions hope to achieve, but in the post-dramatic, this means the performance is ongoing rather than a recurring memory. For example, in his review of Pan Pan’s *The Rehearsal*, Peter Crawley notes a consistent thread of multiple choice:

There is no single Hamlet, neither in performance history, collective memory, nor, it seems, in the play itself. Instead Gavin Quinn’s production offers us multiplicity: Actors wander the stage in plain clothes with black armbands as we enter, pacing around an enormous floor mat in the design of the Danish flag. One of them holds a dog, a magnificent Great Dane, and already it is unclear whether we should a) decode it, b) laugh at a pun made flesh, or c) pet it (Crawley, 2010)

While these choices may seem of minor significance during the performance, what this creates is the potentiality of performance alternatives in the imagination of each spectator. What if a different actor played Hamlet? How different might the performance have been? When the post-dramatic offers performance choices such as these, it is not limited to the live experience of the performance; there are possibilities offered that we do not see performed. This is beyond a rupture of the dramatic; this utterly fragments our narrative experience of the performance. These elements of

performance are not simply traced back to a core text, either. “The totality of the visual, auditory, and musical signs created by the director, set designer, musicians, and actors constitutes a meaning (or a multiplicity of meanings) that goes beyond the text in its totality” (Ubersfeld 5). The multiple contributors to the overall performance ensure that singular interpretations are not available, at least not in anything but a reductive reading. There are other examples from Pan Pan’s recent work, particularly in the example of *Everyone is King Lear in His Own Home*, which premiered in the Smock Alley Theatre Main Space as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival 2012. Jesse Weaver notes that, for the performers, Andrew Bennett and Judith Roddy, “the specifics of their relationship hover between a range of possibilities without necessarily settling on anything definitive or literal. Bennett is at once a father, a tormentor, a child, a brother, a king, while Roddy ranges from carer to daughter, protector to confessor” (Weaver). The ambivalent and ever-shifting roles that both performers occupy throughout generate all manner of possibilities and yet never definitively choose any one in particular. Again, these possibilities are intentionally open and as such, spectators will have varied responses. Colin Murphy maintains that “Director Gavin Quinn's objective seems to be a theatrical "stress-testing" exercise, where he places the play of *King Lear* under enormous pressure [...] in order to find the emotional essence that emerges. But his theatrical exercises mostly look just that; and the essence he uncovers, shorn of all plot, is a cold one” (Murphy). There is, undoubtedly, a risk in leaving the performance so open that a spectator may as easily feel that nothing has been communicated as they might experience a revelation. Jesse Weaver acknowledges that “while [*Everybody is King Lear...*] can be frustrating, incoherent, and indulgent at times, it is at last beautiful and strangely disarming” (Weaver). At the same time as there is risk involved, there is also a delegation of responsibility to the spectator to experience the performance for themselves. In many ways, a director must create all manner of disruptions throughout a performance in order to unsettle the spectators from easy engagement. Gavin Quinn achieves this in *The Rehearsal* by having a live Great Dane on stage and in a similar way in *Everyone is King Lear in His Own Home* with a live Mouse in a ball on the performance space. Something about the spontaneity of the creature’s movements clashes with an established spectating pattern. As Bert O. States explains: “An animal can be trained or tranquilized, but it cannot categorically be depended upon. There is always the fact that

it doesn't know it is in a play; consequently, we don't get "good behaviour," only behaviour" (States 379). Using live animals in performance as a disruptive, even jarring presence is not without precedent. Orozco and Boenisch explain that Ivo Van Hove has "used cows, snakes, onstage cooking, live feeds and spatial arrangements that irritate the spectators' perception in order to trigger such 'reality effects'. He invites, provokes and even demands a new spectatorial 'cognitive mapping' that transcends the consumption of linear stories and psychological characters, while still relying on the framework of 'drama'" (Orozco and Boenisch 402). For States, this returns the sense of play to the illusion of theatrical performance. "The illusion has introduced something into itself to demonstrate its tolerance of things. It is not the world that has invaded the illusion; the illusion has stolen something from the world in order to display its own remarkable powers" (States 380). There are interesting parallels to be drawn between Van Hove and Quinn, and not simply for this example alone. Both Van Hove and Quinn rely on the framework of the drama; however, in Quinn's case, this reliance is as a point of departure. As Sara Keating argues, "Shakespeare's text is just one of the fragments in director Gavin Quinn's collage, which juxtaposes high and low cultural references with pointed self-consciousness. Lear's soliloquies are intercut with muted scenes from *SpongeBob SquarePants*, fart jokes counterbalance the impending sense of tragedy" (Keating). Maintaining the ambivalent direction of a performance demands moment-by-moment attention to the details of the performance, its emotional weighting and points of release, its engagement and disengagement of the spectators, its moments of direct address and obscuring of meaning.



## Reading a Performance

In terms of critical engagement, dramatic theatre and post-dramatic theatre are both subject to research that evolves from literary criticism. Literature may be present in the creative process of both forms, but the extension of literary analysis to reading the performance is a reductive practice. However, Marco De Marinis criticizes the erroneous tendency of critics who assume that “the performance is “included” in the text, when, if anything, the converse is true” (De Marinis 16). Even in dramatic theatre, the text is subsumed by the performance regardless of a less-radical departure in performance from what the dramatic text prescribes. Keir Elam suggests that “the dramatic text is radically conditioned by its performability. The written text, in other words, is determined by its very need for stage contextualisation, and indicates throughout its allegiance to the physical conditions of performance, above all to the actor’s body and its ability to materialise discourse within the space of the stage” (Elam 209). Here, Elam is indicating that the dramatic text can only achieve its most complete realisation in performance and though this opens an argument for the performance as the eminent quality of the theatrical process, the point in consideration is that written text for performance cannot be analysed in isolation from its realisation in performance. If we take the performance as eminent to the text, it also holds that the performed text is but one aspect of the performance text. The idea of a performance text is name-checked by theorists of theatre and semiotics alike even though it receives limited articulation thereafter. Lehmann offers the following distinction between different levels of theatrical staging:

...the linguistic text, the text of the staging and *mise en scène*, and the ‘performance text’[...] The mode of relationship of the performance to the spectators, the temporal and spatial situation, and the place and function of the theatrical process within the social field, all of which constitute the ‘performance text’, will ‘overdetermine’ the other two levels (Lehmann 85).

This proposal articulates the performance text in such a broad manner as to suggest that it encompasses the performance, spectators, time and space of performance, the relation of these qualities to one another and the function they serve in the theatrical

process. Though Lehmann omits the linguistic text and the *mise en scene* from this proposal, he argues that their significance is lessened by the all-encompassing nature of the performance text. In essence, Lehmann provides no solid parameters for the performance text to operate within. Offering an alternative perspective, De Marinis suggests that theatrical performance involves theatre as a material object while performance text refers instead to a theoretical object, and as such, “the performance text is a theoretical model of the observable performance phenomenon, to be assumed as an explanatory principle of the functioning of performance as a phenomenon of signification and communication” (De Marinis 48). This expression of the performance text as the theoretical model of the observable performance phenomenon is worth adopting. It is not a vast improvement on Lehmann’s broad scope, but it clarifies that the observable performance is the subject matter for a performance text. To be specific on the qualities of performance that may be observed, the following list may be considered suggestive: tempo, sound, text, bodies, boundaries, architecture, lights and technology. This list is by no means exhaustive, but the observable qualities of performance appear more equitably balanced when one does not grant text a superior status. When text is considered as an equal quality, the observable qualities which constitute the performance text present a survey of performance in sensory terms. In addition to these individual qualities, De Marinis notes that - in order to qualify as a performance text – “a performance must possess the minimal requirements of completeness and coherence” (De Marinis 3). As such, it is not satisfactory for a presentation of these individual qualities to be labelled a performance; rather, performance occurs when these qualities exist as such within a completed structure. Greater difficulty may be encountered when one considers that, through subjective interpretation, there may be no agreed beginning and ending for a performance. In this instance it may be most useful to interpret the performance within an applied frame, taking a frame to be as Arnold Aronson describes it:

A frame is a form of visual organisation; it creates a self-contained space carefully delineated from the world around it. [...] the frame imparts a sense of order and a consistent ontology that allows us to comprehend what we see (Aronson, *Looking into the Abyss* 90).

However, this connection succeeds in reinforcing the argument for the subjectivity of theatrical analysis given the personal nature of interpretation. De Marinis states that “any performance can be considered a performance text when the interpretive cooperation of the addressee desires to “construct” it as such” (De Marinis 48). Where it is possible for the addressee to construct a frame, the sense of order imparted upon the performance is a personal one; the performance is rendered whole but only as far as the individual perceives it to be. This proposal for completeness by De Marinis is not far removed from Aristotle; in fact, Aristotle’s definition for tragedy in the *Poetics* [Chapter VI] offers that tragedy “is a representation of an action which is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude” (Halliwell 37). From a dramaturgical perspective, or perhaps an account for alternative performance practices, Turner and Behrndt argue that both ‘the ‘open’ text and devised work demand that we consider the composition of the performance as a whole” (Turner and Behrndt 30). Whether or not ‘wholeness’ should be taken as an understanding for a performance text regardless of performance mode, this logic will not hold in all performances given that incompleteness or incoherence may be the central drive of the performance, if not a considered quality. The role of the interpreter is essential to any understanding of the performance text, and so it may not be possible to suggest that a performance text can be objective. This problem is further compounded when one accepts that previous performances do not offer the many tangible traces left by contemporary performances, “the performance text is, constitutively, a text “with gaps” (if not, in fact, entirely absent) before the process of critical analysis begins its attempts to somehow fill in the “empty spaces”” (De Marinis 5). If theatre can only be received subjectively, it follows that the performance text will be equally subjective in response.

Separating performance and text is not a practical necessity, but rather a theoretical consideration. The intention is to identify points of contrast and so explain the understanding that text is not essential to performance. Non-textual forms analysed through the performance text are perhaps the most useful demonstration of the text as non-essential to performance. Birringer argues that dance “moves through media and moves media of representation, and since it cannot ever be fixed, saved, or recovered, it creates a particularly striking and paradoxical challenge to historians,

critics, and theorists who seek to map it onto language and textuality” (Birringer, *Media and Performance* 29). Indeed, performance that is not generated from a text is a degree more advanced than allowing for as simplistic a label as ‘non-textual’. Shaping a category by this term offers no expectation of nuance in the performances which are created without text. In particular, Arnold Aronson expresses disappointment in the failure of theatre makers to appreciate that visual performance and media imagery are two separate visual vocabularies. Aronson states that “there are multiple visual vocabularies” (Aronson, *Looking into the Abyss* 96). Alternatively, one could argue that performance presents a meta-text; something that comes after the development or rehearsal, an agreement on how to perform the original but in an ever-variable manner. Even though text may not be inherent to a performance’s creation, the performance may yet become a text itself. Peggy Phelan argues that “Performance’s being [...] becomes itself through disappearance” (Phelan, *Unmarked* 146). Adversely, one could argue that text therefore becomes itself through overt appearance. These qualities pervade at the expressive extremes of performance and text and while worthy of note, it is perhaps the midpoint of performance and text where both are co-mediated that merits investigation.

Rather than simply experimenting with text and its forms, post-dramatic work is a challenge to text as the primary vehicle for experience, given that so much of a spectator’s experience is intuitive, non-textual, sensory response. From this perspective, text succeeds in making sense of experience but it also closes the understanding of that experience to a textual response. If the performance can be presented in a multitude of forms, why is it that the critical response should be limited to articulation through text? Antonin Artaud is clear in his first manifesto – “we must first break theatre’s subjugation to the text and rediscover the idea of a kind of unique language somewhere in between gesture and thought. We can only define this language as expressive, dynamic spatial potential in contrast with expressive spoken dialogue potential” (Artaud 68). Experience will only be understood through text if text is generated as the main means of creating the sense of experience; it is a circular logic that – through consistent reproduction – lessens the quality of the experience that can be conveyed, creating further distance between original experience and re-

presentation of experience. Artaud offers further clarification, in his desire to link with “primal theatre sensed and experienced directly by the mind, without language’s distortions and the pitfalls in speech and words” (83).

Keir Elam suggests that the written text / performance text relationship “is not one of simple priority but a complex of reciprocal constraints constituting a powerful *intertextuality*. Each text bears the other’s traces” (Elam 209). If we take Elam’s suggestion, the performance is an intertext of what is written and what is performed. Does this analysis hold against the notion of performance as meta-text? The intertext renders performance as an ambiguous performance/text product; the meta-text is the description of the written text through performance. In the trend of ambivalent entities, the intertext provides greater insight than considerations of the meta-text allow. Simply put, the performance text is relatable as an intertext of written text, performance and production. The discovery of the intertextual aspect “permits us to conceive of a performance as an original combination within a textual structure of pre-existing codes (which can be divided into general or particular codes) and distinctive codes that are created anew with each performance and thus recognizable only by abduction” (De Marinis 4). The performance text – if it is taken to be an intertext – is the point of confluence of all theatrical creative practice. Fernando de Toro states that “every text is the assimilation and transformation of many texts; that is, inside every text an intertextuality exists and functions” (de Toro 36). Thus, performance is the assimilation of all creative practice, from written script to production script to light and sound script. This performed intertextuality generates the necessary ambivalence of contemporary performance; ambivalent in the sense that it cannot be argued that the performance text is a finite presentation of the multiple incorporated texts. Furthermore, as De Marinis notes, “it is not possible to articulate general rules for the external demarcation of the performance text” (De Marinis 59). De Marinis asserts this viewpoint on the basis that traditional criterion for marking start and end of a performance no longer hold, where Wilson allows his audience to come and go, etc. As such, there is no identifiable point at which the performance text begins and ends; this information is interpreted and processed on an individual level.

Perhaps the main complication in addressing performance as text is that the performance is not communicable through any single textual medium. Peggy Phelan argues that “Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance” (Phelan, *Unmarked* 146). Here, Phelan asserts that performance is its own medium and as such, the communication achieved through performance cannot be matched by any text; written, visual, or otherwise. Furthermore, Phelan questions the ability of any textual practice to appropriately record the performance phenomenon according to the same logic. In other words, performance is the medium of performance and any other medium is an inaccuracy. Theatrical performance is not notational; that is to say, it is not suited to a notational system or language, such as sheet music (De Marinis 51). In this light, the performance and how it is composed cannot be exhaustively detailed. This is a general challenge against recording the performance through written analysis, but other analysis can also be brought in to question. Aronson suggests there is a kind of futility in any attempt to document the performance through imagery. For example, a photograph renders a three-dimensional performance space as two-dimensional; it also captures only one single moment of the complete temporal experience. As such, the photographic image denies the spatial and temporal nature of theatre in what it captures (Aronson, *Looking into the Abyss: essays on scenography* 98). Despite the seeming dismissal here by Aronson, it is conceded that a photo will reveal far more about the theatrical moment than no photo. Phelan posits that performance “occurs over a time which will not be repeated. It can be performed again, but this repetition itself marks it as “different”. The document of a performance then is only a spur to memory, an encouragement of memory to become present” (Phelan, *Unmarked* 146). The repeatable quality of performance, but only repeatable in performance, is one of the only means through which a performance can be re-presented. Any analysis of a performance that is external to the performance will only serve to make the performance partially present.

However, Lehmann argues that “the significance of all individual elements ultimately depends on the way the whole is viewed, rather than constituting this overall effect as a sum of the individual parts” (Lehmann 85). If performance is considered as

an intertext, we find that the connection of many individual parts is the means of performance creation. Ultimately, the observable performance phenomenon is more than the sum of these individual parts so an attempt to document any specific quality of a performance will not equate to an accurate analysis. Performance is intended to be observed as a whole; indeed, as de Toro states: “The point is not to discuss whether theatre is literature, or whether theatre is purely a stage practice; rather, theatre should be approached as a whole” (de Toro 36). Analysis of the performance as a whole – the observable phenomenon that the performance text represents – is the most satisfactory approach possible in the circumstances. The challenge of the performance text is to achieve a more-complete analysis of theatrical performance than what can be analysed in the literature of or around performance. Alternatively, the question can be posed: can theatrical performance even receive a complete analysis?

As an example of performance that challenges analysis, The Emergency Room’s production of *riverrun*, an interpretation of James Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake*, is a performance that actively resists interpretation. First presented at the Mick Lally Theatre as part of the Galway International Arts Festival 2013, *riverrun* is defined by Olwen Fouéré’s physicality, rhythm and overflowing speech. The design of the performance space seems secondary to the intense focus on Fouéré and the microphone she stands before. A stream of consciousness ushers forth, combining with Alma Kelliher’s sound design to create a fluid sound-scape that pulls each spectator into the lyrical flow of performance. Maddy Costa reflects on the difficulty – if not utter struggle – of describing *riverrun*, remarking that:

Meaning is obfuscated, narrative elusive – but you listen for something else, something more elemental. Language here is slippery, fluid, but also obdurate: at once the flowing river dissolving into the sea and the rock beside and beneath. Fouéré uses her whole body to shape it, visibly softening when the final word is spoken (Costa, 2014).

In a similar way, Susan Conley finds the challenge to interpret *riverrun* as something outside of what the performance demands from a spectator. Speaking of Olwen Fouéré’s performance, Conley says that:

Out of her, and through her, runs a torrent of text, and suddenly, the room comes alive. Any technique for imposing meaning upon the words is, for all intents and purposes, almost useless. It's something like having an uncertain grasp of a foreign language: some thoughts and phrases leap out of the rush, like fish, and in the giddiness of recognition, the next movement is lost. Eventually, meaning, and the need to make it, becomes secondary to allowing this flood of sound wash over, around and through me (Conley, 2013).

One would argue that if an analytical process could take shape and ultimately succeed, then performance would no longer be necessary; that performance concerns itself with ideas that may never achieve a complete articulation, and as such, comprehensive analysis of the performance makes explicit the failure of performance to analyse comprehensively. Of course, contemporary theatre that operates self-reflexively often performs beyond critique; even enabled by critique to perform. In *The Rehearsal*, Pan Pan begin with a critical analysis of *Hamlet*, rendering the act of critical analysis as a performance possibility while making the spectator aware of their own individual critical position. Gina Moxley's *The Crumb Trail* absorbed and performed reviews of previous performances – an incorporation which again rendered critical discourse as a performance act. Such strategies are not entirely new to theatrical performance, though they are indicative of a potential for reciprocity between performance and critical analysis. In terms of providing analysis, the performance text cannot be entirely complete as has been shown, but with a clearer understanding of what the performance communicates in its live iteration, analysis post-performance is possible and relevant. Conley concludes her assessment of *riverrun* by observing that “Fouéré doesn't (or doesn't attempt to) demystify Joyce's swansong, but her brave, agile and defiant performance simultaneously offers an intriguing snapshot of a literary conundrum and creates the theatrical equivalent of reading Joyce's later works: spirit-shocking, exasperating and exhilarating” (Conley, 2013). While this may be frustrating for the critical spectator, ultimately, this is a generous 'leaving open' of the performance, giving permission to the individual spectator to complete their own performance text however they choose to interpret it.



## The Postmodern Body; Present, Absent, and Ambivalent

Confirming the reality of the performer – and, indeed, the performance – is the preoccupation of theatre, beyond any difficulties the artificiality inherent in performance may invoke. By creating with or around the performing body, the performance reality is granted authority. In this sense, the performance exploits the reality of a body in its performing space to compensate for its artificiality. The body is granted its own language in contemporary terms, but Ana Sanchez-Colberg raises an interesting argument through contemporary and avant-garde dance, suggesting that the language devaluation in theatre production is mirrored in contemporary dance developing a parallel mistrust for the languages of the body (Keefe and Murray 24). Where there is distrust of language, whether it is communicated through speech or action, the body remains useful to performance by the immediate communication achieved by its presence. We may say that the result of the performance process can be called the performance aesthetic. Aesthetics are understood in a variety of ways, yet in performance terms, it may be argued that the aesthetic intention is to present a certain reality.

Following this line of thought, the performing body is central to the theatrical aesthetic. Lehmann argues that while the “dramatic process occurred between the bodies; the post-dramatic process occurs *with/ on/ to* the body” (163). Here, Lehmann suggests that the dramatic body has less agency in performance when it is a lone presence; that the dramatic process requires performing bodies to interact with one another, either directly or indirectly. Of course, the post-dramatic process is not without interaction between bodies. Instead, the point would seem to be that the dramatic process utilises the interaction of bodies for dramatic purposes; the creation of tension, conflict, suspense and ultimately resolution. If the same cannot be said of the post-dramatic process, does this mean that the performing body has greater agency in the process? Lehmann indicates that the post-dramatic process occurs with the body, on the body and to the body; even though this interaction seems more advanced than that of the dramatic process, it suggests that the body is an element of the aesthetic process rather than an independent factor within it. It is a case of the performing body being utilised within the process or to further the process. Of the Wooster Group production

of *Hamlet*, Parker-Starbuck asserts: “This Hamlet then, is a play that ‘takes up the bodies’ – historical, material, disembodied, doubled. It performs and re-performs theatre itself, showing, in a digital, post-dramatic time concerned with media representation and remediation, how theatre bodies matter” (Parker-Starbuck 26). This utilisation of the performing body should not be framed in positive or negative terms; rather, it should simply be viewed as the contribution of the body to the performance process. In any case, the performing body is all that is or can be made part of the theatrical aesthetic. Henri Lefebvre argues that “Western philosophy has *betrayed* the body; it has actively participated in the great process of metaphorization that has *abandoned* the body; and it has *denied* the body. The living body, being at once ‘subject’ and ‘object’, cannot tolerate such conceptual division, and consequently philosophical concepts fall into the category of the ‘signs of non-body’” (Lefebvre 407). On the contrary, Lehmann posits that post-dramatic theatre can “retrieve the possibility of returning to things their value and to the human actors the experience of ‘thing-ness’ that has become alien to them” (165). Within the post-dramatic aesthetic, Lehmann is noting that the performing body observes the duality of being both subject and object in performance rather than what Lefebvre fears is a process of the body becoming nothing. Implicit in this statement is the variation from the dramatic model which renders the performing body as a representation of subject (character) and thus creates an inseparable performer/character relationship. As Jürs-Munby observes of contemporary theatre: “Sometimes character makes way for a focus on the body, in what might be taken as a revalorisation of the ‘material’ components of theatre, or of ‘appearance’ divorced in some way from ‘meaning’” (Jürs-Munby, Carroll and Giles 3). Lehmann suggests that the post-dramatic process welcomes the separation of performer from persona as an aesthetic quality.

While the dramatic theatre conceals the process of the body in the role, postdramatic theatre aims at the public exhibition of the body, its deterioration in an act that does not allow for a clear separation of art and reality. It does not conceal the fact that the body is moribund but rather emphasizes it (Lehmann, 166).

The reality of the performer and the art of the performer are inseparable in their habitation of one body, especially when the body is explicitly presented. Nevertheless,

it is an aesthetic process to exhibit the performing body and allow the self-conscious performer to be present. Practitioners can go about achieving the subject/object duality in a number of ways: repetition, testimony and breaking the performance are some common strategies. Lehmann cites reduction of pace as another key expression of the body within the performance, when movement “is slowed down to such an extent that the time of its development itself seems to be enlarged as through a magnifying glass, the body itself is inevitably exposed in its concreteness” (Lehmann 164). Needless to say, the strategies that can be employed are varied but placing them within the performance process indicates that the utility of the body in the performance aesthetic as both subject and object. One can also argue that subject and object can be taken as combination rather than opposition when presented in this manner. In other words, the performing body is somewhere between being present as a subject or object or, as will be considered, not being present at all.

In performance terms, there are conflicting ways of employing a body in performance and they are typically separated by performance mode into presentation and representation. Presentation and representation are set as binary oppositions, claimed from differing performance modes as unique to them. The process of representation is deemed to be an inherently dramatic act while presentation is established as at least postmodern, at most definitive of post-dramatic form. Derrida argues that the general structure of the theatre of representation, “in which each agency is linked to all the others by representation, in which the representability of the living present is dissimulated or dissolved, suppressed or deported within the infinite chain of representations – this structure has never been modified” (Derrida 297). Barthes suggests that representation is not defined directly by imitation and that, even if one gets rid of notions of the ‘real’, “there will still be representation for so long as a subject (author, reader, spectator or voyeur) casts his *gaze* towards a horizon on which he cuts out the base of a triangle, his eye (or his mind) forming the apex” (69). Derrida argues that representation has always already begun and “therefore has no end. But one can conceive of the closure of that which is without end. Closure is the circular limit within which the repetition of difference infinitely repeats itself” (Derrida 316). Representation is treated as a dramatic convention, to the extent that it is perceived as

consummate with the dramatic personae or character. “Even the actor’s art is subservient to the absoluteness of the Drama. The actor-role relationship should not be visible. Indeed, the actor and the character should unite to create a single personage” (Szondi 8-9). To perform dramatically is to represent a character, as it were. Although the performer is still present, it is the created character that a dramatic audience are trained to see. Representation is granted such an important role within modern dramatic theatre as it is considered to be an evolution of the *‘mimesis’* which Aristotle proposes in the *‘Poetics’*. But according to Shepherd and Wallis, *mimesis* ‘has no fixed, reliable or agreed English equivalent. [...] The attempt to translate it immediately becomes an act of interpretation, and hence of debate. Much of the writing about mimesis is debate as to its meaning” (212). Whether or not representation directly correlates with what Aristotle means by mimesis, representation is a close equivalent and it is typically accepted in place of mimesis in contemporary theatre. In one sense, that gives representation an authority of its own, but this is a style that is challenged in its own ways. Peggy Phelan argues that “representation produces ruptures and gaps; it fails to reproduce the real exactly” (*Unmarked* 2). Here, Phelan opens a deeper philosophical debate as to whether or not theatre can reproduce a real experience.

To argue a contrary position, the essential consideration is whether or not representation implies a reproduction entirely faithful to the real. If we return to the notion of mimesis and representation as similar – if not the same – we can see that one reading of either is hardly entirely accurate. J. Michael Walton supports the interpretation of mimesis as ‘representation’, particularly in terms of Aristotle’s definition of the tragedy (Walton 19) while D. W. Lucas prefers ‘imitation’, although he acknowledges that ‘represent’ is as plausible an interpretation as ‘indicate’, ‘suggest’, or ‘express’ (Lucas 258-259). When taken to mean imitation, mimesis is either interpreted as direct or creative copying. Direct copying is taken to imply that there is no artistry in the act of mimesis, but Lucas challenges this idea, proposing instead that “the general inadequacy of Greek accounts of the arts is due not so much to the associations of [mimesis] as to the absence of any other [word] which can express the idea of imaginative creation.” Lucas points to one exception - from the third century A.D. – of Philostratus who used ‘phantasia’ to express the imaginative process” (Lucas 258). Nevertheless, the absence of an agreeable equivalent for mimesis immediately

sends interpretation of Aristotle in multiple ways. Even if one were to account for 'phantasia', the closest parallels in contemporary language for mimesis and phantasia would appear to be mimicry and fantasy; two terms which are no more equal than the various interpretations of mimesis alone. Alternatively, Derrida pushes for theatre to destroy imitation altogether, insisting that more than any other art, theatre "has been marked by the labor of total representation in which the affirmation of life lets itself be doubled and emptied by negation. This representation, whose structure is imprinted not only on the art, but on the entire culture of the West (its religions, philosophies, politics), therefore designates more than just a particular type of theatrical construction" (Derrida 295). In this way, representation is more than a theatrical form for Derrida – it is the process of imitation that allows those living in the West to not only learn but repeat the ideas of Western culture. Theatre of representation, for all of its mimetic form, is a pervasive reinforcement of Western culture.

The opposition of presentation and representation is further problematized in that it is equally possible to argue that either presentation or representation are not strictly controlled by performance modes and therefore can be employed at any time in any performance. Presenting the body is almost taken for granted as the immediate existence of a body before a spectator for a performance constitutes a presentation of a body. "As an artform theatre consciously exhibits the body. A body that is exhibited to others is almost always prepared for it, however informally" (Shepherd 5). As such, one could argue that a body is always presented in performance. As Parker-Starbuck notes in the Wooster Group's *Hamlet*, "it evokes other bodies, bodies lost and mediatized, but can never replicate them fully" (Parker-Starbuck 30). In this way, post-dramatic form allows for a presentation of the body without a simplified reliance on physical presence or absence, but on layers of presence and modes of 'making present'. That the lines between presentation and representation should be blurred is hardly surprising in contemporary performance terms. Among the trends Johannes Birringer notes in contemporary performance, he includes the "cross-cultural conversion and internationalisation of performance vocabularies" (Birringer 19). Though Birringer may refer in the main to dance and its integration of technology, theatrical forms are evolving through conversion as well as by expanding their performance vocabularies. In this context, it should be anticipated that the dramatic and post-dramatic modes will

trade off from one another, experimenting in new means of performance or re-inventing pre-existing forms. Presentation and representation cannot belong to only one mode in this environment. De Marinis says that “while it is very difficult, if not impossible, to find representational performances where there is a complete absence of some presentational and self-reflexive element [...], it seems equally difficult to imagine performances of a presentational type that are completely lacking in representational and symbolic components” (De Marinis 49). So if presentational and representational conventions are not a binary opposition but rather equally employable, where is the basis of an argument for their difference?

Presentation and representation contrast in how they are performed, though the basis for any argument is what they desire to exhibit. In processing the ideas of Artaud, Derrida states that “The theatre of cruelty is not a representation. It is life itself, in the extent to which life is unrepresentable. Life is the nonrepresentable origin of representation” (Derrida 294). Indeed, all performance through bodies is interpreted for reflections on human life, whether these reflections are consciously or unconsciously made. The simple act of exhibiting a body on a stage for spectators is to make an exhibition of life. As Peggy Phelan noted earlier, no representation can fully reproduce the real of what is observed and Derrida alludes to the difficulty in achieving a representation that might offer “the autopresentation of pure visibility and even pure sensibility” (Derrida 300). While the desire is to produce a representation of the real, Sara Jane Bailes argues that contemporary theatre has created a paradox in which failing in representation may still be perceived as a success. Bailes explains that “theatre holds up a profound and humorous metaphor for death. It is bound to the outcome of representational failure because its means predict its end [...] even when representation is seen to fail, it articulates a kind of success, but one that is not contingent upon “winning”. As theatre fails, it negotiates the conditions of production so that failure surfaces as an alternative way of playing the game” (Bailes 77). One senses that regardless of presentation or representation as the leading performance style and perhaps even regardless of the dramatic or post-dramatic as the performance mode, theatrical performance is fundamentally obsessed with mortality, a concept best formed by the human body. Of course an argument can be split between theatre being

about either life or death, but theatre can simply be about both; under the unifying term of mortality (appropriately broad and generic).

Before moving too far beyond this point, it is worth noting the level of ambivalence that exists in theatrical performance and largely within theatre theory regarding the body. Arguments of theatre as life or death have an internal logic which render them passionate and appealing. However, the weakness may well be in too specific an approach. If we are to take mortality as the core subject of performance and the body as mortality's point of expression, we immediately have a problem with no evident solution. Though presence and absence will be discussed in further detail after dealing with the performing body, it seems pertinent at this juncture to express that mortality is not stringently corporeal in its realisation. Returning to the troubles of binary oppositions, mortality is most evident through extremes of absence and presence rather than as a tangible presence of its own. On the whole, this will seem like nothing new as theatrical performance has an extensive history of attempting to express the intangible. As David E.R. George notes: "Performance can [be reiterated] only in the broadest terms; its secrets lie elsewhere – in the unrepeatable" (Keefe and Murray 28). While battling with definitions of what post-dramatic is not, it has become clear that some ideas are not as solid as others in definitive terms. Yet, this malleability should not be overlooked as a crucial aspect of their identity: the unrepeatable, mortality - ideas that are beyond representation and yet so often at the core of theatrical performance.

By way of parting from the discussion of presentation and representation, Jacques Derrida's attempts to isolate specific meanings from the writings of Antonin Artaud are of particular interest; 'representation as the auto-presentation of pure visibility and even pure sensibility'. In attempting to process Artaud, Derrida needs further delimitation of this "extreme and difficult sense of spectacular representation" (Auslander, *Performance* 9). A shrewder reading of this thought can be found in Derrida's notes that follow his essay, further analysing the sentence fragment as: "That re[-]presentation is the auto-presentation of pure visibility and pure sensibility, amounts to postulating that presence is an effect of repetition" (Auslander, *Performance* 22). In this fragmented approach to Artaud's writing, the word-play that Derrida engages in and particularly the function of [re] within chosen terms deserves

closer attention. This play with words can expand to where presentation as a stem can either become representation or re-presentation – two terms that can be interpreted quite differently. Also of significance is the (postulated) relation of presence to repetition. As an idea for performance and accounting for the thought which has gone before – finding performance in the unrepeatable – it is worth suggesting that repetition in performance achieves something more than either presentation or representation can alone; repetition makes mortality present as the unrepeatable quality of performance.

If we go beyond presentation or representation, we can consider the performing body in all of its theatrical contexts. Simon Shepherd argues that the body “is a material presence. As such it produces knowledge of itself and impacts upon the senses of others” (Shepherd 6). This material presence is the root of the body in the space and it is from this root position that the performing body can evolve. Ana Sanchez-Colberg states: “Before there is movement, there is a body in space – a body that has orientation, dimensions, inclination, that by virtue of just existing occupies and produces space. Movement follows from this first principle” (Keefe and Murray 24). Shepherd and Sanchez-Colberg both identify the potentiality of a body in space and crucially, both clearly indicate that this is not yet necessarily a body in performance. I would suggest that the performing body is a different entity to a body which is simply exhibited in a space. Lehmann argues that a theatre of the body “is a theatre of potentiality turning to the unplannable ‘in-between-the-bodies’ and bringing to the fore the potential as a threatening dispossession [...] and simultaneously as a promise” (Lehmann 163). Returning once again to the notion of intangible ideas, potentiality occupies a similar level to mortality; in many ways, comparison is welcome between the two. After all, what is mortality but the potential for existence between life and death? As such, the body in performance observes moments of potentiality not for any clarity in expressing that moment, but for rendering the moment open to all possibility, positive and negative. To limit possibility in a moment of potentiality is at its very centre a denial of free will; a definitive if equally intangible aspect of mortality. Lehmann goes on to argue that ‘the body did not have to content itself with being a signifier but could be an *agent provocateur* of an experience without ‘meaning’, an experience aimed not at the realization of a reality and meaning but at the experience of potentiality” (162-



3). To this end, the experience of potentiality is – or at least should be – as fulfilling if not more so than any pre-conceived narrative resolution.

Through the performing body, we are provoked into considering our own bodies and the potentiality that is available to us in all our moments of transition. Haughton identifies the importance of the performing body being present in ANU Productions' *Laundry* where, "in place of the women's silence, there were performers who spoke directly to audience participants. Instead of being absent and invisible, the women were seen and acknowledged, and they offered physical contact" (Haughton, "From Laundries to Labour Camps" 69). Birringer suggests that "performance exercises a consciousness of movement and energy potentials and an organic conscience that elude analytical languages, which seek to capture, determine, or psychoanalyze corporeal realities and cast creative sensory processes into logocentric values. The human body is not a concept. It is irreplaceable" (12). Indeed, the body and its specific qualities inherit a language that is not equalled by speech-language. This point is a frustration for any interpretation of the performing body: how can something that we know exists on a sensory level be so intangible on a literal level? According to Fischer-Lichte, the existential tension between "being" and "having" a body for performers "provides the conditions of possibility for generating corporeality in performance and enables the audience's specific perception of such corporeality onstage" (77). There is a tension between being and having a body for performers and in many ways this is the fundamental challenge between presentation and representation. Of course, this tension is also important to the performing body and attempts to analyse it. As bearers of bodies, we intuitively know our own physical conditions through having; that is to say, by having bodies we understand their mechanics on a personal level. However, the difficulties arise when we are tasked with intellectualising our body mechanics in anything other than a physical expression. Lehmann addresses 'the body as an incomprehensible and simultaneously unbearable reality' (164). The performing body is a troubling manifestation, one that allows for potentiality, denies easy comprehension in languages other than its own and yet it is known to each individual on a deeply personal level. Martina Seidl, in discussing part of the work of Lundahl and Seidl, says:

You're blindfolded, the voice is saying 'I'm still here', you know that soon there will be physical interaction because you're in the middle of an absence [of touch]. Therefore some people feel a heightened sense of presence, the kinesphere around the body; that the touch could come from any direction. Then, finally, when the touch is established on the left arm, the sense of presence around the body is more determined to this place. That's why the absence is important. (Machon 180).

In all, the performing body communicates the notion of "the reality of the performer, and the artificiality of performing" (Kershaw 156). This communication occurs through movement – physical expression that is intuitively understood and yet body actions in performance must be scrutinised for their self-referential nature. We can attempt to assess the reality of the performer through the metric of presence, but as will become clear, the body's potentiality is the intangible result of a body separated through presence and absence.

Indeed, all potentiality for performing bodies manifests in the balance between the presence and absence of the body. Elinor Fuchs suggests that the notion of theatrical presence "has two fundamental components: the unique self-completion of the world of the spectacle, and the circle of heightened awareness flowing from actor to spectator and back that sustains the world" (Auslander, *Performance* 109). For Fuchs, presence is a shared experience of performer and spectator but if presence and absence are considered to be intangible, there is no standard for performer or spectator to articulate such a shared experience. Fuchs sets this idea of shared presence in opposition to a theatre of absence which "disperses the center, displaces the Subject, destabilizes meaning" (Auslander, *Performance* 111). While Fuchs considers the effects of presence and absence for performers and spectators, the performance as a whole operates on its own standard of presence and absence. Giannachi and Kaye describe how – across the works they engage with – "the production and reception of "presence" are performed and interrogated over time, in operations between unobtainable moments of "absence" and "presence", between the "live" and the "simulated", and so in the implication of the one in the other" (241). Where Fuchs posits presence and absence as effects produced between performer and spectator by the performance,

Giannachi and Kaye engage with work which attempts to articulate presence and absence through performance. In both of these approaches, the struggle with the intangible quality of presence and absence is evident.

Giannachi and Kaye claim that “both as a phenomenon and in its representation, presence remains always in advance or before itself: always in emergence” (237). Where the performance reality is not questioned, this observation may not be apparent given that the conditions of performance are accepted as the present reality. That is to say that the performance is both present and presence without interrogation. However, when the performing reality is interrogated deeply, we may infer from performing bodies – characters or personas – that the body present is not being presented and the body presented is not present. Elinor Fuchs identifies this through the terms of presence and absence, noting that “Theatre is ever the presence of the absence and the absence of the presence. Both are component in its every motion” (Auslander, *Performance* 117). Fuchs suggests that presence and absence can only be understood in relation to one another and while this is true, it is not enough to assume they are binary opposites. De Marinis attempts to frame presence and absence as a binary for performances in a historical sense, but the result is that performances are either (partially) present or absent (64). Of course, this is not a clear-cut binary; the ‘partial’ is an allowance for nuance. Partial presence allows for performance to be simultaneously present and absent, which – at first reading, at least – presents a contradiction of terms. Yes, presence and absence are oppositional terms, but given that these terms exist in a sort of inter-relationship, these terms are rather two ends of a shared scale, such that between presence and absence there exists an intermediate entity: potentiality. In one sense, potentiality exists as the intermediary in all oppositions as the possibility to be one or the other or, in some way, both. However, in the case of presence and absence, potentiality to be one or other or both suggests that neither term can be completely realised on its own. Peggy Phelan argues that “to acknowledge the Other's (always partial) presence is to acknowledge one's own (always partial) absence” (149). As such, if presence and absence are always partial, complete presence or absence are not possible. Thus, all that remains is ambivalence

Indeed, the ‘always partial’ nature of presence and absence equates to the performing body as both subject and object. When the body – the *real* body – is thought

of as partial, it is not simply in terms of presence and absence but also of liveness. Fuchs observes that in contemporary performance “microphones and loudspeakers are used, often in such a way that it is not easy to associate a particular voice with the body from which it emanates, nor to be certain whether that voice is live or taped” (Auslander 117). While there is a tendency to consider disembodiment through technology in contemporary performance, these attempts are all focussed on the partial in performance; voices, images and bodies that are all present and absent. In any case, the post-dramatic process inevitably resists the realisation of one singular meaning. Even though Lehmann proposes that the impulse of post-dramatic theatre is “to realize the intensified presence of the human body” (163), the result is most often a realisation of the intensified potentiality of the human body.

Notions like presence and liveness can only be effectively considered at the moment of witnessing the performance act. This is not to clamour immediately for the ephemerality of theatre. Rather, it is to identify the means through which presence and liveness are conveyed. Chief among the means employed is the body and yet, the body in performance does not conform to any singular interpretation. Bodies in theatrical performance can present themselves, represent other bodies and perform movements of or beyond the body. Theatre “represents bodies and at the same time uses bodies as its main signifying material” (Lehmann 162). In the case of the Wooster Group’s *Hamlet*, Parker-Starbuck observes “an acting style that is completely mediated – their bodies (and perhaps now our own) are highly trained to move through and with the technology. They are virtuosic in their ability to seamlessly channel mediatized forms into an embodied form that somehow leaves them simultaneously disembodied” (Parker-Starbuck 31). Even with highly-mediatised bodies, it seems that the ambivalent partial state emerges most clearly as a means of physical communication.

## Rupturing the Drama; Disruption, Interruption, and Intervention

While there is an established craft for producing dramatic works, it is clear that the post-dramatic performance requires no less intention behind how it is composed – even if the performance sets out to be about nothing, as is the suggestion in *The Company's As You Are Now So Once Were We*. This production was first presented in the Space Upstairs at the Project Arts Centre as part of the Dublin Fringe Festival 2010, going on to win the Best Production award. With four competing interpretations of a day in Dublin city, the ensemble manipulate an arrangement of cardboard boxes onstage to form a variety of spaces from interior settings to exterior cityscapes. José Miguel Jimenez, creator and director, maintains that *As You Are Now So Once Were We* “is about nothing really. It’s about a day in which nothing special happens, a day that doesn’t exist beyond what each one of us sees and what you personally see.”<sup>1</sup> In her review of the re-staged presentation at the Peacock in 2011, Helen Meany observes that, as the ensemble “attempt to reconstruct their journey through Dublin, they forget the details and are fed cues by the others, each an unreliable narrator of their own life, but very certain about everyone else's” (Meany, *The Guardian*). Jimenez explains that the show is “more about the experience of reading *Ulysses* than about the story of *Ulysses* itself. It is about that unseeable and undefineable place where we are the same people living in the same place.”<sup>2</sup> Meany remarks on the construction of the performance:

Using their own names and creating the impression of making everything up as they go along, these actors meet the risk of extreme self-consciousness head on. This is, in fact, their subject: the unrepeatable moment that is the present, and the impossibility of experiencing it from anyone's perspective but one's own (Meany, *The Guardian*).

As Karen Jürs-Munby states, the ‘post’ of post-dramatic functions “as a rupture and a beyond” (Lehmann 2). In this way, post-dramatic should be considered in terms of theatre practices that relate to rather than separate from the dramatic. Even when

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<sup>1</sup> *The Company, As You Are Now So Once Were We* – Programme Notes

<sup>2</sup> *The Company, As You Are Now So Once Were We* – Programme Notes

post-dramatic work departs drastically from the dramatic form, it is fundamentally the drama that informs any such radical departure. Ultimately, when we consider performance, we must look at the points where post-dramatic ruptures with the dramatic. Indeed, Walsh observes that *The Company* draw attention to such ruptures in *As You Are Now So Once Were We*; which is “very much a piece about the creative process, in particular about collaborative theatre-making. [...] The attempt to collectively create a performance is turned into the production itself” (F. Walsh, *Reviews: Irish Theatre Magazine*).

It is important to note that theatrical experiments with form are in fact served by a sense of familiarity with the existing forms. Sidiropoulou notes that Aristotelian structure “has for centuries continued to provide comfort to spectators by perpetuating the illusion of order in a no-longer-orderly world” (Sidiropoulou 136). Perhaps this is one explicit difference between dramatic and post-dramatic forms – the fragmentation and multiplicity of post-dramatic theatre as alternative to the illusion of order, even in how the performance is structured. This is less a negation of dramatic form and more so an expression of other structural and theatrical possibilities. Indeed, as Michel Foucault states, “when one speaks of a system of formation, one does not only mean the juxtaposition, coexistence, or interaction of heterogeneous elements, but also the relation that is established between them - and in a well determined form - by discursive practice” (Foucault 80-81). Taking dramatic and post-dramatic as connected in theatre practice, it is possible to group the two together under the broader arc of performance modes. The term performance is employed somewhat loosely. Shepherd and Wallis see performance as an inclusive term that takes in performance genres such as music, dance theatre and performance art (1). While it is true that ‘performance’ as a term can be all-too liberally applied, Shepherd and Wallis astutely note that “to say that everything is performance is ultimately to say very little” (115). As such, restricting considerations of performance to theatre is a necessary step. Within theatre, the dramatic is historically perceived as the dominant mode and rather than simply ignoring this, it could be argued that the prevalence of drama in theatrical expression is responsible for the perception of drama and theatre as being one and the same. The post-dramatic form is as much a theatrical performance mode as the dramatic, but it has developed at the fringes of

theatrical practice. As Johannes Birringer explains, the “shifting of boundaries [...] is always confusing, especially if our imaginary has been applied to well-defined borders or well-defined cultural and gendered roles” (23).

In this way, the dramatic represents an approach to theatre that has a depth of history and practical exploration which renders it synonymous with theatre. The dramatic is the ‘well-defined’ approach to theatre, and as a consequence the post-dramatic continuously suffers from poor definition or definition in negative terms. Definition in negative terms or events where definition is resisted is a cause of frustration in dealing with post-dramatic performance. However, a closer reading will show that this resistance is towards one ‘single classification’ and as such, the artistic imperative of a post-dramatic performance is to offer broader interpretation. The negative inference is resistance of definition, whereas the perception in positive term is remaining open to a multiplicity of meaning. And yet, definitions of the post-dramatic in positive terms are possible but they begin by understanding the dramatic and post-dramatic in common more than otherwise considered when placed as a sort of binary opposition. This process begins on the broadest level, where within theatre, we can find the physical building or the theatre event; within the theatre event, we find production or performance; and within performance, we find the performance modes. These performance modes include (but are not limited to) the dramatic and post-dramatic. It is reasonable to suggest that the dramatic and post-dramatic share performative components. For instance, the theatrical quality of ephemerality is shared by the two modes. Peggy Phelan posits that performance honours “the idea that a limited number of people in a specific time/space frame can have an experience of value which leaves no visible trace afterward” (Phelan, *Unmarked* 149). De Marinis espouses the belief that “every theatrical performance (every ‘single’ theatrical occurrence) constitutes an unrepeatable, unique event, an ephemeral ‘production’ that is different each time in spite of all attempts at standardization and recording” (De Marinis 51). Ephemerality has an equal importance to both dramatic and post-dramatic forms and could be considered a quality of theatrical performance on a broader scale than specifically applying to any one performance mode in particular. In broad generic terms, there is ample space for comparison between the two modes without denying the specific

qualities which still pertain to each separately. However, given the nature of theatre as an art form, the distinctions between modes and separable categories are frequently blurred.

Within these performance modes, we can attempt to further categorise performance between representational, presentational, reproduction and production in terms of classifications. These categories will struggle to preserve clear distinctions, as Marco De Marinis surmises that these modes are frequently inter-mingled in performance, rendering one classification of a performance unfair, if not simply inaccurate. He goes on to say that “while it is very difficult, if not impossible, to find representational performances where there is a complete absence of some presentational and self-reflexive element [...], it seems equally difficult to imagine performances of a presentational type that are completely lacking in representational and symbolic components” (De Marinis 49). A common assertion of difference between the dramatic and post-dramatic is that dramatic performance is representational and post-dramatic is presentational. Yet, sharing the view of De Marinis, such an assertion is disputable. Indeed, Jen Harvie and Andy Lavender suggest that post-dramatic has moved on “towards a newer paradigm of presentation [...]; that can include representation, rather than hoping to supersede it, as in some postmodern theatre, or be effaced by it, as in much realism” (14). In any event, Phelan argues that “representation produces ruptures and gaps; it fails to reproduce the real exactly” (2). As such, representation cannot be an entirely satisfying performance strategy on its own, where the represented cannot be utterly reproduced. The inter-mingling of forms is perhaps closer to presenting what Baz Kershaw refers to as “the reality of the performer, and the artificiality of performing.” (156) The lines of difference that can be drawn between performance modes tend to hold little sway when those same performance modes are constantly redefining their own boundaries.

While the individual performance modes remain free to redefine themselves or evolve as required, searching for the broad points of connection develops a shared understanding for the specific modes and theatrical performance as a whole. Harvie and Lavender assert that “theatre-making in the first decade of the twenty-first century is plural, contingent, influenced by many sources and open to all sorts of influence and



experiment” (Harvie and Lavender 242). The relevance of these performance modes in contemporary theatre is in aiding the plural and open nature of theatrical practice, allowing for inter-mingling of forms and exchange of performance techniques that could not be exchanged without some common ground between what are deemed separate practices. In reality, practitioners of dramatic and post-dramatic theatre participate in the same theatre culture, often supporting each other as an artistic community if not also working together on collaborative projects. Emma Govan points out that “economic need, as well as artistic vision, is held accountable for changing work practices” (5). Whatever the reasoning, the result is that practitioners maintain broader networks and are exposed to a wider form of artistic expression than they may have been in other circumstances.

Ultimately, the blurring of distinctions between performance modes is in the hands of practitioners who broaden their ranges and experiment with newer forms of theatrical expression. These experiments pave the way for a contemporary theatre that, due to its constantly advancing and expanding nature, is in many ways only worth defining in broader terms. As Sidiropoulou observes, “occasionally, the random selection of and mixture of diverse as well as distracting elements, rather than provide the desired critical distance between the spectator and the spectacle, altogether disengages the audience from the experience of genuinely processing and appreciating the performance” (76).

## Spectatorship

### Spectating the Everyday

While it may be simplistic, it is nonetheless fair to observe that the conditions for spectators have changed vastly in the space of a few short decades. For example, the following assertion from Peter Szondi is certainly debateable in present circumstances:

The theatregoer is an observer – silent, with hands tied, lamed by the impact of this world. This total passivity will, however (and therein lies the dramatic experience), be converted into irrational activity. He who was the spectator is pulled into the dramatic event, becomes the person speaking (through the mouths of all the characters, of course). The spectator-Drama relationship is one of complete separation or complete identity, not one in which the spectator invades the Drama or is addressed through the Drama (Szondi 8).

In postmodernity, the everyday has become a spectator event; 24 hour news coverage, reality television, online broadcasting, social media, on-demand viewing – all of these aspects of postmodernity have contributed to the condition of spectatorship losing its specific venues and blurring with everyday experience. The everyday, it seems, is now as much to be spectated as the event. Of course, the vital aspect of theatre that is not lost through this shift in the postmodern spectator is in the live interaction of the performance event. As Ubersfeld points out: “The establishment of physical relations between actors cannot be done without the intervention of the attending public. What is presented on stage is never merely a binary or triangular relation between actors; it is always a complex relationship in which the spectator plays a part” (Ubersfeld 112). In many ways, recent theatre is displaying a prioritisation of the spectator – for example, ANU state that the spectator is at the centre of the work they make. Miriam Haughton observes that in “placing the spectator at the centre of the work and encouraging each spectator to engage with the performance, this post-dramatic style ensures that each experience is unique. Each audience participant has the opportunity to participate in the writing of the performance” (Haughton, “From Laundries to Labour Camps” 73).

Perhaps what is most telling in the work of ANU, though, is the intervention that they make in the spectatorship of the everyday, blurring a thin line between reality and fiction to a degree that unsettles the spectator and forces them to question what it truly is to spectate. However, the emphasis on the spectator in ANU's work is something that spectators are now aware of, as Peter Crawley suggests:

Such has been the achievement of ANU Productions' masterful Monto Cycle [...] that the audience for this fourth and final piece no longer arrives unsuspecting. This person approaching in the street must be a performer, you think, waiting for *Vardo* to begin, before they drift past, just a person again. For a moment, it feels as though the slyest possible conclusion to director Louise Lowe's 100-year history of the north inner city area would be to leave us alone and guessing (Crawley, *Irish Times*).

Even with prior awareness, the spectator-centred work can manage to disrupt our experience of the everyday, making the familiar unfamiliar. As much as theatre-makers are affected by the transformations of cultural experience, so too are spectators. In postmodernity, this means that spectators regard grand narratives with incredulity as they are equally affected by them. Barthes states that "narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative" (79). In this way, ANU's Monto cycle makes spectators intensely aware of the narratives we take for granted in everyday experience. With a similar experience to that of Peter Crawley waiting for *Vardo*, Haughton shares that, before entering the performance of *Laundry*, "local residents watched the waiting participants as we watched them. In this way, the social history of the area was as performative as was the performance proper, taking place inside the convent building" (Haughton, "From Laundries to Labour Camps" 75). And yet, it would be problematic to suggest that either performance might have begun while waiting in these examples, as Sidiropoulou claims that "a piece of theatre is effectively set in motion only when the spectators decide to embark on the journey of interpretation" (Sidiropoulou 140) Relating this to Crawley's experience waiting for *Vardo* to begin, what the spectator interprets as the performance can begin and – as Crawley ponders – potentially develop in the absence of a performer.

Taking these responses into account, it is clear that the crucial aspect of spectator-centred work is the relation between spectator and performance. As such, this demands interaction for a performance to truly begin. Josephine Machon cites Nicolas Bourriaud in asserting that “artists who explore relational form create work which cannot be fixed, is always in a state of becoming, due to its need for a live interaction with its receiver/participant” (Machon 120-121). Bourriaud, in turn, attempts to process Felix Guattari’s aesthetic reading of the “partial object”, surmising that the artwork “is the opposite of the *buffer* defined by classical aesthetic perception, exercised on finished objects and closed entities. This aesthetic fluidity cannot be detached from a questioning addressed at the work’s independence” (Bourriaud 100). In other terms, Sidiropoulou notes that altered approaches to theatrical composition pose “additional challenges to spectators who had been for centuries trained in perceiving theatre as a mostly linear, logo-centric arrangement of plot incidents. Ever since the physical productions of the 1960s, the audiences of radical performance have been asked to understand and appreciate the new “frame” of the stage, which often includes new unconventional spaces as well. In many cases the spectators encounter difficulties in absorbing an image-based and multi-perspectival performance event” (32). This is partly related to the new technologies available to theatre-makers, but also reflects attempts by practitioners to provoke spectators out of standard approaches to performance and into new engagements.

At the same time, theatre-makers are responding to the challenge of making performances to communicate with a spectatorship that form an unknown, even unknowable quantity until the performance begins. Dennis Kennedy posits that the separate meanings of audience and spectator (audience as “within hearing” while spectators are “looking on”) lead to broader theoretical debates on whether the auditory or visual quality of performance is more important. Thus, Kennedy concludes that the clearer definition is to assume audience means group and spectator means individual. (Kennedy 3) In this sense, spectatorship acknowledges that theatre audiences are ‘composed of individuals’ rather than a ‘homogenous collective’. Indeed, the audience is seen to be heterogeneous. Dan Venning suggests that if Kennedy has a definitive argument, “it is that audiences are absolutely central to performance, and

that an imagined boundary between spectator and participant breaks down upon close inspection” (Venning 494). If one accounts for Kennedy’s definition as a simplified analysis of the spectator, Susan Bennett complicates the set-up of ‘individual / group’ in a useful way through observing the social (audience) and private (individual) capacities of the spectator. (Bennett 125) In this way, defining the audience as a heterogeneous collective can be explained by the spectator’s internal awareness of a social duty to the audience through their own desire for reciprocity, which is an implicit reminder of social duty and participation in a broader sense. To phrase that in another way, each individual participates in the collective with a personal motivation while simultaneously understanding that every other individual is entitled to do the same. Assuming this interpretation, the audience is created not only by mass communion but also by respect of individuality.

If an audience is made up of individuals, what is the composition of the individual spectator? Kennedy puts it that a spectator is “a corporeal presence but a slippery concept” (Kennedy 3). Or, as Colette Conroy suggests; “The ‘ideal’ spectator exists only as an abstract idea” (Conroy 6). Here we have a separation of spectator into physical and metaphysical presence, although it is more common to find references to the physical spectator and speculative references to a spectator’s other aspects. Jacques Rancière analyses the challenge of understanding the spectator:

We understand that when grouped as an audience spectators do not make up a unitary psyche but respond to the same event in highly individual and sometimes idiosyncratic ways. [...] we might learn a little more by turning the problem around slightly, to ask questions about how the emotions of spectators are constructed or manipulated by different types of performance, and especially how arousal is encouraged, discouraged or tolerated. (Rancière 188)

Rancière offers a comprehensive list (gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, education, health and age) to show the extent of individual traits each spectator may have. It follows that the success of performance is not measured by the idiosyncrasies of the spectators but rather by the ability of the performance to illicit a reaction from the heterogeneous collective. Of course, the collective can have an influence on the individual, as Ubersfeld argues that a spectator is “never alone; as his or her eye takes in what is presented on the stage, it also takes in the other spectators, just as indeed

they observe him or her” (Ubersfeld 4). So, in an interesting parallel to the post-dramatic form, we see that the contemporary spectator is as much a figure of ambivalence and multiplicity.

Whether as individual or collective, the contemporary theatre-maker faces an ever-increasing challenge in arousing the sensibilities of the spectator. Erika Fischer-Lichte notes that reality “is increasingly experienced as a performance, as a kind of theatre production” (Fisher-Lichte, 1997: 218). It could be argued that spectatorship has become an ongoing part of contemporary life; to some extent, the lines that should divide the experience of reality and the experience of performance have been blurred to a point where we cannot separate one spectated event from the next. This is not perceived as such a radical idea of spectatorship, but rather as a cultural norm. For Jacques Rancière, being a spectator “is not some passive condition that we should transform into activity. It is our normal situation. [...] Every spectator is already an actor in her story; every actor, every man of action, is the spectator of the same story” (Rancière 17). As such, the audience and the spectators it contains are aware (to some extent) of events that are to be spectated – an individual is frequently made a spectator in their own everyday life. This contemporary sensibility is not beyond the reach of theatre-makers like ANU Productions, Ontroerend Goed, and The Company, who construct performances that invite spectators to challenge their own process of spectating and question the shaping of individual experience by society and media at large.

## Spectator Agency and Experience

In this environment of spectator-centred work, the question that remains is no less complicated: is the spectator the subject or object? As a word problem, the spectator being the centre of the work would imply subjectivity, but in practice, performances offer opportunities for transition in this regard. The extent that a spectator is granted agency, or restricted agency, as well as what conditions are placed on a performer or spectator to control agency are important aspects of the performer – spectator relationship in post-dramatic theatre. As a company that trades on the relationship of performer and spectator, Orozco and Boenisch identify Ontroerend Goed among the emerging Flemish artists in the twenty-first century “who most prominently expand what already appears to be a legacy” (Orozco and Boenisch 397). Ontroerend Goed’s *A Game of You* straddles the line between spectator as subject and spectator as object. Through different engagements with performers, the spectator is made to experience themselves in acts of performance – the spectator is a subject in this moment. However, spectators are made witness – through separation – of other spectators, rendering the fellow spectator as object. Through the use of this duality, the spectator becomes aware of both their subjectivity and objectivity. Receiving a CD at the end of the performance, the spectator will hear two people attempting to establish the spectator’s profile. In this brief audio piece, the spectator becomes both subject and object, yet also neither in any firm sense. This raises the question of spectator presence and absence and – fundamental to this topic – also spectator ambivalence.

An ambivalent state is entirely possible for the spectator and to some degree, it must be considered as the root position of a spectator. Although this may be assuming another version of an ‘ideal spectator’, there is more evidence to support the thesis that a spectator is entered into a state of flux, a state of potentiality, in the experience of theatrical performance. Lyotard notes that spectators are effectively placed as an intermediary of communication in terms of their relation to the performance; “No one, not even the least privileged among us, is ever entirely powerless over the messages that traverse and position him at the post of sender, addressee, or referent” (Lyotard 15). In this sense, a spectator occupies a liminal position in relation to the performance

they are spectating, bombarded with the ideas of performance yet also able to receive those ideas selectively. This ambivalence is necessary for the spectator; on a fundamental level, the spectator is invited to experience a performance and not form any complete judgement until the performance has ended. Furthermore, the relationship that the spectator is offered is separated from the performance to some extent. Nibbelink extends the view that “Singling out the spectator and acknowledging his or her individuality seems an appropriation of participatory culture and liberal market economics; strongly related to individualism and supposedly free choice” (Nibbelink 420). A spectator will never be as intimately connected to a performance as the creators and performers are – this is a distance caused by varying degrees of familiarity; the performer is already familiar with the performance while the spectator is only becoming familiar. Indeed, ‘becoming’ may be a significant term for spectatorship as it suggests the liminal position of transforming from one state into another, an act ‘in process’ rather than yet to begin or already complete.

At the same time, there is an implicit sense of agency in the unwritten contract of performer and spectator; while this agreement is intensified in immersive performance, so too is the duty of care. Machon states that, either explicitly or implicitly; “In all instances where an immersive world is established there will be a commitment to taking care of the audience within the event” (Machon 99). Machon continues that these ‘contracts’ “invite varying levels of agency and participation, according to how far the audience-participant is prepared to go” (Machon 100). Haughton identifies this aspect in ANU’s *Laundry*, stating that “While the performance offered participants the chance to participate in the performance to varying degrees, it did not enforce participation” (Haughton, “From Laundries to Labour Camps” 73). Other performances strike a different balance; for example, Nibbelink suggests that the camera click in *The Smile* is not a violation, but rather “the critical teasing of performer-spectator relationships. It is an inversion of conventional spatial positions, as the performer temporarily is an observer, or even voyeur, whereas the spectator occupies the centre of attention” (Nibbelink 414). Of course, the duty of care is conceived with protection of the performer in mind – a quality that Haughton observes in assisting a bathing performer with her bandages, one of the most delicate scenes of *Laundry*:



“Silently, but steadfastly observing this interaction was a stage manager, dressed like a nun, sitting on a stool, while reading a book and eating an apple” (Houghton, “From Laundries to Labour Camps” 81). From her experience, Sara Keating observes:

In this deliberately undefined theatrical situation, the audience is unsure of its role, is afraid to breach convention by breaking the dramatic frame, and yet within the confines of the dramatic illusion itself we are also made aware of how little power we wield: the performance will continue unfold no matter our intervention (Keating, *Reviews: Irish Theatre Magazine*).

At the other end of the scale, Nibbelink insists that Ontroerend Goed extend the permission of the spectator to testing their boundaries. “Ontroerend Goed approaches all the staged encounters as acts of providing particular conditions, places of potentiality which are actualized by the specific encounter taking place. In the end the spectators’ personal responses to intimate or intrusive behaviour define the content of the scene, and of the performance as a whole” (Nibbelink 414). Indeed, Machon suggests that when executed correctly, immersive theatres “allow the experience to feel free and lead to creative agency, enabling artists and audience to make the work together. They invite / require a plurality of experiences and responses which can emancipate the audience-participant within the process” (Machon 144).

Creating interruptions in an otherwise flowing performance is not simply a performance strategy. As Ubersfeld argues: “Theatre does more than just awaken spectators’ fantasies. It can also sometimes awaken their consciences, and perhaps the two go together” (Ubersfeld 30). That is to say, multiple strategies ranging from the fictional to the intensely real are in play in post-dramatic theatre to provoke other modes of response from spectators. The capacity to manipulate the spectator is only one side of the theatrical dynamic; in terms of spectator agency, theatre-makers must appreciate the implicit duty of care. When asked to define his work, Adrian Howells responds:

I think it’s ‘a loving manipulation’; the way that a parent who so loves their child might manipulate them because they want them to have a particular experience that’s going to be safe, ‘boundaried’. I think that’s quite a good definition,

‘loving-manipulation’, because there’s always a tendency to think that manipulation is a negative thing because it takes away agency and ownership from individuals. Something I’m very aware of is empowering individuals to have agency (Machon 263).

As a spectator arrives to the theatre with this agency intact, the game of performance centres not only on what a performer must do to change the spectator’s position, but also on what a spectator may do to maintain their agency. Different performance strategies yield a variety of results. ANU’s *The Boys of Foley Street* places spectators in scenes that are not always clearly demarcated from reality, forcing the spectator to choose their role; participant, witness, or spectator (in the specific sense of “onlooker”). Susan Conley describes *The Boys of Foley Street* as a constant challenge to the witness’ boundaries; “a space in which all expectations of safety are thrown into question. This feels unbelievably dangerous. There is this terrible tension between ‘this is only a show’ and ‘holy crap, am I really getting into this car, even if this is in fact only a show?’ We are forced to respond to queries, not only because the querent is standing right up in our faces, but also because it would be anti-social not to do so. In some instances, it would actually be inhuman not to do so” (Conley, *Reviews: Irish Theatre Magazine*). Conley indicates that by embracing the invitation to exceed passive reception, the spectator leaves the performance with an awareness of their agency and capacity for change on a broader, societal scale. In each performance moment, what remains consistent is that spectator agency is challenged, even provoked, to an extent that the response is intrinsically individual. For instance, Susan Conley describes the range of choices, if not dilemmas, that *The Boys of Foley Street* poses for the spectator:

We are powerless to look away from what unfolds before us, and are transformed not so much into participants as accomplices. When a young lad shoves an iPhone in my hand and tells me to hold onto it, I tuck it up my sleeve, and fold my arms behind my back. When his ma shows up and practically strips him down in the alley, checking for drugs, I start thinking of ways I can get rid of the phone, because she’ll eat the head off me if she finds it on me — there’s a drain, off to the left, I can tuck it in there maybe, or maybe, I can just let it fall to

the ground and I'll slip off up to the street? (Conley, *Reviews: Irish Theatre Magazine*)

For the contemporary spectator, there is more than response; there are modes of spectating that react to the performance and change in energy and sensation just as the performance is able to do. These interventions or interruptions for the spectator are moments of potential wherein the spectator may reflect, detaching themselves from the performance in a temporary way, deciding to dis-engage completely or either re-engage as before or re-engage in a new way. There are a variety of ways to achieve such an interruption; for example, Aronson observes that the moment a spectator is acknowledged in a performance, "our own reality, our own presence, is somehow brought into question" (Aronson, 2005; 100). Of course, these interruptions also assert the ambivalent position of the spectator as not stable, always in question, or – to be direct – that physical presence does not assume full participation in the performance. A full house is a commercial ideal for theatre, yet further interpretation may suggest that the artistic aim of theatre for communication and engagement is not achieved by virtue of an audience being physically present. This physical presence does not equate to mental connection with the performance, which reaffirms Kennedy's evaluation of the spectator: a corporeal presence but a slippery concept. Surely full attendance is equal to full attention? It is an understandable expectation and one that is formed upon the established binary of presence to absence; a spectator that is present must be the opposite condition of a spectator being absent. However, the circular logic of this position is so firmly rooted in the validity of the binary opposition of presence and absence that it fails at the earliest consideration of some intermediate state of being.

Being a spectator is to fluctuate between varying positions in the self-conscious act of spectating. Ontroerend Goed's *A Game of You* invites the spectator in to a participative, almost collaborative process where either complicit or resistant, the spectator leaves the performance with a keener sense of their agency within a performance. While Nibbelink allows that perhaps nothing spectacular happens in *The Smile*, she concludes that visiting the performance "may lead instead to a rediscovery of something quite ordinary, yet precious: the experience of one's presence in the work; the awareness of one's senses and how they (dis)function; the perception of proximity

of human beings; the impression of slowing-down towards the starting point of theatre: the direct encounter between performers and spectators” (Nibbelink 419). The provocation of a spectator’s sensibilities is a hallmark of post-dramatic theatre. Lehmann poses the question: “What presents itself to the audience if not a presence that crosses itself out?” before arriving at the assertion that “presence is the effect not simply of perception but of the *desire* to see” (Lehmann 169). In this way, the spectator’s position in relation to a performance is mainly affected by the individual’s readiness to perceive. On a related point, Read argues that “the one state that is intolerable to theatre, that indeed denies the existence of theatre, is indifference” (Read 26). This is a specific kind of indifference for Read; not the kind that results in those not attending the theatre, but indifference of those in attendance through boredom or embarrassment. Should theatre render these spectators indifferent, without any desire to perceive something in performance, it must be considered a kind of failure. That said, Read’s choice of terms may be quibbled with by practitioners such as Robert Wilson who may argue that indifference is the enemy, while boredom and embarrassment can be actively felt. While Read asserts the intention of theatre is to evoke some response, the only tangible failure of which is indifference, Nibbelink notes the equal merit in spectators becoming reflexively conscious of the function and dysfunction of their own awareness.

This is a different result than an ambivalent spectator, where ambivalence is in tune with Lehmann’s notion of evenly-hovering attention – that is to say, taking in a performance without actively processing a defined response. An indifferent spectator is assured that they have not been stimulated by a performance. Of course, ambivalence and indifference are not presented as a new binary – an ambivalent position may ultimately arrive at indifference; as such, these terms do not represent an opposition in the clearest sense. The binary that persists is between subjectivity and objectivity, but the assertion being made is that spectators are able to shift between these positions. We have already considered how interruptions allow spectators to reflect on their own subjectivity. Sustained subjectivity is not possible and contemporary performance and even spectatorship do not encourage it. At the other end of the spectrum, objectivity is not a total possibility – assuming that this would infer a universally acceptable response

to performance. As Kennedy puts it: “If a universal exists, it cannot be in the way spectators experience meaning in the event of performance, or the way they connect (or do not connect) the performance to their lives” (Kennedy 13). Kennedy goes on to cite an array of potential reactions that individual spectators may have while present at a production of *Hamlet*; reactions that are by no means common to all. In a contemporary sense, this kind of objectivity is not encouraged either. If anything, it is the ambivalent shifting between these positions that is becoming the standard for experiencing performance.

Shifting between modes of reception rather than relying on established patterns, the contemporary spectator experience appeals to all sensory levels. It is not enough for theatre-makers to appeal to sight and sound in the digital age; these senses are overloaded with an array of messages on a daily basis. Indeed, as Ubersfeld claims, reducing “the theatrical message to the hearing or even the deciphering of signs would be [...] a sterile enterprise” (Ubersfeld 30). It would be a sterile enterprise to not explore the live capacity of theatre to affect a spectator’s experience in a live and present sense. Referring to the work of the Wooster Group, Bonnie Marranca states: “The production of affects is more important than representation” (Marranca 44). As we have considered, post-dramatic practitioners tend to centre their work on the spectator; phrasing that another way is to say that theatre-makers focus on the spectator’s experience of performance. To this end, there are various strategies employed by post-dramatic practitioners to affect spectator experience.

Performances that immerse the spectator in the world of the performance are perhaps the clearest examples of works intended to affect spectator experience. “Immersive theatre is discernible as that practice which actually allows you to be in ‘the playing area’ with the performers, physically interacting with them” (Machon 67). Sharing the performance space and having to interact in a present sense immediately unsettle the spectator from any established pattern of reception. This is less passive reception and more like experiencing an encounter. Nibbelink relates an encounter in *The Smile* where a scene is created through description before the spectator’s blindfold is lifted, causing a clash of the senses – the described against the observed. As Nibbelink posits: “the spectator is addressed as a sensory organism; instead of proposing sight as

the agent of 'true' knowledge, the scene focuses much more on how collaborative and disjointed sense mechanisms constitute different kinds of knowledge and modes of engagement with the world" (Nibbelink 418). Nibbelink goes on to assert that this scene shows that "senses do not work separately, but function together as active perceptual systems, and also may provide contradictory information" (Nibbelink 419). Through moments such as these, spectators both overcome standardised patterns of reception and actively experience what may be perceived as sensory biases. Machon goes further, suggesting that "creative agency experienced within the artwork of the audience-participant has the potential to lead to a political agency on an individual or collective level" (Machon 120). While the potential is there, it depends on the individual in terms of how they choose to process the experience.

As with participation in any encounter, the individual may also choose to distance themselves after the moment has passed. For Ubersfeld, the spectator "sees his or her fears and desires realized or exorcized without becoming their victim, yet not without his or her participation" (Ubersfeld 25). Participation is essential to the spectator's experience, yet there can be no control of how the individual spectator will articulate the experience beyond the performance. Reviewing *World's End Lane* in the *Re-Viewed* strand of Dublin Theatre Festival 2011, Peter Crawley remarks that;

I have not learned this history, but lived it; dumbly obeying and following strangers, listening to scandals, confessing secrets, conspiring with an anguished junkie, feeling unnerved and giddy by the one-on-one intimacy of Louise Lowe's production, agonising over my role as either participant, voyeur or non-intervening citizen, tumbling finally from its enthralling mesh of then and now in a daze of different perspectives (Crawley, *Blogs / Festival Hub: Irish Times*).

Machon argues that the idea of encounter is important as it "allows for, in fact invites, a plurality of experiences and responses to the work, helping to emancipate the receiver-participant within the process. It ensures that meaning is elaborated collectively, both amongst a community of participants in the event and between the performance itself and the participant/s" (Machon 121). In Crawley's experience of *World's End Lane*, the consideration given to the effects of his experience are obvious; confession, conspiracy, feeling, agony, to intervene or not intervene – the breadth of

this emotional response is indicative of the capacity of contemporary performance to affect spectator experience beyond prioritisation of sight and sound.

Yet, the undermining argument against immersive performance is that it presents a fiction, regardless of whatever marks of authenticity borne are presented. “A chair on the stage is not a chair in the real world. Spectators cannot go and sit on it, or move it somewhere else; for them it is forbidden, it does not exist. Everything that happens on stage [...] is marked with unreality” (Ubersfeld 24). The separation of performer and spectator through the illusory aspect of theatricalisation is implicit in theatre, another part of the unspoken contract, an expectation of spectator behaviour and limitation of one’s agency. In this case, one could observe that this particular behaviour is necessary for standard performance to proceed. Of course, unquestioning acceptance of behaviours of this kind are the very thing that experimental performances aim to disrupt. At the beginning of ANU’s *Laundry*, Sara Keating notes that:

[T]he audience is immediately separated. Although we experience the same scenes in different order, Lowe is interested in exploring the individual experience: both the subjective experience of the individual audience member and the individual stories of the various Maggie’s – as the inmates were known – who we meet on our journey through the abandoned building (Keating, *Reviews: Irish Theatre Magazine*).

In these disruptions of normal theatrical codes, it is vital that spectators are placed in a self-conscious relation to the performance to allow some release from the intensity of the experience. Ubersfeld shares the absurd story of a cowboy, attending his first theatrical performance, who draws his gun and aims at the villain onstage as an extreme contravention of a spectator’s assumed passivity. For Ubersfeld, the message is clear; “When you intensify the illusion and at the same time make it ever more impossible for people to do anything, revolt by a spectator who is uninitiated in the codes and is bowled over by this explosive contradiction can take this pathetic form” (Ubersfeld 25). ANU offer a level of self-awareness to the spectator throughout, encouraging a process of reflexivity. Sara Keating re-iterates that ANU allow this reflexive space to encourage each spectator to truly interrogate their own relationship to the work. “*Laundry* is not just an act of public disclosure but of social questioning, where we are asked to consider

our own role in perpetuating systemic corruption, and by placing us in such close proximity to history, Lowe is inviting us to question our own complicity” (Keating, *Reviews: Irish Theatre Magazine*). At all times, the spectator is encouraged to reflect upon the implications of these intimate performances in a broader sense, applying the experience of spectating a performance to the experience of spectating the everyday.

As such, intimacy can be a strategy that alters the spectator experience. Nibbelink notes that “intimacy is often evaluated as something positive. *The Smile* invites a slightly different understanding. Sometimes the performer comes too close, physically or mentally, breaking into the personal sphere, installing a surplus of intimacy” (Nibbelink 415). Expanding this broader argument, Lyn Gardner comments on the dependent, even vulnerable state that a spectator enters into for this performance:

You are taken down a flight of stairs, put in a wheelchair, have your hands tied together and are blindfolded. In this helpless state, you are wheeled into a space where smells are wafted under your nose, lights shone in your eyes and your face tickled. Entirely in someone else's power, you relinquish yourself to them - dancing when you are asked to dance, lying down on a bed when you are told to, and answering questions about yourself, some of them quite intimate. Somehow, it feels safe to speak (Gardner, *Stage / Theatreblog: The Guardian*).

Gardner illustrates Nibbelink’s point quite effectively as this is not a markedly positive intimacy; the spectator is ‘helpless’, entirely in someone else’s power. For this level of intimacy, there usually needs to be an established trust between people and yet, Ontroerend Goed’s ensemble assume permission is given by attendance. Of course, the counter-point is made that knowing less ensures spectators learn something about their own boundaries or limits of intimacy. Chris McCormack observes that by disabling certain senses and enabling others, “*The Smile Off Your Face* quite literally transports you to a different plane of experience. The flickering scents, the titillating soundscapes, and the delicate physicality of the performers all combine to create a space of ‘intimacy’” (McCormack). In creating a space of intimacy, Ontroerend Goed offer something in return for the trust placed in their hands by the spectator – provoking and evoking a space of experience and reflection that is unique to the individual spectator. As Nibbelink asserts, *The Smile Off Your Face* “permeates the private space of the



spectator, via address to various sensory modalities: next to the voices of the performers and the tactile encounters, the spectator is immersed in a soundscape of noises, chatter and laughter, and a scenography of scents. [...] Because the spectator cannot see, the performance highlights another personal space, namely that of the imagination” (Nibbelink 414). However, Lyn Gardner suggests that the success of *The Smile Off Your Face* “is less to do with its power as a piece of theatre and more to do with the fact that the more ways we are offered to communicate in the modern world, the lonelier we feel” (Gardner, *Stage / Theatreblog: The Guardian*).

Whether it is that spectators are curious as to what their own limits are or seeking an encounter of human intimacy in a world of digital communication, there is an immediate and present feeling about the performance. In terms of reflexivity, too, these intimate encounters are likely to challenge the spectator to re-evaluate their self-image, if not identity. Nibbelink shares this view, stating that the performers in *The Smile Off Your Face* do not seek intimacy for themselves, but instead invite spectators “to experience intimacy and explore their responses. Since spectators cannot see for most of the time, the aural and olfactory stimuli trigger personal fantasies, and in fact, confront spectators with their own thought patterns, hidden anxieties and desires, sense of humour, and so on” (Nibbelink 415). This is the idea of subjective response taken to its extreme, where the response is dependent on the individual’s senses and hence, where there is no experience that will match the individual spectator’s experience. As such, the intimacy of this production is not so much inter-personal as it is intra-personal; it is an opportunity for the individual to perceive themselves. Referring to *A Game of You*, the third and final piece of the *Internal* trilogy, Harry Browne simply states:

That’s what Ontroerend Goed does with its immersive theatre, full of direct one-to-one and many-to-one engagement with the audience. All the questions I asked on the way out of each of their shows (shows?) were about myself: my actions, my reactions, my expectations, my ‘performance’; literally, my character. Well, not quite all: I was also wondering, sort of, about other audience members (Browne).

Browne raises a curious observation here, similarly noted by Nibbelink when she suggests that “it is an interesting paradox that a focus on the single, individual spectator

eventually addresses the spectator's relational capacities" (Nibbelink 419). In a sense, this exemplifies the ambivalence of post-dramatic theatre as it centres on the individual spectator, creating a space for subjective experience that is reflexively aware of other possible subjective experiences. This is the experiential condition in postmodernity as Jameson sees it, in which "aesthetic attention finds itself transferred to the life of perception as such, abandoning the former object that organized it and returning into subjectivity, where it seems to offer a random and yet wide-ranging sampling of sensations, affectabilities and irritations in sense data and stimulations of all sorts and kinds" (Jameson 112). Returning to the example of Ontroerend Goed, Nibbelink posits that the "spatial and corporeally oriented spectatorship in *The Smile*, and the focus on spectators' particular response to intimacy might as well be regarded as (modest) explorations of proximity and engagement, constituting both an understanding of self and of the relation between self and world" (Nibbelink 419). Even in an experience of intimacy, the post-dramatic places the spectator in an ambivalent situation; making it possible to realise both an understanding of self and of the relation between self and world. Yet, the limits of experience are also exposed in our unconscious over-reliance on certain senses over others.

The spectator relies on basic senses in experiencing a performance with sight and sound forming the primary senses – the predominant senses appealed to by performance, although performance need not be so limited. Rancière claims that more than any other art, "theatre has been associated with the Romantic idea of an aesthetic revolution, changing not the mechanics of the state and laws, but the sensible forms of human experience" (Rancière 6). Here, Rancière describes the idea that theatre can achieve an intangible appeal as the effects on a spectator's senses have no accurate measurement. These senses are intended to be active in human experience. Dominic Johnson writes that "theatrical experience depends on complex relationships between vision and other forms of sensory perception. [...] Other types of experience, including the material, temporal, social, and environmental conditions of theatrical production and reception, supplement these stimuli" (Johnson 4). And yet, theatre mainly relies upon sight and sound, a similarity shared by cinema which encourages critical comparison between the two models.

In the 1970s, film theorists began to apply psychoanalysis to film in an attempt to discuss the spectator-screen relationship as well as the textual relationships within the film. Susan Hayward identifies Freud's theory of libido drives and Lacan's theory of the mirror stage as the eminent psychoanalytical concepts used to explain how cinema works at the level of the unconscious: "The spectator sits in a darkened room, desiring to look at the screen and deriving visual pleasure from what she or he sees" (Hayward 157). Christian Metz thinks of cinema as a technique of the imaginary, a thought that draws an obvious parallel with theatre, yet Metz is approaching cinema from a psychoanalytical position; "in which the imaginary, opposed to the symbolic but constantly imbricated with it, designates the basic lure of the ego, the definitive imprint of a before the Oedipus complex (which also continues after it), the durable mark of the mirror which alienates man in his own reflection and makes him the double of his double" (Metz 15). Of particular interest in this expression of the psychoanalytical analysis of cinema as a technique of the imaginary is not simply the mirror, but also the alienation from one's own reflection. If, through the act of spectating, a spectator becomes a double of their double, the spectator's experience is inherently ambivalent; at once, being themselves and – at the same time – alienated from being themselves. Peggy Phelan posits that "for the spectator the performance spectacle is itself a projection of the scenario in which her own desire takes place" (Phelan 152). To distil this idea further, the ambivalent position of the spectator is to witness an outward performance of some inner desire. As the spectator is observing the social procedure of the act of spectating, the only choice remaining is to project or, as Metz would put it, identify with an active performer. Metz analyses what he refers to as the "spectator-screen relationship as a mirror identification" (Metz 18). Interpreting this for theatre allows for a variety of dynamic relationships given the freedom of identification that a theatre spectator can avail of; spectator-performance, spectator-performer, spectator-spectator. However, in terms of identification and the position of Metz, we return to psychoanalysis and advance from signs and signifiers on to perceptions and what is perceived.

The spectator's experience is formed around perception of the performance. Kennedy suggests that we can use film theory to identify parallel trends in theatre

studies, but without what he refers to as “the critical trap of a determined subjectivity” (Kennedy 10). Remaining free from a determined subjectivity is important considering that placing the spectator as the subject of the gaze has variations of meaning for theatre. As Arnold Aronson states: “The very act of looking, even voyeuristically, implies a reciprocal action, a return of the gaze, and hence an illusion of reflection” (2005; 100). Whereas the gaze will not be returned directly in film, the live performance of theatre ensures that the spectator is instantly conscious of this voyeuristic position; subject to a return of the gaze, even. Or, as Bruce McConachie notes, “spectators tend to focus their attention on the same people or objects at which the actors are gazing” (24). As such, live performance can re-direct the spectator’s gaze. However, this theory may not be as evenly applicable to theatre as the spectator is in a much less controlled environment or less subject to an isolated perspective. Ranci re further explains the desire to move away from a dominant image/subject:

The confusion about active/passive audiences, and the place of propriety in the auditorium, underlines how the spectator presented theatrical modernism with one of its most persistent problems; in wishing to control perception it was working against its own best interests (Ranci re 173).

The distinctions between film and theatre emerge most clearly in the variable operations of the gaze in theatrical terms. Elinor Fuchs argues that “patrons who seek new forms in the theatre have become accustomed [...] to the multifocal scene and the diffused spectatorship it calls for” (92).

Diffused spectatorship, as Fuchs calls it, is an advance from the subjective gaze which works for film and one dominant image. In the case of theatre, the spectator may perceive several different activities in the context of a live performance. Susan Bennett asserts that spectators are “trained to be passive in their demonstrated behaviour during theatrical performance, but to be active in their decoding of the sign systems made available” (Bennett 206). Yet, where theatre presents competing images instead of one dominant image, the spectator is forced either to select and focus or to adopt some strategy to perceive a broad array – an attempt which cannot completely succeed. In engaging with post-dramatic theatre, Lehmann asserts that “everything depends on not understanding immediately. Rather one’s perception has to remain open for

connections, correspondences and clues at completely unexpected moments, perhaps casting what was said earlier in a completely new light. Thus, meaning remains in principle postponed.” Lehmann elaborates on this point, advising that “the spectator of postdramatic theatre is not prompted to process the perceived instantaneously but to postpone the production of meaning (semiosis) and to store the sensory impressions with ‘evenly hovering attention’” (87). Kennedy critiques such a position, arguing that even though Lehmann “says so much of value about how spectation has been revised in contemporary ‘postdramatic’ theatre, [Lehmann] does not attempt to drive beyond the semiotic; the sophistication of his analysis is not matched by any sophistication of the linguistic model” (Kennedy 12). There are many things happening on a stage that a spectator may perceive as important action and post-dramatic theatre in particular encourages the spectator to remain open to interpretations of actions onstage as ideas that are all simultaneously available, not necessarily requiring a narrative order or structuring in their interpretation. And so, performance continues to experiment with sensible forms of human experience, ranging from the boisterous to the subtle. As Lehmann notes, “Postdramatic theatre has come closer to the trivial and banal, the simplicity of an encounter, a look or a shared situation. With this, however, theatre also articulates a possible answer to the tedium of the daily flood of artificial formulas of intensification” (Lehmann 181).

The spectator of post-dramatic theatre is challenged to choose what to observe as a contrast to the concentrated focus of the gaze or the ordered interpretation of dramatic signs. Placing the choice with the spectator to perceive and (eventually) interpret is not a negation of the meaning-making process; rather, it is a throwing open of that process, a welcoming of varied interpretations. The diffused spectatorship of post-dramatic theatre allows for the individual to arrive at their own interpretation by their own path. Di Benedetto states that, when dealing with a multivalent medium like theatre, “the brain is continually sorting stimuli and augmenting its perception according to probable interpretations. We are in a state of flux” (171). In this way, offering the spectator a neat interpretation of the performance would be inconsistent with the reality of the theatrical medium. The spectator is in a state of flux and has chosen to be in this state; what is the merit in denying a spectator this opportunity? As

Aronson points out: “A change in an individual’s attitudes, associations, or beliefs is affected not through a straightforward presentation of ideas but through a fundamental restructuring of perception and understanding” (7). Placing the spectator in an environment that not only challenges their perception of the performance, but their perception in a greater sense seems to be an appropriate use of the medium. Lehmann states that, for post-dramatic theatre, “it is part of its constitution to hurt feelings, to produce shock and disorientation, which point the spectators to their own presence precisely through ‘amoral’, ‘asocial’ and seemingly ‘cynical’ events” (Lehmann 187). Di Benedetto shares this perspective, suggesting that transgression in performance “is the artist’s impulse to test the limits of social contracts by disrupting sensibilities, whether physical or mental, to release them from their complacency, even if just for a moment” (Di Benedetto 179). In a manner that illuminates large aspects of this discussion of spectatorship, Helena Grehan proposes that:

[If] a performance is successful in terms of its ability to engage spectators in a process of ethical reflection, it will leave them feeling ambivalent. This is not an ambivalence that means they will necessarily flounder or that they occupy a position of inertia, but instead, it is understood as a productive space that allows for ideas, traces, concepts and concerns in the performance to percolate (22).

By unsettling the spectator, or in offering the potential to reflect in complex, contradictory and hence productive ways, post-dramatic theatre facilitates “face to face” engagement, not in a simplistic sense, but rather as a means of generating interruptions for the spectator. In essence, an intense boredom is as much a sensation as an intense excitement. Elinor Fuchs observes that the ‘fascinated spectators’ of Robert Wilson’s *The Life and Times of Joseph Stalin* were “surprised to find that they were literally permitted to be absent: walking in and out of the performance, eating, napping, wandering visually, and daydreaming were all accepted behaviours in the theatre” (Fuchs 71). These strategies for providing spectators with new experiences and new engagements clearly move away from defined representational forms and actively seek alternative means to communicate with or beyond the sensible forms of human experience.

For example, sight is considered an automatic necessity for communication – and so, Ontroerend Goed’s production *The Smile off your Face* deprives the spectator of their sight by blindfold, activating other senses in the process; what Nibbelink refers to as “positioning the body as a web of sensation” (Nibbelink 419). Sound may be deemed essential to certain performances, and so WillFredd Theatre’s *FOLLOW* offers a fully-integrated performance that is accessible to both hearing and deaf audiences. A radio-play made visual without literal representation – this is what Pan Pan achieve in their productions of Samuel Beckett’s *All that Fall* and *Embers*. Sound and sight do not combine in any rigid sense in these productions; but it cannot be said that room is not left for spectators to form those connections. While it may be suggested that ANU’s *Laundry* reaches almost all sensory faculties, the dominant residue of the performance for a spectator is arguably the smell of carbolic soap. This smell is at once synonymous with the performance and also irretrievable from that context – the distinctive smell is forever embedded with memories and other sensory interpretations of the performance. To create an alternative metaphor, *Laundry* exists for the spectator post-performance as much in the mind’s nose as in the mind’s eye. This is not simply a process of innovation and experimentation in performance; it is also a challenge to spectators to demand a broader sensory experience and a statement that there is no solid rule regarding the sensible forms of communicating human experience, only accepted norms. Indeed, it would be reductive to apply any such rule to sensible forms of communication. As Colette Conroy posits, for performers and spectators, “the audience carry with them expectations about the conditions for representation. The process of renegotiating these conventions has been an important part of theatrical innovation in avant-garde and post-dramatic performance” (Conroy 34). Performer and spectator share the knowledge of what represents a convention, and even if the knowledge is not shared, the vital element of the performance will be the attempt to communicate something to the spectator. Conroy notes that theatre studies places spectators at the centre of their own perceptual universe, engaged in working out their own responses to the entire performance event with reference only to the event itself and their own knowledge and perception. Conroy asks: “Is spectatorship a form of experience, or is it a process of investigation?” (42). In the experiments of contemporary

post-dramatic theatre, there is no rule to say that spectatorship cannot be both a form of experience and a process of investigation.

Fundamentally, the argument that flows from Ranci re and that can be applied to Conroy in this moment is that the forms of sensible experience need to be challenged, re-imagined, or abandoned altogether in an evolutionary process of human communication. Placing the spectator at the centre of perception with only the event itself to perceive is not asking the spectator to become interpreter; rather, it is setting the performance the challenge to communicate and engage. Conroy observes that “we become spectators by physically attending a performance. We sit in the same room as the actors, and we look at the actions they perform with their bodies. We laugh or cry or yawn. But do we think or analyse or reflect with the body?” (18). This is a provocative question – what physicality does the spectator engage in, short of offering applause or perhaps a standing ovation? Is there a ‘shaking out’ of the experience required? Should the spectator be made to feel physical tingles in reaction to a performance? All too often, the demand is for spectators to articulate their response through words, but this is an alien language when the visceral experience is felt like a punch in the gut or a vibration in the spine. Physical experiences for spectators are thus of equal merit, but interesting for what they are trying to offer the spectator, an object to interpret or re-interpret – to learn again. For all the deep reflection that ANU provoke through their performance work, there is a consistent focus on social inequality. By immersing spectators in the lived realities – past and present – of the Monto area, ANU purposefully affect spectator experience to bear witness to a litany of otherwise hidden injustices. Haughton notes the power of ANU’s work remains in the spectator’s sensory experience:

Indeed, one cannot deny a history of trauma enacted in front of one’s eyes. One cannot forget the poisonous smell of carbolic soap (distributed to the penitents) that infiltrates the senses the moment the front double doors are shut and bolted. One cannot rebuff the unexpected grief and guilt that bubbles up from an overpowering experience of silence and isolation in performance. One cannot help but shudder, while gasping for fresh air, in a building locked tight, utterly deprived of open windows or bright light, and observing the shadowy



and ghostly movements behind sturdy doors. Most significantly, one cannot escape the emotional connection that is forged among audience participant, performer, and history (Haughton, *From Laundries to Labour Camps* 72).

In their work, Ontroerend Goed affect spectator experience to liberate each individual from established patterns of response. In either case, however, the inciting factor is to create a theatrical experience. Even though Lyn Gardner describes her own experience of *The Smile Off Your Face* as therapeutic, she argues that “there is a difference between theatre and therapy. Really good theatre might indeed be therapy but it is first and foremost theatre. Theatre is often extremely good social work -- and cheap at the price -- but the social work is a by-product, or bonus if you like, of the art” (Gardner, *Stage / Theatreblog: The Guardian*). We might apply this last point to ANU’s Monto cycle which undoubtedly inspires us to reconsider the established social narrative of the area, but through the medium of performance. In so doing, we might also advance Nibbelink’s point on the relational capacities of spectators to extend outwards in terms of social relations. As such, we can move from considerations of spectatorship as an individual or audience process to wider social contexts.

## Theatre as Social/Political process

Given the ordering of spectatorship, there is an obvious comparison to be made between the spectator and audience, and the individual and society. The central idea of both spectator and individual is agency (or *freedom* in a social context). As Dennis Kennedy states: “We still arrive at the theatre with our agency intact” (Kennedy 12). This is to say that each spectator chooses to participate in theatre of their own free will as each individual may participate in society. In a similar way, Nibbelink argues that collectivity is “not a homogenous community, nor an arbitrary gathering of individuals, but a re-articulation of the social: instead of communality the theatre of experience explores the potential of connectivity, with acknowledgement of the heterogeneity of any spectator in the theatre” (Nibbelink 419). This is a quality that Haughton also identifies in the spectator-centred works of ANU:

By making the audience matter, contemporary theatre and performance in Ireland make politics visible and accessible, opposing the passive and disorientating spaces of an increasingly postmodern neo-liberal society and culture (Haughton, *Flirting with the postmodern* 389).

However, the individual agency of each spectator is immediately set against the individual agency of other spectators in the compromising creation of the audience. This social process is intended to be harmonious for the most part. “Theatre by its nature is intensely social. Its live quality brings us together” (Di Benedetto 170). Bringing spectators together to form an audience may not explicitly remove individual agency of the spectator, but it must be observed that the social grouping demands social participation from each spectator; a kind of reciprocity in which each spectator must endeavour to not disrupt another spectator’s experience in expectation of the same. However, this also returns to the performer to not take advantage of the spectator relinquishing agency temporarily. Harry Browne criticises Ontroerend Goed for breaking this contract: “*A Game of You* ingeniously exploits our rather sweet and amazing willingness as audience members to try to be honest, to be ourselves, to go with the flow, to trust – but this time the emphasis is on the word ‘exploits’” (Browne). Where both sides have agency, neither wishes to be dominated or exploited by the

performance. The process of negotiating what power is lost or given is an overtly political act.

For Kennedy, the audience remains a grouping of individuals bound only by the conventions of theatre: “Individual spectators do not become a mob or a pack or a single psychological entity; they make the group but the group does not make them. They become an audience by virtue of their cooperative attendance, nothing more” (Kennedy 14). Speaking of agency in spectators, Alan Read claims that “as long as the audience is grouped together, assembled, there is no threat to any police that may wish to regulate it. It is, on the contrary, in the audience’s *decomposition* that the threat to hierarchies of organisation begins” (Read 179). Read is astute and subtle here, noting that an audience grouped together reinforces the social while a lone individual may distance themselves from social participation. The extent to which participating as a spectator is akin to social participation should not be underestimated. Lehmann notes that “the definition of the citizen as spectator is indispensable – a definition that is gaining more and more plausibility in the society of the media anyway” (Lehmann 183). Before a performance even begins, spectators must be keenly aware of the social participation they are engaged in. It is clear that each spectator will have participated in the theatre ritual to this stage; navigating the foyer, purchasing a ticket, gaining entry to the auditorium. Individually, these actions may seem trivial, but the fact is that each spectator shares these experiences before taking their seats. To some extent, the notion of shared experience prior to the performance enables the transition of spectators into audience members, and ultimately audience. Kennedy speculates that ‘if there is a universal in a gathered group it must be *the gathering itself*, in the simple act of being present, as simultaneous witnesses or participating observers, at an event offered for display *precisely for this group*” (Kennedy 14).

Issues arise when this unspoken contract between performer and spectator is altered; this most often occurs through invitation to participate. With an invitation to participate, there is a kind of politics in action – albeit, on an intimate level – that may be interpreted as one side seeking power over the other, or at the very least, as one side manipulating the other. Rancière frames this invitation in the context of quiz and game shows: “spectators in attendance are even more dedicated since they hope to be

chosen as participants (*The Price is Right*) or have accompanied previously selected contestants (*Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*). Thus the programmes are premised on a manipulated spectatorship, which opens the possibility that the game itself might be fixed” (Ranci re 181). Considering this theory in a theatrical context, this manipulation of the spectatorship is conflicting – performers need the participation, but need to remain secure in their performance. As such, the spectator can only hope to achieve honorary participant status; there can be no elevation to full performer status, so in a sense, the status of performer is elevated. In their production *Politik*, The Company’s ensemble of four performers – Nyree, Tanya, Rob and Brian – work through four established sequences in the story arc of robbing a bank; a meeting at a caf , the bank robbery, a night club celebration, and a meeting in the gang’s hideout. Sara Keating observes that *Politik* “begins with a manifesto about civic engagement in a modern democracy and political processes that are “alien to our daily lives”. In their quest for greater agency, the performers tell us, they tried and failed to join several political parties. So instead they decided to make a show in which the audience, as citizens, are allowed to take control of what happens on stage” (Keating, *Blogs / Festival Hub: Irish Times*). This structure is maintained through improvised versions – in version one, the performers run the sequence; in version two, each performer claims an area and assists the audience in re-designing the space of each sequence (obstacles in the caf , a queue in the bank, etc.); in version three, each performer takes on traits that the audience have democratically chosen; and in version four, each performer invites spectators to participate in a repetition of the sequences, albeit with alterations as a result. Alan O’Riordan wonders “What has this got to do with politics? [...] participation affects the system. We participate in the play and its narrative changes. The same goes for politics” (O’Riordan). Sara Keating also raises the spectator’s involvement, stating that The Company “see theatre as a site for social change and as their fictional scenario unfolds for a second and third time, the audience is made aware of their complicity in events” (Keating, *Blogs / Festival Hub: Irish Times*).

As the performance develops, ebbing and flowing in changing directions, spectators assume bit-parts in the reconstructed sequences as the ensemble – Nyree, Tanya, Rob and Brian – each assume responsibility for how the spectator is included. Of course, the control is understood to be with the performers – even in a situation where

it is assumed by an over-zealous spectator, it is not long being returned to the performers. In case there was any doubt, the ultimate resolution of the performance (a Mexican stand-off between Nyree, Tanya, Rob and Brian – accompanied by their participating spectator – which results in the selected spectators remaining as the only ones left standing) is the clearest indication that the spectators have never been in control. Clara Kumagai notes that “*Politik* certainly succeeds in empowering the audience; we discuss, we suggest and we make decisions. This is a system in which we can make changes and see them play out. The Company have created an environment in a theatrical space that they would like to see in a political one. But *Politik* confines this to the theatre, and disregards how it may apply outside it” (Kumagai). In this shrewd analysis, Kumagai returns us to the fact of theatrical work that exists firstly if not only in a theatrical presentation and any assertion of impact outside of a theatrical context tends to be problematic. In this case, The Company’s political effort is more of a call to experience than a call to action.

Spectators may reflect on their own political agency, but what they do with any realisations is their own concern. Nibbelink is equally concerned about the agency afforded to spectators in the work of Ontroerend Goed, finding in *The Smile Off Your Face* that “it is impossible for the apprentice-spectator to act according to a routine, which necessitates experimenting with what it means to be a spectator in this unknown environment, to become other than oneself and to start an inquiry into the value and meaning of intimacy” (Nibbelink 414). There is some extent to which the lack of agency or control may be the point demanding our consideration. In the general sense of contemporary performance, Orozco and Boenisch suggest an ambivalent cultural attitude, captured – to their minds – in the use of the prefix ‘inter-’ to convey the feeling of ‘between-ness’. Orozco and Boenisch contend that ‘inter-’, as a prefix, “also appropriately reflects, and performatively articulates, the experience of a changing political and social landscape, especially as felt by the ‘Old Europe’” (Orozco and Boenisch 401). Our digital age ensures that we no longer live in isolation or, at the very least, that Ireland’s insularity is not an effective block against global cultural attitudes. Indeed, Ireland has experienced a drastic change in the political and social landscape of the past five years, where 2009 to 2014 may be most appropriately summed up as ‘inter’ or in-between years in the nation’s history. This ambivalent position generated a

creative space to question the nation's collapse and redress the unresolved traumas of the past. Haughton points to ANU's *Laundry* as a production that "signalled, through a gentle performance with a troubling impact, the stakes at play for the Irish state, its citizens and its "official" history" (Haughton 65). In terms of activating the agency of its spectators, *Laundry* may be the eminent production of the period. However, Fintan Walsh frames testimonial theatre such as *Laundry* as performances that "resemble postdramatic theatre practices, but with the exception that they are often highly dramatic, though often in reflexive, socially engaged ways"; a blend that Walsh suggests "might be seen as a particularly well-rehearsed Irish theatrical idiom" (Walsh 5). Indeed, there is a specificity about ANU's work that is not only in their chosen sites for performance; there is a cultural specificity in operation at the same time. While there is a case to be made for a particularly Irish theatrical idiom in these terms, what is pertinent to this discussion is the 'reflexive, socially engaged' quality of ANU's work. There is a sense in which *Laundry* in particular activates a spectator's social engagement, encouraging reflection on both Ireland's past and present, providing an active experience of political agency in a real and present way. Haughton describes her experience:

I entered the convent building as a consumer, an Irish audience member who had bought a theatre ticket as part of the Ulster Bank Dublin Theatre Festival 2011; I exited it as a citizen, confused and horrified by the history I shared with a regime capable of such injustice, of bringing such despair to the weak and struggling members of Irish society (Haughton, *From Laundries to Labour Camps* 69).

Spectators are brought into the world of the Magdalene Laundry and though the performers are stand-ins for the gathered testimonies of the production, distance and intimacy are played with until the spectator reflects on their individual complicity and how that contributes to the society around them. It is politically powerful in terms of raising conscious awareness of the individual's agency in a given situation. Haughton points to the design of the 'Alice' scene as a micro-performance with a clear political impulse: "The mirror-wall alternated between reflecting the participant's reflection and revealing this trapped person behind the wall" (Haughton, *From Laundries to Labour*

Camps 83). In both literal and figurative ways, then, the spectator/participant is challenged to reflect upon the testimony and reflect upon themselves.

While provoking a spectator out of passive reception may be the intention, making the spectator active in a participatory way carries greater implications for performers and the performance. Rancière insists that the “transformation from spectator to character is highly unusual in any performance circumstance” (Rancière 182). This may be down to the temporal nature of the transformation; a spectator who transforms into a participant soon reverts back to spectator, if they ever escape the notion that they are mainly spectating. Haughton argues that in producing *Laundry*, ANU “urged each participant, as a spectator and citizen, of whatever country, to bear witness to this hidden and denied trauma by remembering these women and their families” (Haughton, *From Laundries to Labour Camps* 88). In the reality outside the performance, bearing witness demands social responsibility from the spectator. In effect, as Max Herrmann suggests, “spectators are involved as co-players. In this sense, the audience is the creator of the theatre. So many different participants constitute the theatrical event that its social nature cannot be lost. Theatre always produces a social community” (Fisher-Lichte 32). Here, Herrmann provides a reminder that, if only through attendance, an audience contributes to the existence of the performance beyond the act of the performance; each individual becomes a piece of the performance’s archive. However, the spectator is not only a contributor, nor is the performance as entertainment their only reward. Each time a spectator attends the theatre and participates – or, even if the spectator is disruptive – they will be reminded of their individual agency.

Haughton maintains that *Laundry* “is motivated not by the need to imagine or represent an Irish state but by the need to interrogate the functioning of a state and society that was brought into being less than one-hundred years ago. [...] The power of this production, witnessed by so few but with a post-performance efficacy still gathering momentum, lay not only in its interrogation of past wrongs but in its realization of present wrongs” (Haughton, *From Laundries to Labour Camps* 90). Theatre’s capacity to remind spectators of their individual agency may be a layered effect. ANU’s productions provoke responses in subtle ways, from implying the complicity of the spectator to offering redemptive opportunities; all moments that test the resolve and character of

the individual spectator. Yet, there are other ways in which a spectator or audience might be reminded of their agency. As Rancière observes in the spectacle of the game show, “whatever else one might think of *The Price is Right*, it is an astonishing display of spectator agency, reminding us that spectators can be forged into an audience by agitated behaviour as well as by acquiescent or reflective aesthetic experience” (Rancière 186-7). As ANU display from production to production, provocations are there to be uncovered, but it is with the individual to experience their own agency.



## Theatre and Social Media

One of the emergent ideas from the previous section is that society shapes the experience of spectators. As such, it will be necessary to provide a frame for aspects of society that shape the contemporary spectator's experience and, to some extent, their perception. As Lehmann observes: "The politics of theatre is a politics of perception. To define it we have to remember that the mode of perception in theatre cannot be separated from the existence of theatre in a world of media which massively shapes all perception" (Lehmann 185). In contemporary society, it is impossible to ignore the role that media and social media play, and as Lehmann rightly notes, it is equally impossible to ignore the impact that this has on theatre. Phillip Auslander states that theatre has experienced an incursion of media technology and that "audiences now expect live performances to resemble mediatised ones." Auslander also notes that mediatisation is incorporated in theatre to such an extent that "the live event itself is a product of media technologies" (Auslander 25-26). These two points show that it is not only the audience who wish to see mediatised performances, but that theatre-makers also want to explore the potential of media technologies in performance. This desire is shared by postmodern playwrights as well as post-dramatic practitioners. Enda Walsh's *Penelope* made use of a microphone, CCTV camera and LCD monitor. In *Who is Fergus Kilpatrick?*, The Company created their own documentary footage as well as turning the camera on their audience. The Corn Exchange littered the performance of *Freefall* with live and pre-recorded video projections. Auslander explores mediatisation mainly in terms of live performance and while his discoveries are quite engaging, the focus on live performance is to analyse theatre's end product. Mediatisation of theatre (and, subsequently, the development of spectator expectation) begins in production and is not simply a quality within performance. Indeed, Andrew Bennett notes that "Only very recently, in the explosion of Web-based resources and, specifically, blogging, has the amateur (and sometimes expert) reviewer provided a widespread and different order of evidence drawn from the "regular" theatregoer's view of a show" (Bennett 10). While the consumption of media has become normative, as has its incorporation into theatrical performance, it can be considered that this is not an acceptance of the media

as a dominant medium but rather an opportunity to critique media through the theatrical medium.

Lehmann suggests that “Postdramatic theatre is also theatre in an age of omitted images of conflict” (Lehmann 183). This provokes a thought that is so often overlooked in consumption of media; what is not being shown? In this sense, media facilitates a distance from events for the spectator. In terms of media promotion, Jean Baudrillard claims that “[Promotion] devours our substance, but it also allows us to metabolise what we absorb...” (Malpas 63). Baudrillard identifies the inherent distance that media forms can create between spectators and depictions of reality. It is this distance that makes the spectator of media abandon a position of ongoing critique. However, Lehmann insists that this is a manipulation of the spectator and quotes Samuel Weber, who writes:

If we remain spectators/viewers, if we stay where we are – in front of the television – the catastrophes will always stay outside, will always be ‘objects’ for a ‘subject’ – this is the implicit promise of the medium. But this comforting promise coincides with an equally clear, if unspoken threat: Stay where you are! If you move, there may be an intervention, whether humanitarian or not. (Lehmann 184)

Going further, Ranci re analyses the media and finds that the act of spectating is exploited in how the media presents spectators or studio audiences, “camerawork is designed to exploit complicity with the event, providing frequent shots of the live audience and shooting from its point of view.” (Ranci re 185) Continuing on with Fisher-Lichte’s idea that reality is resembling performance, Lehmann observes that “theatricalisation permeates the entire social life, starting with the individual attempts to produce or feign a public self – the cult of self-presentation and self-revelation through fashion signs or other marks designed to attest to the model of a self (albeit mostly borrowed) vis- -vis a certain group, as well as vis- -vis the anonymous crowd” (Lehmann 183). Mediatisation of theatre production is on most public display in social media promotion. Social media networks inevitably assumed the role of promotional tool for theatre practitioners as they sought ways to respond to the Arts Council’s publication of March 2010: *Supporting the production and presentation of theatre; a new approach*. The document contains a number of references to audience generation,

enhancement and engagement as expectations for practitioners seeking funding (Arts Council / An Chomairle Ealaíon). Through social media, practitioners had a ready-made platform to connect with their potential audiences. In many ways, social media networks represent a perfect fit for creative individuals and companies who seek control of their own promotion; creating a social profile, managing a public identity and engaging with spectators are activities one would assume to be second nature to practitioners of creative arts. By adapting to social media, many theatre practitioners have succeeded in expanding their network of connections. Recent trends such as creating Facebook profiles for theatre companies, the proliferation of Twitter accounts for practitioners or organisations, as well as video trailers for theatrical productions all represent the efforts of practitioners to take control of their own promotion and engagement with spectators at large.

As long as social media promotion is developing some form of return or creating some level of interest, neither practitioner nor spectator may consider if anything is being compromised in the process. As Frederic Jameson believes, “the emergence of postmodernism is closely related to the emergence of this new moment of late consumer or multinational capitalism” (Jameson 20). Within a consumer culture, the practice of creating cultural commodities is closer to a form of service than an artistic engagement with a spectator. However, practitioners making content available for spectators is not to be discredited out of hand. In fact, this is a direct form of engagement which the contemporary spectator can appreciate, as the availability of content is typically related to the demand for content. Given the vast content available through social media, one can only assume that there is demand for it. If promotion through social media is to maintain its impact, practitioners must ensure the quality of content they are making available is in keeping with their artistic standards. Basic economics would also infer that quantity should be controlled in order to avoid over-saturation of content. All in all, practitioners would be best advised to approach social media as a supplementary method of promotion to avoid these potential pitfalls. But of course, practitioners are not singularly responsible for standards of promotion through social media.

The role of the spectator in theatre production has evolved through social media. A creative production on its own is not enough to satisfy the modern spectator; this needs to be supplemented by trailers, interviews with cast and crew, promotional photography, previews, reviews and further responses. Jameson argues that one of the key features of postmodernism is “the transformation of reality into images” (Jameson 20). Supplementary content to a production has grown from ticket stub and programme to become script, company email list, social media connections and internet links. Technology has advanced to make content accessible beyond PCs and Laptops; social media networks are accessible from mobile phones, smart phones, iPads and iPods. The contemporary spectator can connect themselves with a production not only by witnessing the performance but also by engaging with the content that is made available through these platforms. Practitioners have sought out this heightened level of engagement by combining social media with the theatre experience: competitions for tickets can be entered on Facebook or Twitter, just as discounts on tickets can be claimed.

A useful advance in the relationship of spectators and practitioners has been the establishment of crowd-funding website Fund-it. This platform for artistic patronage may be of greater interest in charting the evolution of patronage throughout history; from private patrons of the arts through guilds and apprenticeships, followed by literary subscriptions of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (perhaps the earliest example in the lineage of “crowd-funding”) and also in the context of arts funding bodies, bequests and endowment schemes. Even in a contemporary sense, Fund-it is not a radical departure from similar crowd-funding programs such as Kickstarter or Sponsume (a UK equivalent). Instead, the importance of Fund-it is the support platform that it has offered to Irish theatre makers – particularly relatively young companies – throughout a period of severe financial instability in the broader Arts sector. Productions such as Brokentaklers’ *The Blue Boy*, THISISPOPBABY’s *The Year of Magical Wanking* and THEATREclub’s *2010* may not have developed without funding raised on the site. While the focus has been on theatre makers, crowd-funding is equally remarkable for the opportunity it grants to spectators; the crowd hold the power to decide if a production will happen or not. Again, there are two sides to this relationship; a practitioner must attempt to convince the spectator of the worthiness of the production. There is a danger that a practitioner’s

integrity could be compromised in this request for financial support, but the reality is that the majority of funders presently responding to projects on Fund-it are practitioners themselves. Promotion through social media is an important means for generating the sponsorships required for these productions. Essentially, a site like Fund-it grants the spectator a role as enabler of the production. But that is not the only enhancement in the role of the spectator in theatre production. Typically the spectator is taken as the receiver of the theatrical product. Through social media, it is now possible to argue that beyond simply receiving a performance, the spectator can enable a production through crowd-funding and also contribute to a production in non-financial means. THEATREclub's *2010* was crowd-funded, but it was also crowd-written. The piece was composed from the responses of participants to a daily question: what have you learned today? Project Brand New delivers works in progress with an expectation that spectators will give feedback to practitioners for future development of the projects. Productions and initiatives like these are blurring the lines of what is and is not expected of a spectator. In summary, the enhanced role of the contemporary spectator is to be receiver, enabler, contributor and critic of a production.

It is worth considering a potential side-effect of practitioner engagement with spectators through social media. If the practitioners have a direct connection to spectators, what is the role of the theatre critic to be? In reality, critics and reviewers have diversified as much as the theatre-makers they analyse, moving their articles into blogs and Twitter links. Far from being a negative scenario, the conversation and debate surrounding theatre is increased through social media and the role of the critic can be to ensure the debate continues, even giving these debates a direction. In truth, artistic critique cannot be abandoned. Jean-François Lyotard argues that "in the absence of aesthetic criteria, it remains possible [...] to assess the value of works of art according to the profits they yield" (Malpas 57). Theatre needs to not only preserve but consistently evolve its ideals. Spectators can enable work through Fund-it, yet there remains a duty to assess productions as worthy of funding. As Bennett puts it, this does not refer exclusively to the professional theatre critic, but all spectators in a position to critique performance. "Scholarship, the teacher, and the professional critic all further serve to market the theatre product. Bad reviews can still limit the run of a production.

More significantly, they often determine a very specific set of expectations in the audience and thus determine how that audience will receive the play” (Bennett 121-2). It is worth noting that spectators are becoming more critically aware through social media and that conversations and critiques of work extend far beyond the run of a production. While new media offers extensive means for spectators to engage with theatre and performance, the contemporary challenge is to identify points where the spectator can dis-engage.

In most theatre situations, the social experience has extended beyond the physical building. Bennett refers to the ‘integrated social experience’ that particular theatres offer. The socio-cultural position of theatres on London’s South Bank is clear; the commercial outlets that surround theatres like the Abbey or Project Arts Centre’s location in the heart of Temple Bar lend further credence to this observation. There are extra expectations on the identified urban theatre audience, which are made clear by ‘pre-theatre’ dinner menus and other such commercial initiatives. “Audiences outside the mainstream [...] do not have the same experience of theatre attendance” (Bennett 126). Indeed, it is often overlooked that theatres, in their business of attracting audiences, also attract direct or spin-off commercial interest as a result. But these businesses are not the focus; it is rather the theatre business itself that must be considered. Ranci re considers theatre audiences to be separated according to art, as might also be inferred from Bennett’s idea of audiences outside the mainstream. According to Bennett, “Theatre as a cultural commodity is probably best understood as the result of its conditions of production and reception” (106).

In an Irish context, contemporary theatre has faced continued uncertainty over the conditions for production, primarily due to issues of funding. Initiatives have developed, such as Business to Arts, which encourage artists to seek private patronage or investment instead of remaining dependent on traditional funding channels. This process has drawn clear lines for the Irish theatre business where commercial success and artistic integrity are not always equal targets. Bennett goes on to suggest that production companies may “produce an internal horizon of expectations which will attract audiences through challenging their own already formed expectations / assumptions about a particular play or theatrical style” (113). Under another name, this

“internal horizon of expectation” can be taken to mean “audience development” in the contemporary sense – companies endeavour to hold on to established audiences and expand on those numbers in order to have some expectation for revenue. At the same time, this also refers to the expectations that audiences will have of a given company; expectations that the company must endeavour to satisfy in some way. With reference to Herbert Blau’s *The Audience* (1990), Kennedy observes that “Blau approaches audiences by considering how playwrights and theatre artists have conceived them psychologically” (Kennedy 10). Emma Govan also suggests that audience expectations have filtered into the theatrical process, in the ways that practitioners “make the consideration of their audience a core element of their performance-making. [...] In this manner the audience can be seen to be another character within the piece” (Govan et al 69). Bennett observes that many theatre makers “look to the input of their audiences to influence, if not create, both performance scripts and production methods” (Bennett 114).

This develops what may be called a clear business model for the theatre company, combining their own artistic interests with the expectations of the audience in order to remain financially viable. It is in this context that the theatrical art becomes a commercial decision that affects both artist and audience. Rancière, while contemplating the Hochkulturbetrieb (the high culture business), suggests that “the long-established assumption is that excessive emotional or physical involvement in an audience renders it less competent to recognize the value and sophistication of a work of delicate or deeply significant art” (Rancière 179). This logic is, Rancière claims, the reasoning behind the separation of high and popular art due to audience behaviour – quiescent and boisterous, respectively. Emerging from all of this is a sense that the theatrical art form becomes a strategy for the company rather than an artistic concern. However, it is equally valid to argue that the artistic form can lead the commercial enterprise. In forming the horizon of expectation for their audiences, theatre makers allow the spectatorship to form expectations of the theatrical performance before they experience it; whether that is in terms of performance quality or the permitted behaviour of an audience – quiescent or boisterous, as Rancière puts it. Examples of the clear branding that the Abbey Theatre and Druid Theatre Company have established

often emphasise the brand over the production; for example, “Abbey Theatre presents...”, or “*DruidSynge*” and “*DruidMurphy*”. In a sense, this is effective audience retention; assuming that audience expectation will be met or exceeded, performance quality and artistic brand identity become synonymous for the spectator.

In essence, contemporary theatre practice is constantly evaluating its relation to the spectator, finding new ways to engage, to communicate, and to retain audiences. Aronson argues: “If the purpose of art is to create experiences one cannot have in everyday life – to create, in fact, a theatre that is not comforting – then a theatre that replicates the everyday world is meaningless and pointless” (2000: 9). To rephrase Aronson here, theatre that replicates the everyday world is not meaningless and pointless if a spectator is able to experience that everyday world differently. Assuming that the everyday world cannot be replicated to create new experiences is to overlook the interesting experimentation in documentary and verbatim theatre by groups such as Rimini Protokoll or Brokentalkers. Ultimately, Aronson’s crucial point is that theatre makers must persist in creating work that accounts for audience experience more than it accounts for audience attendance.



## Space

Initially, space is employed in a concretising manner in theatre. The performance must be located somewhere and once that place is conceived, space in a theatrical context becomes open to possibility. Once there is a space, a performance has something to side with, conflict against, escape, return to, inhabit or dissolve as it sees fit. Spatial interaction – in whatever form it takes – is a central concern for theatrical practice. However, space is also a human concern, as space represents one of the many ways we define ourselves. Ubersfeld argues that if one accepts that “human beings as performers are a primary characteristic of theatre, the secondary characteristic, indissolubly linked to the first, is the existence of a space within which those living beings are found” (Ubersfeld 94). Birringer surmises that “bodies have dimensions, orientations, inclinations, weights, stances, and postural alignments, so that just by virtue of being there they occupy and produce space” (Biringner, *Media and Performance* 38). Outside of our own body-spaces, the desire for location is what drives the creation of places within space; we define ourselves by location and origin, direction to or from and largely in relation to nature. We create places, and particularly so in a theatrical context, to solidify our existence through a basic circular logic; we both identify and define ourselves in relation to space. Theatre space, however, is the topic of a specific philosophical debate usually linked to space and its content. There is, of course, Peter Brook’s famous assertion: “I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged” (Brook 9). Taking the emptiness of space as a given, Antonin Artaud maintains that the stage is “a tangible, physical place that needs to be filled” (Artaud 27). However, Gay McAuley contends that space is “not an empty container but an active agent; it shapes what goes on within it, emits signals about it to the community at large, and is itself affected” (McAuley 41). Anne Ubersfeld holds a similar position, stating that theatrical space is not a void, rather “it is filled by a series of concrete elements of variable relative importance” (Ubersfeld 120). This approach is sensible when one considers performance design; that the space is as structured as the performance for effect, as space and performers act upon

spectators in equal measure. Hans Thies Lehmann specifies that “Postdramatic theatre knows not only the ‘empty’ space but also the overcrowded space” (Lehmann 25). However, Ubersfeld argues that this is not so particular, acknowledging that there can be “theatre in which the stage is overfull, or theatre in which the stage is an open emptiness” (Ubersfeld, 120). Indeed, these philosophies of theatre space will inform much of what follows, but first of all, it is important to address a specifically Irish philosophy of space which prioritises land and its location above space and its construction.

### Theatrical Landscapes; Urban / Regional / Rural

In Ireland, the main categorisations of space are distinguished between urban, regional, and rural. While the fixed boundaries of these spaces adhere to a geographical order, there are identities that accompany these distinct spaces. Anne Ubersfeld claims that “we can say that to spatialize the world is not only to make it comprehensible, but also to render it ‘theatricalizable’” (Ubersfeld 98). As a society, we are brought together by a national concept of space but we can also be divided into subsets of geographical regions. Indeed, there are a variety of approaches to space in Irish theatre that are informed as much by geographical experience as by theatrical practice. Henri Lefebvre categorises theatre among ‘non-verbal signifying sets’ that are “characterized by a spatiality which is in fact irreducible to the mental realm. There is even a sense in which landscapes, both rural and urban, fall under this head” (Lefebvre 62). Extending Lefebvre’s concept to Irish theatre, there is often an irreducible quality of Irish rural or urban experience to be found in theatrical space. Yet, Share and Corcoran argue that, as a result of urban sprawl and other environmental factors, there has been “a reshaping of the conventional binary opposition of urban/rural, but with a parallel tendency to discount the salience of non-urban, or even non-Dublin, experience” (Share and Corcoran 5). As such, there are unconscious expressions of spatial experience in contemporary performance. For example, The Company’s *As You Are Now So Once Were We* explores a contemporary spatial experience of Dublin rather than representations of the source text, James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. Fintan Walsh describes the process, concluding that The Company “find meaning in the city and in their art by conjuring and collapsing both before us” (F. Walsh, *Reviews: Irish Theatre Magazine*). In many ways, it is the experience of the city and finding ways to relate that experience that drives the performance, ensuring that *As You Are Now So Once Were We* is as much a spatial project in its own right as it is a textual response to *Ulysses*.

Of course, The Company’s spatial experience also shows that the shape of the urban space is defined for us by its structures. As Harvey states, “the built environment constitutes one element in a complex of urban experience that has long been a vital crucible for the forging of new cultural sensibilities. How a city looks and how its spaces are organized forms a material base upon which a range of possible sensations and

social practices can be thought about, evaluated, and achieved” (Harvey 66-67). Applying Harvey’s logic to Ireland’s urban spaces, the organisation and placement of theatres within a city points to some extent towards how theatre is estimated or valued within that city. It also suggests something of the expectation for access to these spaces given location and accessibility. In the case of Dublin, the city centre is predominantly the high streets of O’Connell Street and Grafton Street. Theatre is somewhat secluded from these spaces; the nearest examples are the Gate Theatre off O’Connell Street on Parnell Square and Bewley’s Café Theatre on the second floor of Bewley’s on Grafton Street. That said, other theatre spaces are not out of reach by any means; the Abbey Theatre is not far removed from O’Connell Street, while Project Arts Centre occupies a significant space in Temple Bar. Smock Alley Theatre is only a moment away and occupying a prominent location adjacent to the quays of the River Liffey. These locations are not only a statement of place within the urban space, but also offer an invitation to both immediate locality and a global audience. This aspect of theatre’s ambivalent treatment of location, the blurring of the local and global in what Morash and Richards term the ‘glocal’ is motivated by the larger city project that strives “to identify a unique selling point in the global market, [in which] the historically validated specificity of place is both an opportunity for marketing and an endangered cultural value as its uniqueness is packaged for an international consumption” (Morash and Richards 151). Evidently, with space as with performance, the commodification of culture has run rampant through the early twenty-first century. Nevertheless, there is a cultural economy at play in the buildings of Irish theatre and in their visibility as such. As the Abbey remains a part of the contemporary Irish national identity, it may be fair to suggest that it receives a majority of exposure in this cultural economy; given that the Abbey serves the double-purpose of representing culture and nation.

Bourriaud argues that “the development of the function of artworks and the way they are shown attest to a growing urbanisation of the artistic experiment. [...] it is no longer possible to regard the contemporary work as a space to be walked through. It is henceforth presented as a period of time to be lived through, like an opening to unlimited discussion. The city has ushered in and spread the hands-on experience: it is the tangible symbol and historical setting of the state of society” (Bourriaud 15). The

experiential aspect of contemporary work is facilitated by the city-space, though what Bourriaud is critiquing here is that, in effect, the city is held as the ideal, the prioritised space above any other, and by appointing one kind of space – the urban city – as the ideal space and representation of a society is inherently a devaluation of other spaces.

Peter Crawley considers *Vardo*, the fourth part of ANU's Monto cycle, to be "a discovery; we are engaged and led, challenged and confided in, yet the underlying sense is of an unknowable city" (Crawley, *Irish Times*). There is an inherent critique of city-space at the centre of this production, however; what hides or is hidden in the city can be either benevolent or malevolent. Remaining consistent with the Monto cycle, *Vardo* compels us to rethink urban space and how it ties together the openly public and intensely private space with minimal distinction, creating hidden places in plain view. Although the presence of an audience "makes it possible to see the production of space in the theatre as a subset of the wider social production of space", Morash and Richards observe at least one major difference: "in the theatre, there are strict spatial boundaries, defined according to explicit criteria; within those boundaries, a space is produced, but it only endures for the clearly defined duration of the performance" (Morash and Richards 8). This results in spatial production at an accelerated pace, exceeding that of the everyday world. In direct contradiction of this idea, ANU actively disrupt the space of the everyday urban world in a way that potentially endures beyond the duration of the performance. At the same time, the Monto cycle connects past and present to show that the treatment of the area has an established pattern and that our altered engagement with the inner city is – potentially – a temporary interruption of that cyclical history. Indeed, Peter Crawley notes a pessimistic tone in that "the cycle seems tenderly aware that this history is endlessly repeating. More hopeful, though, is ANU's remarkable framing of the city – and its effect. You leave more alert, inquisitive, and compassionate to hidden stories, as though encouraged to see the world anew" (Crawley, *Irish Times*). The city space may be, as Bourriaud suggests, tangible symbol and historical setting of the state of society, but it is not without its flaws. As such, ANU's Monto cycle urges us to consider urban space as much for its failings as for its redeeming qualities.

From another stance, prioritisation of city space poses a specific problem in the Irish context where arts and culture can be perceived as 'Dublin-centric'. A number of organisations feel that, even with funding cuts across the board in 2010, there is a disproportionate support of theatre organisations based in or near Dublin. This perception is not relaxed by the ongoing primacy of the capital city in cultural activities – festivals, etc.; even though it should be argued that the capital city is automatically presented for such purposes, it may be the automatic nature of assigning Dublin these opportunities that causes upset in other quarters. Cork, Limerick, Galway, Sligo, Kilkenny, Waterford – there are other cities and towns along with these that have a sense of devaluation under current policy. Of course, cities have advantages in terms of sheer size, scale and population – three measures under which Dublin is undoubtedly the primary city in Ireland. Francis Reid observes that:

A large population centre may have the resources to support, and the audience to fill, several theatres, each dedicated to the needs of specific areas of the performing arts. But how can a wide range of performance types be housed in communities which because of low population density or other resource restrictions are unable, or perhaps unwilling, to build on such a scale? (Reid 204-205).

There are a number of factors that influence the development of theatre spaces and communities within urban environments. However, in general architecture, there is a kind of disunity in cities that gives the urban space a sense of uniqueness. "Fiction, fragmentation, collage, and eclecticism, all suffused with a sense of ephemerality and chaos, are, perhaps, the themes that dominate in today's practices of architecture and urban design" (Harvey 98). It is interesting that Harvey should consider the fiction of urban spaces, as it is such a criticism that is levelled at Dublin's Temple Bar; an area that includes The Ark, Meeting House Square, FringeLab, and Project Arts Centre, with Smock Alley and the Gaiety School of Acting on its Western extremities. For Share and Corcoran, Temple Bar is less a cultural space than an illusory construction of the Celtic Tiger, "then already in transition from 'authentic' bohemian quarter to manufactured cultural theme park" (Share and Corcoran 4). As one example of many grand-scale projects of urban renewal or development, Temple Bar demonstrates that the face of a

city changes more consistently than it fits one particular theme. The perception of space in this broader architectural sense is something that diffuses through lived experience, shaping other aspects of culture. "A spatial action overcomes conflicts, at least momentarily, even though it does not resolve them; it opens a way from everyday concerns to collective joy" (Lefebvre 222). Space and the city, in its architecture and organisation, is always a site for competing ideas to clash – even those of the grand variety. Harvey argues that modernists see space as always subservient to the construction of a social project, while "the postmodernists see space as something independent and autonomous, to be shaped according to aesthetic aims and principles which have nothing necessarily to do with any overarching social objective, save, perhaps, the achievement of timeless and 'disinterested' beauty as an objective in itself" (Harvey 66). Perhaps it is not in theatre buildings alone that Irish theatre-makers have been able to alter their perceptions of space from the traditional pattern. The autonomous and independent space that Harvey suggests indicates that space is not subservient to any one project. Ireland's architectural collage, the blending of neo-classical, modern and postmodern on given streets, reflects the variety of spatial projects and identities that have emerged separately among neighbouring spaces. If one can perceive this variety in the architecture of their surroundings, this non-linear approach to space may be applied elsewhere; perhaps as Ubersfeld notes in theatre's capacity to construct its own spatial referent, wherein "the activity of construction causes (referential) space to change from a set of unordered signs that cannot immediately be grasped intellectually, into a system of organized intelligible signs. Theatricality constructs a signifying totality out of what, in the world, is in-significance" (Ubersfeld 102).

The prevailing idea of theatrical space is that it serves as the medium through which performance and spectators are connected. Yet, experimental forms commonly draw attention to ways in which our perceptions of space also create disconnection. Morash and Richards suggest that arguments about disconnection between audience and performance could be extended to not only the Abbey and Druid productions that tour internationally, but also the work of Pan Pan which "has more in common with post-dramatic work being done in Berlin or New York than with an Irish theatre rooted

in place-making” (Morash and Richards 155). Indeed, such contentions of ‘ersatz cosmopolitanism’ are difficult to avoid for experimental theatre in Ireland – work that travels with greater success internationally than it does nationally. For example, The Company have presented work in Berlin and California, yet have only staged one production outside of Dublin; and that took place in The Mermaid Arts Centre in Bray – a venue notable for also offering residencies to Brokentalkers and THEATREclub, but in a location that is effectively an extension of Dublin through the DART line and other transport links. Pan Pan have had some reach within Ireland, but it may be worth undermining the argument that experimental theatre is Dublin-centric by re-iterating the burgeoning of alternative practices in locations with extended education (e.g. Cork, Galway, Limerick). However, the weakness in this development is clear; yet again, experimental theatre is defined by urbanity – the cosmopolitan base required to first develop and subsequently sustain such work.

The theatrical landscape in Ireland is divided into the urban (main cities as hubs for professional theatre), regional (locations outside of Dublin), and rural (townlands and communities where semi-professional and amateur theatre thrive). This is considering theatre at large; if we apply the post-dramatic to this view, the Irish theatrical landscape is quickly reduced to the urban – within which the post-dramatic form is Dublin-centric. Morash and Richards identify a spatial dynamic that develops through Irish theatre of the twentieth century, wherein “what is staged has a relationship with the actual spatial and temporal divisions within Ireland [...] This is predicated on an overlapping spatial and temporal division in which the conceptual space of the West of Ireland is conceived as a site of unchanging rural tradition and beneficial social conservatism while the cities are the location of rapid urban transformation and subsequent alienation” (Morash and Richards 47). In many ways, this spatial dynamic persists through the diverse theatrical forms of the early twenty-first century; particularly in the matching of rural with tradition and urban with transformation. These divisions are important in observing that few post-dramatic performances originate outside of Dublin and regardless of where these productions originate, few if any travel on an Irish theatre network. Criticism of post-dramatic form tend to focus on the perception that it is inherently cosmopolitan. One might argue that



this is in contrast with non-urban Irish locations which prefer a sense of locality to their theatre. Indeed, Susan Bennett argues that it is crucial “to understand the social and cultural geographies to which performances and inhabitants both contribute” (Bennett 15). On this note, and in terms of space as geographical, we may be limiting our focus on Irish post-dramatic theatre to the main urban centres; specifically Dublin, Belfast, Cork, and Galway.

At the same time, it would be unfair to suggest that theatre around Ireland is in some way limited to larger cities; that is by no means the intention here. Since the turn of the twentieth century and into the early twenty-first century, the number of theatre and arts venues across Ireland has increased. Yet, in identifying the growth of theatre venues around Ireland, Morash and Richards surmise that “the spread of physical spaces for theatre around the national space did not necessarily reinforce the idea of a national theatre; it could, in fact, have the opposite effect, highlighting regional difference over national solidarity” (Morash and Richards 16). As such, this contrasts the dramatic and post-dramatic in suggesting that, rather than being a question of form, the artistic output of venues outside of Ireland’s main cities places emphasis on their immediate locality. There is no consistency between venues and – to some extent – this is an expression of postmodernity in its own way; namely, there are grand narratives from major Irish drama that are not regarded equally throughout the country. The reach of professional theatre may be something for another study, yet it is important to consider at this juncture that when we talk about Irish theatre, there are a multiplicity of things that Irish theatre could be. One case of particular interest begs the question; can the post-dramatic be rural? In the case of WillFredd Theatre’s *FARM*, presented at the Dublin Fringe Festival in 2012, the rural is brought to an urban audience – relating examples of, among other things, the everyday experiences of a farmer, the finer details of beekeeping, and the proper method of attaching a horse to a flatbed cart. The show’s director, Sophie Motley, suggests that *FARM* is a consideration of “farming practice in Ireland, and how the Rural and the Urban could interrupt a space. So many people who grew up in the city are no more than two or three generations from the land itself, a rarity in modern Europe.”<sup>3</sup> Motley raises an interesting point here in suggesting that,

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<sup>3</sup> WillFredd Theatre, *FARM* – Programme Notes

separated by little more than three generations (if even), Irish people have direct links to a rural, agricultural identity. However, the idea of the rural as an 'interruption' of the urban space relates in itself a kind of prioritising of space, where urban space is perceived as superior to the rural. In contemporary Ireland, the urban space is both literally and figuratively valued more highly than rural space. The opposition of rural to urban is achieved in simple terms, also; rural is to agriculture as the urban is to cosmopolitanism. In the case of *FARM*, the rural is a temporary intervention in urban experience, which suggests that post-dramatic theatre – with radical forms responding to the contemporary moment – is aligned closer to the ever-shifting urban space than it is with the traditional rural landscape.

In the geography of Irish theatre, it is clear to see that the post-dramatic does not represent a common national interest – limited to urban audiences with lived experience of the cosmopolitan, our globalised postmodernity. This is not to say that areas outside the M50 belt are not subject to the postmodern; it is to remark once again Lyotard's view that the postmodern emerges at an uneven pace. One need only consider how relatively recently parts of Ireland gained access to electricity under the electrification scheme to see that aspects of modernisation were not completed at one particular time. Perhaps more appropriately to our recent information age, consider the level of internet access throughout Ireland and that there are still inaccessible points on the map. This may seem unthinkable to the unconsciously postmodern citizen – indeed, some humour is derived from the conceit that, in the contemporary epoch, to be without broadband or Wi-Fi is to be outside of civilization. This is the lived reality of Baudrillard's claim; "the generations precipitate themselves..." – we have a cultural divide, wherein there are younger generations who know no other lifestyle encountering older generations that have witnessed a series of remarkable changes in their lifetime, from the advent of analogue technologies all the way to our present digital age. This is not simply a technological issue; it is a kind of spatial tension. These cultural realities are not extraneous to theatre, where the desire for new forms of expression that bore the post-dramatic are symptomatic of a culture that has not been fully realised in Ireland. As much as technology has proceeded at varying rates between

urban and rural areas, the roll-out for alternative cultural forms is all the more unequal.

Francis Reid offers the example of the UK:

Whether architectural space or performance space – an unlimited range of forms exist side-by-side. On the surface, this may seem to be a fine example of cultural diversity. It's fine for London. But most of the country has an unequal hotch-potch of provision, which is impractically expensive for a nation which has one and only one consistent consensus across all political parties – that culture is a luxury (Reid 201).

The situation is not so different in Ireland, not only in the sense that provision for the arts is unequal, but that there is a separation even between the capital and other cities, before accounting for towns, townlands and rural areas. There is also the question of what might be called the theatrical mainstream – something that sets out the major cultural forms – and how this may impact on the differences between certain spaces, both perceived and actual. Morash and Richards find that, despite alternative interventions, “the major figure in Irish theatre has remained the playwright. [...] Site-specific and devised work runs against this trend, existing largely outside of what might be considered the Irish theatrical mainstream” (Morash and Richards 112). With this in mind, there is a case to be made that perceptions for Irish theatre begin from a position determined by the Abbey as Ireland's national theatre, where the playwright is at the centre of the theatrical process. As a contrasting example, one might consider the highly experimental work of the Flemish theatre where there is no national theatre to align with or react against:

This theatre is simultaneously local and global, dramatic – text-based – and devised, highbrow intellectual and popular emotional, rigorously aesthetic and politically engaged. It is a paradigm of being ‘in-between’, transcending the regimes of the ‘post’ phenomena (the post-modern, the post-industrial, the post-colonial, the post-communist, even the post-historic, and most certainly in our context, the post-dramatic) which largely dominated western culture as the first generation of Flemish theatre-makers came to the fore (Orozco and Boenisch 400).

All in all, the wave of Flemish theatre-makers that Orozco and Boenisch observe here may initiate their work from an already-decentred position, in that there is no central idea of a Flemish theatre to guide their experimentation. While Irish theatre is open to new forms and expressions, there will always be an assumed prioritisation of the writer-led theatre as Ireland's 'national' theatre. In this way, the dynamic of Irish theatre is not only between local and global, but also with the concept of national as well. There is a sense of spatial fixity to Irish theatre in these terms, a conceptual national space that hovers over any created work. Again, this is far removed from the example of Flemish theatre that Orozco and Boenisch identify as continuing "to reinvent its non-locatable 'in-between-ness' which also, in a potentially productive and yet challenging way, obscures its own identity and resists security and stability" (Orozco and Boenisch 403). Irish theatre and its practitioners are more readily locatable, in terms of places and buildings if not in clear artistic terms.

## Theatrical Architecture; Buildings and Places

Given the scope of this project, there is an inevitable discussion around architecture given the exemplary realisation of the postmodern in architecture. Of course, there is also the subset of theatre architecture to be considered. In fact, postmodern architecture is lauded in theatrical terms by David Wiles as he critiques the theatrical architecture of the modern era:

Theatre architecture turned out to be one of modernism's greatest failures, flexible, versatile theatres stripped of social messages proving a conceptual impossibility. [...] When postmodernism declared that we can never create ex nihilo, we can only rework fragments of the past, many theatre people heard the voice of common sense prevailing. (Wiles 22).

While it is also worth emphasising that postmodern consideration for fragments extends to architecture in this case, Wiles argues that theatres stripped of a social message are an impossibility. Although this observation is focused on the limits of the architectural project, Wiles' point may be interpreted in a metaphorical sense, as a suggestion that theatre buildings are not independent of the society that they are located in and must inevitably form some kind of social connection or relationship. Yi-Fu Tuan supports this perspective in stating that, once completed, "the building or architectural complex now stands as an environment capable of affecting the people who live in it. Man-made space can refine human feeling and perception" (Tuan 102). Lefebvre observes that, as the outcome of past actions itself, "social space is what permits fresh actions to occur, while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others" (Lefebvre 73). Yet, society and its vital messages change at a rate that architecture cannot match. As Gay McAuley notes, in architectural terms, "it is somewhat ironic that the most ephemeral of art forms should leave behind such obvious and durable traces of its presence" (McAuley 37). In this way, McAuley captures the argument of Wiles in a succinct fashion; the contradictory aspect of theatre architecture given its very construction undermines the fleeting moment of theatrical performance. The challenge for theatre architecture, as Francis Reid observes, is the 'intransigence' of modern construction materials. "Pouring concrete imposes current thinking upon future

generations. This was not a problem for earlier theatres: there was a permanent shell of stone and brick but it was fitted out internally as a theatre with a timber structure, which was virtually free standing” (Reid 17). Indeed, the key concept to emerge from these considerations of theatre architecture is adaptability, in terms of the flexibility of the constructed theatre space. Wiles explains that when modernists “called for a theatre of comfortable seats and good sightlines, rather than an environment that stimulated the senses and encouraged social interaction, they led theatre architecture into a cul-de-sac” (Wiles 239). Reid argues that successful attempts at adaptability have been “in small studios where the seats can be moved around between end-stage, traverse and in-the-round formations. However, mostly as a consequence of the time and labour involved, the tendency has been to settle down into the most successful format – which is usually end-stage” (Reid 17). The architecture of a theatre provides for a set range of possible productions, given that the complete structure is reasonably accepted as a limiting factor. In an Irish context, the Abbey Theatre offers productions with a vertical design given the spatial flexibility above the stage, whereas depth and width hold certain limitations. This architectural focus on the proscenium style fixes the seating arrangement, rendering the stage space as the only alterable space of a production’s design. The proscenium space is not without criticism, of course – Anne Ubersfeld points out that “perception varies (and what is worse, it varies in a hierarchical way) according to the location of our seat in a proscenium theatre. The orchestra seats and the gallery (the gods) offer singularly different images of the same show: we have all made that cruel discovery” (Ubersfeld 113). Alternatively the Project Arts Centre’s Space Upstairs offers a versatility of arrangement in its open plan design; moveable seating arrangements, tabs, lighting rig and so forth. Smock Alley markets itself as Ireland’s ‘oldest newest’ theatre, combining its original foundation in 1662 with its recent renovation and re-opening in 2012. The venue offers three types of performance space; highly raked [main space], black box studio and multiple levels [Boys School space]. Across these three theatre spaces, the evidence for the impact of architecture on the potentials of the space is resoundingly clear. Smock Alley is also notable for the diversity of its programme since 2012, hosting a range of productions ranging from theatre students and amateur groups to professionals and festivals –

indeed, Pan Pan's *A Doll House* was the first production in the Main Space upon re-opening.

While the eminent venues for Irish experimental theatre vary in terms of versatility and specificity, Reid argues that; "The more individual a theatre building, the more it needs – nay demands – to have its own productions created to take advantage of its own particular space" (Reid 201). Nevertheless, Reid's previous implication of 'poured concrete' as limiting adaptability to some extent remains an important frame when considering theatre architecture. Morash and Richards note that "once a space for theatrical production has been constructed, the real physical limitations of that space will have a formative effect on what takes place there" (Morash and Richards 9). This idea is not simply limited to the possibilities for an individual performance, but instead it is important to note the formative effect of theatre spaces on the forms of theatre presented in that space. In the first instance, physical limitations allow or disallow certain cast sizes or enough performance space for movement and dance; these are literal, physical limitations. In the next instance, expectations are formed around the forms of theatre that will be presented; taking two Dublin theatres as an example, the tradition of repertory drama in The Gate Theatre on Parnell Square has been established over its history while The Lir Theatre on Pearse Street is a relatively new venue with a primary focus on its own theatre student programmes and work. As McAuley argues, "the place of performance itself provides a primary framework: spectators who are intrigued by a certain kind of performance go to places where it is practiced and thereby enter into a tacit contract with the performers not to be outraged by what happens" (McAuley 41). These limitations are figurative but, over time, contribute to forming an effect of expectation for spectators by association with the physical space. Inverting the previous example, spectators would not expect (according to their associations) repertory drama in The Lir and new or emerging work at The Gate, even though such work could easily be programmed if the respective artistic directors chose to do so. However, as Yi-Fu Tuan suggests, "the built environment clarifies social roles and relations. People know better who they are and how they ought to behave when the arena is humanly designed rather than nature's raw stage" (Tuan 102). In this

respect, the theatre building implies a certain code of behaviour, as well as artistic expectations. Or, as McAuley surmises:

The theatre building or designated place of performance provides a context of interpretation for spectators and performers alike. Due to the kinds of performance put on, a venue gains a certain reputation within a cultural community; it attracts a certain kind of spectator, repels others (McAuley 41).

One may argue that spectators are drawn to theatrical buildings for the narrative histories they represent. Elizabeth Mannion notes of the Abbey Theatre that, “except for the years between July 1951 and July 1966 when it operated out of the Queen’s Theatre while being rebuilt following the fire, it has always been based on approximately the same plot of land in Dublin’s north inner city. [...] to date its location has been the Abbey’s only constant” (Mannion 167). The Abbey’s spatial narrative is all the more intriguing providing the acquisition of the adjacent building on Eden Quay, ensuring that its location will remain constant. Similarly, the Gate Theatre and its repertory continues to be a physical connection to its founders, Hilton Edwards and Michaél Mac Liammoir. Indeed, it is a contemporary standard that venues around the country all generate a spatial narrative to create links with their immediate and surrounding locations. Gay McAuley suggests that an important function of the location of the theatre building is “to determine in part at least the audience for the performances put on within its walls. The nature of the performances is obviously the major determinant of who will come to a particular theatre, but the venue is also a potent factor” (McAuley 47). This is to say that, in frequenting a particular venue, audiences develop as much of a relationship with the structure as with the work they see performed within. Marvin Carlson suggests that “in every historical period and in every culture the physical matrices of the theatrical event – where it takes place within the community, what sort of structure houses it, and how that structure is organised and decorated – all contribute in important ways to the cultural processing of the event and must be taken into consideration by anyone seeking to gain an understanding of its dynamics” (Carlson, *Places of Performance* 204-205). McAuley further observes that “the place of performance itself provides a primary framework: spectators who are intrigued by a certain kind of performance go to places where it is practiced” (McAuley



41). This suggestion further complicates the isolation of performance from spatial theory in that it is not only performance dictating the venue but the venue may also dictate the performances it programmes. Susan Bennett argues to the contrary that “theatre buildings can only ever tell part of the performance story while play texts tell perhaps even less” (Bennett 20). This is to argue that we cannot know a performance simply from the space it takes place in; we will know something of its dimensions and scale, but there are limits. Even in the name of a theatre building, associations can be made, as Brandon Woolf discovers from the People’s Theatre in Berlin: “Volksbuhne. People’s Theatre. Somehow different than the “national theatres” peppering other major European cities. These halls feel hallowed, sacred even” (Woolf 144). It is not always enough to know the measurements of a space; often, there are associations with spaces that are not evident in the built environment. This is the point that Morash and Richards observe in Ireland’s theatres: “For the past century or so, it has generally been assumed that one of the conceptions of space that Irish audiences bring with them into the site of theatre (along with the concept of theatre space itself), has been the space of the nation” (Morash and Richards 9).

Of course, this assumption does not hold in all cases and in recent times, it is important to observe the different things that the Irish ‘nation’ may infer for different people. The Abbey Theatre is simultaneously host to a contemporary program of writer-led drama as much as it is an access point to the literary canon it premiered over the course of history. Smock Alley is a multi-faceted location in its current form, but it makes explicit the variety of historical purposes it has served through exposed architecture of the original stonework and the maintenance of its stained-glass windows. Project Arts Centre has a nomadic history, before settling in its current location on East Essex Street. However, in the postmodern era, these narratives and associations with buildings are both utilised and subverted in equal measure. For instance, the work of THISISPOPBABY would ordinarily be viewed as alternative or experimental; at the very least, occupying a space outside of the mainstream. The usual standards applied, THISISPOPBABY were a part of Project Catalyst, a Project Arts Centre initiative for developing new work. Even by association, then, this is a company that would perceive themselves as alternative and yet, it was the Abbey Theatre that presented THISISPOPBABY’s musical, *Alice in*

*Funderland*, on the main stage in 2012. Inspired by Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, this interpretation sees Alice (from Cork) lost on a night out in Dublin where she is exposed to a strange, hyperreal version of the city. With characters like Delores the [Drag] Queen of Hartstown, twisted scissor sisters, a politician with a Cheshire cat grin, and a loose ally in a gay roller-skater, this production stands out as a marked departure from the Abbey Theatre's programming pattern. Indeed, the marketing pitch was to upsell the perceived contrast between production and venue; a musical had not taken the Abbey main stage in over 20 years; the more than a century old Abbey Theatre presenting the not yet five years old THISISPOPBABY, and so on. The contrast was at least a novelty and at best an exciting prospect. In this case, the Abbey Theatre building as a place and its historical associations and perceived artistic trajectory were interrupted by a distinctly postmodern production. The location of the theatre building generates associations in a similar way, as McAuley observes:

The location of the theatre building necessarily makes some statement about the way theatre is perceived by society more generally and by its practitioners (whether or not they have any real choice about where they practice): is it part of high culture in association with art galleries and concert halls in a modern arts complex, is it a commercial product to be marketed like any other in association with other commercial activities, or an outpost of culture in the deadly environment of freeways and concrete apartment blocks inhabited by the working class in many cities, is it part of leisure culture or tourist culture or (a theatre on a university campus) the world of education? (McAuley 46)

While McAuley is varied in her suggested possibilities of what a theatre building's location might be interpreted as, she does not account for simple things such as poor urban planning or community theatres which serve a greater role than theatrical performance. Society is not and cannot be assumed to be commenting on theatre by the location of its facilities – no such truth can hold in a majority of cases, let alone all. A theatre that is geographically separated may still be essential to that society, while a central location may be little more than an available construction site at the right time. The location of the theatre building may make some statement, but broadly speaking, not all sides of society would be represented by it. However, if the theatre has become

an urban building, Lefebvre observes that such spaces have an “increasingly pronounced visual character. They are made with the visible in mind: the visibility of people and things, of spaces and of whatever is contained by them” (Lefebvre 75).

While buildings that bear mentioning are few in the context of Irish post-dramatic theatre, it is worth identifying the connection – if only in physical terms – that post-dramatic and the dramatic maintain in Irish theatre. There is no separation within the industry; theatre-makers distinguish themselves by their productions but are by no means operating in disregard of one another. However, the split in mainstream and alternative theatre forms is pronounced when one brings an external viewing of Irish theatre to mind. Indeed, Wiles claims the implications resulting from the split between avant-garde and mainstream are profound for late twentieth-century theatre. “On the one hand, there is mainstream theatre which inhabits either inherited Victorian spaces or else a functionalist modern machine à jouer, a machine for performing in. And on the other hand there is a fringe theatre which inhabits spaces that receive almost no mention in histories of stage architecture” (Wiles 249). The spaces available in Ireland vary from standard proscenium to modified black box to contemporary interventions of occupying non-theatrical buildings. Of the standard proscenium design, Reid claims that “it is unlikely that theatre will ever again have such a standardised format as it had at the beginning of the twentieth century” (Reid 205). While this points to alterations in theatre architecture and design, the reality in Ireland and other countries is that resources for the Arts are scarce, and it is thus unlikely that new theatre constructions will be undertaken. One clear question presents itself for alternative forms in this environment; do post-dramatic theatre-makers require a building? From the evidence in the case studies of their edited collection, Jürs-Munby et al suggest that “the dedicated theatre building has long since been abandoned, with the action taking place for instance as a staged demonstration on the streets in front of the theatre, or in a Berlin hotel, or in a lecture hall, or in the site-specific location of a Gdansk shipyard, highly charged with national-cultural memory” (Jürs-Munby, Carroll and Giles 3). While Reid agrees that theatre buildings are not essential for performances, he also adds that “a common slogan of the fundamentalists – Two Planks and a Passion – includes recognition of some of the basic reasons for organising theatre space” (Reid 207). Even

in site-specific work, however, the spaces are subject to organisation and design elements. In ANÚ Productions' *Laundry*, Sara Keating provides generous detail on the aspects of design, in particular:

The building itself provides much of the soundscape, although it is undoubtedly enhanced by Ivan Birthistle and Vincent Doherty's sound design, which never underestimates the emotional power of a heavy slamming door. [...] Sarah Jane Shiels lighting design provides narrative momentum, luring us deeper into the building with its alternately flashing and dimming codes. Designer Owen Boss responds to the laundry's environment in a subtle multi-sensory way that allows the building itself to tell its own story through smell, texture, temperature, as well as through its austere aesthetic (Keating, *Reviews: Irish Theatre Magazine*).

In this example, it is clear that the space is presented as much as it is made present. Yet, even as *Laundry* is removed from the theatre building, Haughton suggests that a part of this site-specific production's potency "lay in its staging of testimonies and recovered histories in the very building where those experiences were acquired" (Haughton 69). Buildings as 'places' may still offer some vitality and urgency to a non-theatre production; yet, in a postmodern sense, one might argue that theatre structures cannot satisfy the contemporary outlook. For instance, the proscenium stage which reveals and conceals as well as the theatre for drama built around it form a meta-space. These spaces demand drama as they were specifically constructed to suit this purpose. For instance, McAuley notes that "the creation of a division between on and off, inside and outside... permits the interplay of seen and unseen, revealed and hidden, and it is this interplay that has proved such a powerfully expressive tool in terms of the fictional worlds constructed through the performance" (McAuley 87). In this way, the representative space has a representative purpose.

Post-dramatic performance cannot be unbound from drama if it is to be confined by architectural dimensions of the dramatic theatre space. In this line of thought, David Wiles poses what is, in effect, a crucial question for theatre in postmodernity: Should one work in an inherited theatre space built for and perpetuating outmoded spatial practices? (Wiles 13). The implication in this question is that, even in rupturing the form of drama, post-dramatic practice that is presented in a

dramatic space continues to have be contained by a dramatic structure in a literal sense. Ubersfeld notes that “the structure of almost all dramatic stories can be read as a conflict between spaces or as conquest or abandonment of a space” (Ubersfeld 108). In a larger sense, the conflict between drama and post-dramatic forms plays out between spaces and the abandonment of space as much as it does in any other theoretical or practical way. Francis Reid states that, “for successful theatre, the space needs to catalyse the elusive contact that not only binds actor and audience but individual members within that audience” (Reid 11). For post-dramatic practitioners, as is evidenced in the work of ANU, the desire for a space that brings audience and performers together is paramount. The work of ANU is ‘spectator-centred’, which implies that there is a deliberate attempt to engage the spectator in the setup of the performance space. As Ubersfeld states, “theatre is the performance of a mode of activity (however aberrant that activity might appear) that the spectator recognizes, or in which he or she recognizes certain elements. Thus stage space is both the icon of a given social or sociocultural space and a set of signs that are aesthetically constructed in the manner of an abstract painting” (Ubersfeld 101). This is, in essence, how theatres come to be places rather than spaces – even in the use of a found space / place, the act of identification combined with the solidity of the structure in which that identification takes place is what sets the spectators’ experience apart. As McAuley notes, the ‘stimulus’ of being in a theatre means spectators are ready to perceive meaning (McAuley 42). However, Reid observes that most new theatres “show increasing concern with minimising isolation and emphasising contact between individual audience members” (Reid 17). Yet, emphasising contact between performer and spectator is not only achieved through closer proximity, but in careful consideration of spatial design.

## Spatial Design and Ambivalent Spaces

Cathy Leeney asks “If audiences live in a state of between-ness: between history and virtuality, identity and performativity, narrative and intertextuality, spontaneous action and self-conscious reflexivity, hierarchized structure and postmodern playfulness, between the pre-modern and the postmodern, how does contemporary theatre explore their quandary?” (Blandford 23). This question is explored by Leeney through dramatic spaces in Irish theatre and yet, it draws such evocative parallels with contemporary post-dramatic theatre. In particular, *As You Are Now So Once Were We* and *Politik* are two productions from The Company which show another set of relations to and understandings of space.

First presented in the Space Upstairs at Project Arts Centre in 2011, *As You Are Now So Once Were We* is the ensemble’s response to reading James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and attempting to connect with the contemporary city of Dublin in a similar way. Throughout the performance, the space is organised and re-organised through the clever use of cardboard boxes to form locations and settings that remain fluid and changeable, perhaps a comment on city space as transitional. As it develops, this performance becomes less about Joyce’s text and more about the urban experience and designs of the cityscape, as Fintan Walsh observes:

Words, however, seem less important than form, and new ideas are conveyed through experimenting with boxes of all shapes and sizes. As the stories unfold, the boxes become buildings, restaurants, tables and theatres, and the collective constructs the city as members' please (F. Walsh, *Reviews: Irish Theatre Magazine*).

The choice of cardboard boxes as stand-ins for buildings and locations obviously serves a purpose in the flexibility of the space for performance, but there is also a degree to which these boxes can form an image of a space without ever firmly becoming one space in particular. In this way, the performance space remains fluid and open. Walsh notes that the performers “repeatedly interrupt and correct each other, vying for attention or control of the narrative thrust. Moreover, the performers make and

unmake the cityscape as they move, through the slick manipulation of cardboard boxes” (F. Walsh, *Reviews: Irish Theatre Magazine*). While there is an extent to which narrative control is with the speaker in *As You Are Now So Once Were We*, the authorship of the space is as, if not more, important. Making and unmaking the cityscape, The Company show a deft approach to performance space which carries over to their following production, *Politik*.

Presented in the Samuel Beckett Theatre as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival 2012, *Politik* explores the theme of political engagement in Ireland and the role of each individual citizen. Questions are posed that propel this investigation; is it possible for those who perceive themselves as ‘outsiders’ to get involved in Ireland’s political system? Can we participate in political change? What can each citizen do? Can we make changes that will influence our future? As an extended conceit, the ensemble replace political participation with theatrical participation; we are no longer spectators, we are participating citizens in a democratic performance. There is a simplified performance to open with wherein the ensemble take on roles as gang members through four scenes; a meeting at a café, a bank heist, a nightclub celebration, and conclusion in the gang’s hideout. Following the first performance, the ensemble reach out to the audience for changes to incorporate into repeat performances. While the idea is simple in its construction, The Company excel in their improvisational ability and engaging spectators in the creative process. Entering the Samuel Beckett Theatre, there is an open seating arrangement which immediately subverts one perceived boundary of performance space, placing this choice with the spectator. As Clara Kumagai observes: “The stage is gone, and the audience can choose to sit where they will, in a variety of seats, couches and bar stools. There is a rather unnerving quote on the two screens at either end of the theatre: ‘If I can’t dance I don’t want to be part of your revolution’” (Kumagai). The space is thrown open and while this and the associated projections may incite some response, the process is not as simple as removing a stage. The playing space and spectator space are combined to allow for an increased participation without enforcing increased participation. Sara Keating notes that, within the open seating, there are “four defined but empty spaces where the action takes place – and the audience are encouraged to provide props and extra characters with chalk. They have

free rein on content, but there is an inherent semiotic significance in the sites of action, which makes certain details easy to predict” (Keating, Blogs / Festival Hub: Irish Times). The four defined spaces correspond to the four scenes of the intended performance; café, bank, nightclub, and hideout. However, as with their previous production, The Company’s *Politik* displays a preference for ambivalent, adaptable performing spaces rather than fixity. Any changes that spectators add with chalk to the four areas are incorporated into re-runs of the opening performance; this may vary from extended security in the bank to a variety of obstacles in the nightclub. Even though the improvisational aspect of incorporating these changes into the performance is enjoyable, the content is less the point than the ongoing conceit. As spectators of *Politik*, we are being offered not only participation in the creative act, but opportunities to design the performance space. This experience is far removed from McAuley’s observed ‘sense of transgression’ for the spectator, there is no sense of trespass in the performance space. Instead, the performance space – such as it is by the completion of *Politik* – is a result of what we might call ‘spatial dialogue’ between performer and spectator, a co-authored set of relations for the performance space.

Indeed, a recurring aspect of post-dramatic performance is the space – or perhaps, the gaps – that are installed in performances for each spectator to interpret in their own way. Benjamin Wihstutz argues that theatre “always encompasses both the aesthetic and the social space. This ambivalence of theatrical space forever leads to difficult legal, ethical, and political questions that seek to determine the precise conditions under which performances can be judged as being either art or a social, public event” (Fischer-Lichte and Wihstutz 185). *Politik* offers a defined space for spectators to contribute design ideas, but these interpretations are made literal. As such, it is equally acceptable to render non-literal or mental space available for interpretation, intended gaps that are a form of spatial interaction. In the case of ANU, the location cannot succumb to performance design and rather than resist this, this gap is highlighted to expose the distance between spectator and the real physical location of the work. Josephine Machon considers such treatment of selected performance locations to be consistent with ‘immersive’ theatre and that through “emphasising contact, tactility and immediacy, immersive theatres re-envision the relations between



people, space and time and mark the event within a participant's embodied space or interior architecture. This interplay of spatialities thus sites / cites the activity of being together during and following an immersive event" (Machon 144). For Machon, the interplay of spatialities encourages a participant / spectator to re-consider their existing relations to a given space, to consider a new reality for the space in a real and present way. Indeed, ANU's Monto cycle – a series of four major works exploring the social history of the Monto area in north inner-city Dublin – is effectively an active re-negotiation of how the location might be perceived. Miriam Haughton considers the location of the Magdalen laundry on Gloucester Street, site for ANU's 2011 production *Laundry*, and suggests that the identifiers and associations of place inform the spectator of this location's perceived social value before the performance begins in earnest. "Tattered buildings, litter, and graffiti surrounded the laundry – not ocean views, Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) clubs, or retail chains – and thus relegated the laundry and the penitents' lives to a neglected and forgotten place, outside the mainstream of national activity and representation" (Haughton, *From Laundries to Labour Camps* 76). In this way, the Monto cycle presents a radically different dialogue with the area, which offers a stark contrast to productions taking place in established theatre spaces which do not engage with the exterior location. McAuley notes the degrees of separation that theatres tend to create from their surrounding locations, observing that "there are usually a number of thresholds that the spectator must traverse: the purchase of a ticket, verification of this by uniformed staff in foyer, further verification by ushers in the auditorium who indicate the seat allocated. [...] the spectator has been progressively further and further removed from the world outside, permitted to move further and further into the world within" (McAuley 42-43). As such, the typical theatrical experience of space was delivered through fictive separation. In the work of ANU, however, we are actively challenged to re-consider our associations with a given space and in the given space, while simultaneously permitted to form new connections beyond those preconceptions. ANU go even further in ensuring individual response by distributing spectators across a variety of sequences; each spectator experiences the performances within the production in a different order, and so there is no defined pattern of response to the space or performance other than the spectator's own improvised responses. "The intimacy of the one-to-one encounter teases performer–

spectator relationships, and produces ambiguous relationships between the private and the public, between looking and other modalities of perception” (Nibbelink 412). Far from being an isolated performance strategy, this reflects a general trend towards generating ambivalence and incoherence for the spectator on multiple theatrical levels.

Hence, we do not observe entirely coherent spaces in these productions; nor are we offered any direction on how to interpret the performance spaces. Space is simply another aspect of the production that may defy easy intelligibility. In this way, experimental and post-dramatic practitioners appreciate that “innovation in the organisation of space allows for a negotiation of theatrical conventions and a tangible expression of a new perspective” (Govan, Nicholson and Normington 103). Of course, ambivalence presents itself as a strategic element of performance design, so it should not be surprising to find that postmodern pluralism and fragmentation also affects scenography. Most notably, then, post-dramatic theatre emphasises heterogeneity, even in terms of spatial design and the experience of space. Lefebvre insists that, “thanks to the potential energies of a variety of groups capable of diverting homogenized space to their own purposes, a theatricalised or dramatized space is liable to arise. Space is liable to be eroticized and restored to ambiguity [...] by means of differential systems and valorizations which overwhelm the strict localization of needs and desires in spaces specialized either physiologically (sexuality) or socially (places set aside, supposedly, for pleasure)” (Lefebvre 391). It is important to note that Lefebvre claims that space is liable to be ‘restored to ambiguity’; in essence, that ambiguity is the inherent state of space. This concept is addressed in post-dramatic theatre through examples like The Company’s incomplete spatial design for *Politik* or ANU’s non-linear progression through performance spaces in *Laundry*.

However, a standout example of active ambiguity towards space in performance is to be found in Pan Pan’s production of Samuel Beckett’s *Embers*, presented in the Samuel Beckett Theatre in 2013. While there is an observance to the auditory qualities demanded of the production, the accompanying installation – an enormous skull sculpture designed by Andrew Clancy, complemented by Aedin Cosgrove’s lighting and Jimmy Eadie’s sound design – is so elegantly balanced between metaphorical and literal representation that it provokes uncertainty as frequently as clarity. Ian R. Walsh

summarises the action: “The entire radio play is then performed via microphone from the sculpture [skull] for the duration of the piece while Aedín Cosgrove’s marvellous lights caress, illuminate and darken the skull impressing dreamlike images upon the audience’s minds that sometimes illustrate, contrast and forget Beckett’s words coming through the speakers. The piece is thus not acted (but spoken) and not killed by a literal representation” (Walsh). Indeed, there is that essential ‘fidelity’ to Beckett’s demands for the performance to not be ‘acted out’; Andrew Bennett and Aine Ní Mhuirí are concealed inside the skull sculpture as they perform the text. In many ways, Pan Pan have exploited a loophole in Avra Sidiropoulou’s claim that “it is no surprise that many directors finally resist the courtship of Beckett’s formidable texts, intimidated by the limitations they would inevitably face in the process of staging, most of their fears essentially encapsulated in the risk of having to surrender their artistic identity [...] there is in fact very little an artist can do to break free from the formal requirements of Beckett’s performance scripts” (Sidiropoulou 57-58). Through unique and well-conceived design, Pan Pan are not limited by Beckett’s formal requirements and instead uncover a way to express their own artistic identity simultaneously with Beckett’s text, neither impugning the identity of the other. As such, it is ambivalence that is essential to Pan Pan’s design. Maintaining consistently jarring visuals that somehow align with the auditory performance ensures that spectators are maintained in constant bewilderment. Helen Meany insists that ambiguity is maintained throughout, and even though “the image of the skull, and of being brought inside Henry’s head, initially seems too literal a metaphor for such an abstract piece, the cumulative effect of this staging becomes riveting” (Meany, *Stage: The Guardian*). The overall effect is that of an experience with no trace, leaving no solid memory. Walsh argues that cohesion is not at all the objective with Pan Pan’s *Embers*; that instead of striving for clarity among the individual design elements, “to complement in this production does not mean a movement towards a unified creation where all elements work together. Instead, here we have the opposite, where theatrical performance is clearly separated into its constituent parts. That is to say, we experience the lighting, the setting, the words, sound effects, the timbre of voices as a sum of parts that does not make a whole, but rather (to channel Beckett for a moment) makes a ‘hole’ (an absence of coherence)” (Walsh). While the elements of design that Walsh lists above are not individually

responsible for the incoherency that Pan Pan's *Embers* maintains, there is little doubt that their combination in the production's design is effective in diverting spectators from easy interpretations. Indeed, Jane Howard captures the spectator's experience rather succinctly in observing that the show ends in silence; "Part uncertainty if it is over; part respect for the quiet space Quinn has given to us" (Howard). Overall, this production uses design to create sensory conflict for the spectator, where the space is not only visual but auditory and neither sense is prioritised above the other.

Indeed, Jameson notes limitations in discussing spatial forms as something "we tend, crudely and not altogether accurately, to identify as visual" (Jameson 87). Lefebvre suggests that the understanding of the visual impact of space can be manipulated and to a large extent, this manipulation is a learned behaviour. "We buy on the basis of images. Sight and seeing [...] have turned into a trap: the means whereby, in social space, diversity may be simulated and a travesty of enlightenment and intelligibility ensconced under the sigh of transparency" (Lefebvre 76). McKinney and Butterworth assert that "Scenography is not simply concerned with creating and presenting images to an audience; it is concerned with audience reception and engagement. It is a sensory as well as an intellectual experience; emotional as well as rational" (McKinney and Butterworth 4). There are other possibilities within this assertion, particularly in the case of post-dramatic work where experiencing the emotionless and irrational are also valid responses. Johannes Birringer believes that "any theatre practice worth thinking about in the context of postmodern culture has been fundamentally concerned not only with recovering the meaning and boundaries of performance in the theatre but, specifically, with the transformation of visual space and the difference in attention to the perceptual process produced by scenographies of visual and acoustic images that no longer recreate the appearance of dramatic realism" (Biringner 31). Machon insists "when working within architectural space it is clear that immersive work [...] owes much to its scenographers for allowing the peripheral experience of the space to fuse with the sharp, focused vision of *the detail* in space" (Machon 124).

Ultimately, the transition in design and scenography has highlighted an over-dependence on the visual aspect of theatre. Among the early concepts of space that

post-dramatic adapted from performance art is the landscape space; reflected in Gertrude Stein's 'landscape play'. Stein's idea adhered to the following traits, as Lehmann notes: "a defocalisation and equal status for all parts, a renunciation of teleological time, and the dominance of an 'atmosphere' above dramatic and narrative forms of progression. It is less the pastoral than the conception of theatre as a scenic poem as a whole that becomes characteristic" (Lehmann 63). Stein's landscape play was conceived more with a visual frame in mind than with a concept of spatial differences between the urban cityscape and the rural landscape, yet its requisite 'defocalisation' has developed beyond the visual aesthetic of theatrical performance towards the idea of equal status for other forms of sensory experience. As is obvious from the example of Pan Pan's *Embers*, the quality of soundscapes or aural design is equally valuable in sensory terms. Lefebvre claims that "Silence itself, in a place of worship, has its music. In cloister or cathedral, space is measured by the ear" (Lefebvre 225). Indeed, sound and its design – the idea of a soundscape – has developed at a rapid pace. In discussing the work of Artangel with Josephine Machon, for example, Michael Morris states: "Sound is incredibly important, as is where that sound comes from. In the traditional theatre sound came from one source, over there, on stage. Now it's possible, even more so, to play with directionality and the architecture of sound" (Machon 157). Morris acknowledges not only the importance of sound, but the need for sound to provoke a variety of sensations. Birringer extends this idea further, arguing that beyond sight and sound, theatre can engage our kinaesthetic senses. Birringer explains that "The experience of the quality or force of a particular movement is not only the basis through which we communicate but also the ground of associations, of our concrete connections and imaginary relations with the kind of social space in which movement takes place" (Biringner, *Media and Performance* 29). These alternative means of engaging spectators have been embraced in post-dramatic and experimental theatre. Fundamentally, the limitation of theatrical experience may be perceived as the result of dramatic theatre's prioritisation of the aural and visual; a limitation that post-dramatic form certainly attempts to overcome.

Ubersfeld argues that, fundamentally, "theatrical space is always in a performance relation with something else" (Ubersfeld 103). To develop these relations,

there are various devices an artist can employ. Josephine Machon suggests that there are degrees of shared experience which “accentuate feelings of community and conviviality. Space provides the charged medium where people and things coexist in this live(d) manner” (Machon 144). So often, the emphasis for theatrical design is on ‘shared space’ between performers and spectators, yet that raises questions of ownership: whose space is it to share and why? David Wiles argues that, for Tadeusz Kantor, “this desire to bring actors and audience closer resulted in contradiction. Some experimenters in environmental theatre invited the audience to enter the performance space, and become co-creators of illusion; others transferred the performance from a theatre to an appropriate ‘authentic’ found space, generating yet another level of pretence. Attempts to destroy illusion only recreated it” (Wiles 237). Granted that performer and spectator are necessarily together in a live sense during theatrical performance, there are very clear distinctions made between the performance space and the spectator space. In this way, Ubersfeld suggests that:

[The] pleasure of the theatre has a lot to do with the fact of a visible and tangible construction of a fantasy that you can live vicariously rather than in reality, which might be dangerous. [...] the spectator will reflect upon events in such a way that those events might cast light on concrete problems pertaining to his or her real life (30).

As such, the pleasure of the theatre space is that the spectator enjoys the performance in a live sense, but returns to physical separation from the space at the end of the performance. Even with invitations to participate in performance, there is a sense of transgression for a spectator each time they cross the physical or metaphysical boundary that separates performance space from spectator space. As Gay McAuley observes, “No modern spectator would willingly go onto the stage during the performance, and, if spectators have to cross the stage before or even after the show in order to get to or from their seats, they do so hastily and with a definite sense of transgression, of being “out of place”” (McAuley 74). A code of behaviour explains away why spectators might not enter the stage space during performance, but what about McAuley’s observance on a ‘sense of transgression’ in crossing performance space

when the performance has not even started? Lefebvre claims that “space is not a thing but rather a set of relations between things (objects and products)” (Lefebvre 83).

Extending this outwards, we can also see that there is a distinct set of relations between performance space and spectator. Reid shares this perception, stating that “The heart of a theatre’s format is the relationship between stage and auditorium” (Reid 204). But how do we account for the separation that is created between these spaces at the same time that this set of relations is in place? In a sense, it is built into the architecture of the theatre space, but as McAuley observes, this is only one aspect of a ‘presentational space’ which is “made up of both the architectural features of the stage as it exists in any given theatre or performance venue and the organisation of this space for the production in question” (McAuley 79). As much as there are designed seating plans for an audience, there are designed spaces for performance and as this organisation of space is specific to each production, we can infer that each production accounts for the relation between spectator and performance space. Lefebvre considers any given space, any ‘interval’ provided that it is not empty, and observes that such a space “contains things yet is not itself a thing or material ‘object’. Is it then a floating ‘medium’, a simple abstraction, or a ‘pure’ form? No – precisely because it has a content” (Lefebvre 82). In essence, there is an intention behind the design or, indeed, the ‘content’ of a performance space. Ubersfeld proposes that theatrical space is “an autonomously constructed, complex reality” and also “an object of perception for the audience” (Ubersfeld 103). As such, we tend to ask why theatre-makers choose to add content to the spatial medium and what the intended perception of that content might be. Barthes argues that theatre is a “representational, geometrical discourse in that it cuts out segments in order to depict them: to discourse (the classics would have said) is simply ‘to depict the tableau one has in one’s mind’” (70). Ubersfeld broadens this idea, stating that “simultaneity of space allows for the presence of substitutive elements side by side” (Ubersfeld 108). Ubersfeld continues to observe that classical plays tend to bring together any dispersed elements in their final scenes, even in terms of spatial elements. It is simple enough to state that this is not necessarily the case in post-dramatic work, just as it is not the case in all drama.

In contemporary theatre, performance space is a medium for a more comprehensive sensory experience. As Lefebvre considers, performance space is to be examined “not only with the eyes, not only with the intellect, but also with all the senses, with the total body, the more clearly one becomes aware of the conflicts at work within it, conflicts which foster the explosion of abstract space and the production of a space that is *other*” (Lefebvre 391). However, it does suggest a desire for resolution on all levels of the drama that does not appear to be a concern in post-dramatic theatre. In many ways, the space of performance is another means of incoherence. There is some intention behind the design of a space and either the director or the designer seek this out. Elizabeth LeCompte, in discussion with Richard Foreman, says: “The closest I come to that is landscape architecture. I want to organize space. I can’t think unless I’m organizing space” (Marranca 41). There is clearly a desire in the case of LeCompte to organise the spatial elements of performance, even though the design may be intended to be incoherent. Johan Callens observes that “LeCompte insists on dividing the spectators’ attention between simultaneous, non-hierarchical actions on different areas of the stage” (Oddey and White 143). However, Marranca argues that LeCompte is a visual artist, and thus “starts with the construction of space as a way of conceiving design as structure” (Marranca 43). The dispersed elements within a design structure is consistent in the work of the Wooster Group, but also sets an interesting precedent that can be observed in other post-dramatic work; for example, the dispersed installations of Pan Pan’s productions of Samuel Beckett’s radio plays, *All that Fall* and *Embers*. Indeed, Aedin Cosgrove’s design is far closer to ‘installation’ in descriptive terms, spaces that complement but remain conceptually separated from the audio of Beckett’s radio plays. Patrick Lonergan, in reviewing *All that Fall*, discovers a space that is free of ‘sensory distractions’, which allows the audience ‘to listen to the play with a profound concentration’. Lonergan concludes that this not only allows for a better appreciation of the text, “but it also imposes upon the audience many of the sensations that are described by Maddy and the other characters: a sense of blindness, a feeling of isolation despite being surrounded by others, perhaps even a sense of abandonment in space. So we’re not just passively receiving *All That Fall* but actively experiencing it” (Lonergan, *Reviews: Irish Theatre Magazine*). This idea of active reception is a valid point and undoubtedly an intention of the design; by presenting us with an experiential space that



is not at all times parallel to what we are hearing, Pan Pan offer access to Beckett's work while undermining any certainty with which we can articulate the experience.

Re-evaluating the capacities of theatre to engage a wider variety of senses owes its development to technological progress; as much in a reactionary sense as anything else. As such, Shannon Jackson insists that "Theatre and technology have always been in a constant state of mutual transformation, whether one imagines that cross-media relation in bodily systems for blocking a scene, in mechanical systems for transforming a scene, or in incandescent systems for lighting it" (Jürs-Munby, Carroll and Giles 176). Wherever the motivation for change develops from, there is something notable about the way technology can be incorporated into theatre production. Machon argues that "the presence of technology can be a fundamental element within an immersive event, encouraging greater access to a sensual and felt response from the individual audience member and opening up ideas within and around creative space, encompassing the internal human capacity of imaginative space as much as designed rooms, architecture and geographic location" (Machon 48). Again, it seems that our spatial design is influenced by the technologies of our everyday experience. Machon's comparison of designed space and imaginative space is echoed by Oddey and White, who suggest that any "virtual space corresponding with the actual space is a dynamic and a constantly renewing space in which multiple performative processes occur" (Oddey and White 161). As a contrast, Birringer discusses theatre as a "very old-fashioned medium", suggesting that this inertia of new and evolving technologies is, in actuality, an advantage since even with the inclusion of film and video, "the stage is always a concretely physical space where temporal and spatial perceptions are shaped by what comes physically into the space. But the self-evidence of this space, and of the mechanics of the live body of the performer, is precisely what the theatre can defer and speculate on by making us apprehend its relationship to the not-seen and not-heard, to the out-of-place and the forgotten" (Biringger 31). The self-evidence of the space is a position that Ubersfeld uses to argue that stage signs do not need material support; "their material support is the object itself, the space itself. The theatrical object is an object in the world" (Ubersfeld 101). Lehmann suggests that theatre "is catching up on an aesthetic development that other art forms went through earlier. It is no coincidence

that concepts which originated in visual arts, music or literature can be used to characterise postdramatic theatre. It was only under the influence of reproductive media like photography and film that theatre became conscious of its specificity" (Lehmann 94).

Through this developing consciousness of theatre's specificity, spatial design or scenography have evolved from a position of minimalism and objects to what Reid observes in the contemporary approach as "a diversity which challenges the architecture of our available theatres, often seeking to find alternative spaces which have been neither designed nor designated for theatrical performances" (Reid 201). Lehmann insists that scenography, or his preferred term of visual dramaturgy, "does not mean an exclusively visually organised dramaturgy but rather one that is not subordinated to the text and can therefore freely develop its own logic" (Lehmann 93). Indeed, even Machon states that various elements become extensions of the scenographic aesthetic of the work, "influenced by the landscape or architecture as much as the bodies of the performers and the actions they execute. However flamboyant or minimal it may be, design is key to the experience of the space and to the otherworldliness created" (Machon 95). Through spatial design, scenography, or visual dramaturgy, there are a variety of approaches through which, as Lehmann argues, "theatre is defined as a process and not as a finished result, as the activity of production and action instead of as a product, as an active force and not as a work" (Lehmann 104). By designing performance space in this way, post-dramatic theatre sets a clear intention to provoke reflexivity in the spectator through spatial ambivalence. The active experience of space is essential, allowing the spectator to question their interpretations of what space might mean, and ultimately reflect on whether or not a performance space is simply a space for projecting these interpretations of meaning.

## Text

### The Postmodern Text; Incoherency, Fragments and Multiplicity

Experimentation for theatre-makers is a process of embracing complications rather than seeking resolutions. Particularly with text-based practices, given the primacy of narrative as an orderly structure, it is important for theatre-makers to push beyond the perceived limitations of text as much as they subvert or undermine the internal structures of the texts they explore. As such, presenting an incoherent text is not a failed production, but a performance strategy; as in the case of The Emergency Room's *riverrun* which premièred at the Galway Arts Festival in 2013. Jane Daly describes the production – adapted and performed by Olwen Fouéré – as “both infused with the anarchic spirit of its source and underscores the enormous challenges inherent in a theatrical portrayal of (or a part of) *Finnegan's Wake*” (Daly, 2013). Fouéré channels the voice of the river ‘Life’ from James Joyce's text in a discontinuous, non-linear and unrelenting flow. This is a performance actively defying immediate comprehension. Maddy Costa suggests that, “As an audience member, you drift along Riverrun's current, hoping not to drown” (Costa, 2014). The performance is not a traditional adaptation by any means, as Daly observes. “Rather than presenting a conventional plot, *riverrun* – like the novel from which it's fashioned – weaves neologisms and portmanteau words into a sustained stream of consciousness” (Daly, 2013). As a production, *riverrun* exemplifies how our understanding of what a theatrical text is or can be has evolved beyond the literary drama or script. Marco De Marinis concludes that the dramatic text is either “quasi-order” or “set of optional instructions” and though the dramatic text “orders” (or gives instruction for) its staging, it should not be mistaken or confused for performances that are, can be or have been (De Marinis 46). In this instance, De Marinis refers to the dramatic text as it has become conventionally recognised, according to its structural elements or its form and not necessarily to the entirety of its content. Jürs-Munby insists that “frictions between text and performance can become productive on the level of subject matter, as the performers' attitude and energy is brought into play. The resistance of performers against text and vice versa can function to disturb

ideological normalization and ‘business as usual’” (Jürs-Munby, *Text Exposed* 112). In the case of *riverrun*, these structures of form and content are radically altered, reflecting the broadened parameters in contemporary Irish theatre for what can be considered to be a theatrical text.

Indeed, it is perhaps most accurate to presently state that a theatrical text “encompasses any kind of textual blueprint that is intended for or attains performance” (Balme 125). In one example, ‘texts’ could be taken to mean the text of a play written by an author, the text of the director who has worked on the author’s script and annotated it for his or her production, or the performance itself, understood as a language of sound, light, and movement, to be interpreted by the audience (Issacharoff and Jones 1). As such, suggestions that post-dramatic theatre has abandoned text are exaggerated – a point that *riverrun* radically disproves. Speculation of this kind may originate in misinterpretation of Lehmann’s summary of ‘theatre after drama’, where he suggests that “the new forms and aesthetics that have evolved have one essential quality in common: they no longer focus on the dramatic text” (Lehmann i). Summations such as this have been misinterpreted to suggest that post-dramatic theatre has abandoned text altogether. Radosavljevic shrewdly notes that “even Lehmann’s conception of ‘postdramatic theatre’ does not presuppose non-text-based theatre, but on the contrary traces its origins to playwrights such as Heiner Muller and Peter Handke” (82). Of course, post-dramatic may no longer focus on the dramatic text alone, but that is only one type of text in a wide-ranging category. As Christopher B. Balme notes, “Postdramatic theatre may be created from a set of images, a selection of objects or physical exercises; it may or may not result in a text before or after the fact” (Balme 126). This is indicative of the transformed role of text in theatre production, particularly in postmodernity where ‘text’ takes other forms than the written or literary text. For example, an image, a film, a song, a painting, or other documents can all be considered as texts. In a different way, texts may not even be required for the conception of a performance. Ubersfeld argues that creative work developed through physical or gestural performance allows for “a space that develops in a parallel or indeed even opposite direction to that which might arise from the imaginary of the text. And that text could after all be a non-text, an exploded text, or a text that has been put into

question *qua* text – texts that contemporary drama offers in abundance” (Ubersfeld 112).

In a cultural sense, this has been the practical approach for some time; our range of cultural expression has extended beyond standard literature in our digital age. Contemporary theatre-makers would be remiss if they were to continue employing text in a traditional manner in this evolving cultural moment. Or as Lehmann argues: “The tradition of the written text is under more threat from museum-like conventions than from radical forms of dealing with it” (Lehmann 52). Fouéré’s *riverrun* is not subservient to Joyce’s prose nor does it prescribe any particular interpretation, yet it enlivens the text through performance and perhaps frees the text and spectators from an established weight of meaning and interpretation. At the same time, *riverrun* offers an example of experimental practice that remains fascinated with text, albeit seeking new forms of expression. Such experiments make it clear that we are seeing an evolutionary step in the traditional engagement with writing and literature. As such, the differences between dramatic and post-dramatic practice in terms of text are not to seek the primacy of one approach over the other; rather, it is a case of two options for creating theatrical performance. Pavis adds to this notion by noting that “Plays, literary works and dramas are still being written, and a performance does not need a textual origin, aid or trace in order to exist” (Pavis 117). Lehmann offers an alternative view, suggesting that “The focus is no longer on the questions whether and how the theatre ‘corresponds to’ the text that eclipses everything else, rather the questions are whether and how the texts are suitable material for the realization of a theatrical project” (Lehmann 56). Practitioners are realising new possibilities within the performance modes of dramatic, post-dramatic and experimental theatre as ‘text’ now has a multiplicity of forms.

An aspect of *riverrun* that merits broader consideration is the notable distinction created between text as writing and text as speech. Text and performance (or specifically, language as text and language as speech act) may be separated as concepts to better reflect the concerns of post-dramatic and experimental practitioners in Ireland with expression; the performance of text more so than its creation or origin. Noting the inadequacy of language to express everything in the human mind as an old idea, Mark Currie nevertheless argues that “it characterises a distinctly modern crisis in the relative

ability of words to document visual experience” (Currie 129). Extending this view, the crisis of the written word is defined by the term ‘inadequacy’ in an era of sensory stimulations and experience that are challenging to describe. Of course, visual experience is one aspect of this – in a broader sense, theatre increasingly aspires to activate and stimulate a multitude of senses in the audience beyond that of sight and sound. In interview with Susan Conley, Fouéré asserts:

Whatever language you speak completely shapes your reality. It shapes you culturally. It’s the result of a whole lot of forces that you have no control over. I certainly experienced as a child, being in between two languages, and that was the true place, not the English or the French — the in between. I think this gives voice to that place of silence, which is a really weird way of trying to describe it (Conley, 2013).

Indeed, the post-dramatic does not have sole claim to interrogations of the text and language of performance. As Jeanette R. Malkin argues in the case of post-war drama, “language is on trial: it stands accused of usurping and molding reality, of replacing critical thought with fossilized and automatic verbiage, of violating man’s autonomy, of destroying his individuality” (Malkin 1). Of course, dramatic theatre merits attention with regards to text as speech-act as it informs the perspective of Irish theatre-makers with regards to text and performance more generally.

The dominance of the written play-text in Irish theatre, or that in the foundation of Ireland’s national theatre the playwright was placed at its centre, infers that Irish theatre-makers are bound to employing text in their work in some shape or form. For this reason, theatre-makers moving away from traditional dramatic forms in favour of post-dramatic and experimental forms is an obvious choice in an Irish context, as Willie White suggests that, “in Irish theatre, because of the centrality of the writer and the word, the agenda has been to deliver the text to the audience. [...] It revolves mainly around speech” (Chambers et al 47). The implied critique of dramatic performance here is that providing the audience with the text takes precedent over other possibilities of performance. Balme explains that this approach to dramatic theatre has a historical context, given that, “over time, the playtext adapted itself more and more to the

reader... The dramatic text emulates increasingly the conventions of prose, providing, as it were, a mental theatre for the armchair theatregoer" (Balme 124). Whereas David Barnett insists that "Postdramatic textual delivery openly embraces uncertainty by presenting text in all its richness" (Barnett 147). In the pursuit of performativity and an active spectatorship, post-dramatic and experimental theatre-makers have a clear motivation for questioning what role text should have in contemporary performance. As Cathy Turner observes, "In many works, the verbal text is not only, or even the main structuring element" (Turner and Behrndt 29). Lehmann claims that an essential dimension of writing for the theatre in a contemporary sense is the "challenge to discover new potencies of the art of theatre." Here, Lehmann references Heiner Muller who insists that a theatre text is only good "if it is unstageable for the theatre as it is" (Lehmann 50). This idea that a text could change a theatre, either through technology, architecture or even artistic direction, has not been fully realised in Irish theatre. After all, as truly wonderful as it is to have artistic ideals, the playwright whose play is unstageable is in short demand. Since the establishment of the Abbey Theatre, Irish literary theatre has made the playwright adapt in terms of receiving commissions and funding in general. Thus, a playwright has no logical motivation to challenge this situation. Financial constraints on playwrights are an important consideration but this is immediately followed by time constraints. The professional production of a written play is a long-term process and, as Marina Carr puts it, there is "often eighteen months to two years between writing a play to its production. And you come a hell of a long way in two years" (Chambers et al 62). In this sense, the traditional Irish literary theatre is the other extreme of Heiner Muller's unstageable text; rather than theatres not being ready for the play, by the time the play is produced, it may no longer be relevant.

In this way, the motivation for theatre makers to adopt production or performance approaches with a shorter turnaround time becomes obvious. Devised work, ensembles, physical theatre and dance have all expanded as means of artistic output that may satisfy both pressures of finance and time. Yet, even these forms find their practice engaged with text to some extent. As Balme shrewdly notes; "It could be argued that every theatrical text, even one that explicitly distances itself from the existing theatrical system, is still linked to that system and its conventions" (Balme 130). Pavis goes further, alleging that there is a broader cultural or societal issue at the heart

of engaging with text. Pavis suggests that, “at whatever historical moment, in whatever culture, common sense – and society with it – holds on to an idea of a truth of the text, inscribed in it, incontestable, inalienable, and so to an idea of a necessary and possible fidelity of interpretation” (Pavis 119). In this way, the problem for theatre-makers is as much in cultural expectations for how a text should be presented as it is in their own interpretations. These are boundaries that need to be negotiated for each production. In terms of contemporary practice, Pavis finds that “it is nonetheless not easy to distinguish clearly the staging of a text and staging as a show, as an autonomous art. Often the artist has not consciously decided if it is one or the other and the spectator will, even more so, be caught between the two ways of seeing” (Pavis 123). At the same time, Radosavljevic insists that dramatic traditions do not demand ‘text versus physical performance’ to persist as the core issue. Indeed, she suggests that “the power dynamic between text and performance which underlies the development of devising as a theatre-making category has to be understood as being specifically characteristic of the English-speaking world and may not find easy equivalents in some of the other European cultures in which the verbal and the corporeal elements may be more integrated” (Radosavljevic 65). Thus, it will be observed that Ireland’s contemporary theatre practice is so coded by the written word that performance will always be inextricably linked with the written text; whether by inclusion, exclusion, or subversion of the written text. This link is not inherently negative or stifling, at least not to a restrictive extent. There are many creative actions and reactions available to Irish theatre-makers to overcome any sort of subjugation by the text. At least, there should be no unease with text remaining a part of the experimental or the alternative ‘fringe’ theatre-making for the particular ways of engaging text that practitioners have developed over time. Marranca points to the Wooster Group, noting that the “so-called ‘deconstruction’ mode of LeCompte’s style derives from film and video editing and collage, which is a spatial rather than a literary impulse” (Marranca 50). A spatial approach to text is, in this sense, ideally captured in *riverrun*; textual representation can go beyond the literal and aspects of design can both offer new insight to the text and obscure the text in equal measure. *riverrun* is also a useful example of what should be meant by deconstruction in post-dramatic practice, given that the whole text is not



necessarily taken apart, but rather opening out its structure to engage with its component parts.

As has been argued, post-dramatic is not easily categorised as a rejection of text or as non-narrative. Mark Currie argues that narrative has not disappeared, but rather that it has “polarized around Lyotard’s distinction between the grand and the little, where the former is big and bad and the latter small and beautiful, where the former is a metanarrative delusion and the latter is a form of assault.” (Currie 112) Instead of approaching the post-dramatic as inherently non-narrative, one must consider how post-dramatic attempts to move beyond narrative and how it complicates narrative structure. Susan Conley writes that “Fouéré is known for taking an artistic approach to theatre, one that has little to do with traditional beginnings, middles and ends. ‘I’m far more interested in forms of communication that aren’t about stories. A story is a very basic way of communicating an idea, and I get very angry when people say theatre is all about storytelling — no, it is about live experience” (Conley, 2013). While *riverrun* is a fascinating production in its own right, there is also a point to be made about Olwen Fouéré as an experimental practitioner with a career that predates Ireland’s present surge in post-dramatic work. Indeed, it is interesting that Conley frames Fouéré’s approach to theatre in terms of the alternative treatment of narrative structure – the traditional beginnings, middles and ends.

For experimental theatre-makers, traditional narrative structure offers something definite to react against, to decentre and reinterpret. As Lyotard claims, “The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements - narrative, but also denotative, prescriptive, descriptive, and so on” (Lyotard xxiv). The works that are presented as dramatic masterpieces, that form the essential canon of Western literary theatre, offer an established departure point for experimental theatre. As Currie explains, “A canon is a narrative of narratives, a kind of master narrative which tells the story of stories” (Currie 112). Contemporary Irish theatre has redressed the canon in a variety of ways. Standard drama has been re-visited with alternative identities; all-female castings, Bisi Adigun’s version of *The Playboy of the Western World*, among others. Of course, experimental productions have sought to engage with canonical works as is the case for a consistent number of Pan Pan’s previous

productions: *Oedipus Loves You*, *The Rehearsal...*, and *A Doll House* as examples of re-imagining the presumed 'Western' canon. Addressing the literary canon is less about deconstructing these works as it is about deconstructing the pre-conceptions and associations that precede these works as a result of their status. As such, post-dramatic theatre is an ongoing resistance to a closure of narrative at any level. While it may be a simultaneous process in adapting existing texts for performance, the activity of deconstruction – and by extension, re-construction – may merit particular attention. As John D. Caputo claims, deconstruction “is interested in what is considered the great canon - the study of great Western works - and open at the same time to new works, new objects, new fields, new cultures, new languages, and I see no reason why we should choose between the two” (Caputo 11). Yet, when a company like Pan Pan begin the process of deconstructing a text for performance, particularly a dramatic text, there must be some concern in the initial stages of taking the text to pieces. As Caputo states: “That is what deconstruction is made of: not the mixture but the tension between memory, fidelity, the preservation of something that has been given to us, and, at the same time, heterogeneity, something absolutely new, and a break” (Caputo 6). In re-imagining a text for a contemporary audience, it may be, as Jonathan Culler states, that “deconstruction is interested in what has been excluded” (Culler 152). In Ireland’s post-dramatic theatre, we are not simply seeing a resistance to narrative in terms of theatrical performance. Rather, we are seeing productions that challenge social narratives – interested, as Culler’s point highlights, in what has been excluded from the social narrative. As Currie observes: “Like nations themselves, national canons have undergone a revolution which has entailed the twin processes of, on the one hand, an increased recognition of diversity and polyethnicity within national traditions and, on the other, a devolution of canons to narrate the literary histories of hitherto unnarrated identities: women’s canons, gay canons, black canons and so on.” (Currie 112) As such, the difficulty here (most often overcome by ambivalence) is that these performances construct a social narrative of their own. Indeed, there is a supply of social commentary that prioritises the work of ANU or Brokentalkers.

The textual existence of these productions extends far beyond the performed work – exemplifying why it is that text remains a consideration of these experimental and developing forms of theatre. “How can narrative become the encompassing term

when at the beginning it is only one species among many?" (Ricoeur, *Volume 1* 32). Here, Ricoeur is analysing the problematic of narrative, suggesting there is 'something paradoxical' in narrative as a category that might encompass drama, epic, and history where these ideas run counter to what Aristotle proposes in the *Poetics*. However, Ricoeur is clear that the individual author must find "the latitude offered by Aristotle's text" (Ricoeur, *Volume 1* 32) Ricoeur presents an understanding of narrative that is a simple binary; historical narratives or fictional narratives. In ANU's work alone, we see that these supposed opposites are actually brought together – an insistence that the historical "real" is but one narrative of reality. Furthermore, ANU and Brokentalkers display the importance of historical narratives that have been omitted from the record of "real" history, highlighting the damage these omissions can cause than as much as making some attempt at correction. It follows that there are multiple forms of text available to contemporary theatre makers. Written dialogue becoming speech-act is still present; however, there are a number of other possible languages for theatre-makers to use as they compose a performance. As Jameson notes, "the languages of the postmodern are universal, in the sense in which they are media languages" (Jameson 150).

In our contemporary experience, text is far more prevalent in digital forms. That said, a caveat should be placed on discussions of digital text in connection with the post-dramatic as, too often, the tendency is to see 'new media' as unique to the post-dramatic. Shannon Jackson urges caution in any assumption that new media is specific to post-dramatic theatre. "Many forms of theatre use new media and screen technologies, including Disney musicals", Jackson observes, suggesting that an engagement with new media and technology is "a line walked by many twenty-first-century artists who find themselves enmeshed within the social and technological forces that they simultaneously critique" (Jürs-Munby, Carroll and Giles 175). In this way, we should attempt to understand the incorporation of digital media in contemporary theatre as another language of composition. Indeed, as McKinney and Butterworth observe; "Technologies of the stage can 'speak' their own various languages while working 'alongside' rather than 'behind' the text. Additionally, technologies of recording, editing and replaying or projecting can be used to help create distance between the various elements" (McKinney and Butterworth 145). Of course,

there are important issues that arise if we are to locate the alternative use of digital composition in dramatic or post-dramatic. Andrew Bennett argues that the act of speaking necessarily involves the presence of the speaker, otherwise “the digital voice recorder and any other device that transmits or makes a copy of your voice is essentially a writing rather than a speaking instrument” (11). This is generally true of how digital audio is employed in theatre; in recordings that are more like an audio cue rather than actively constructing an auditory environment for performance. Equally, one might apply a similar argument to projections of text. A demand for liveness is what separates the digital and the written text, where it simply may not be feasible to present the digital components of a performance in any other way than as built-in.

However, Ubersfeld observes that it is possible to overcome this difference in analysing the system of communication that is employed. “Advertising and the media as a whole are not only referential messages (concerning the quality of a product or the attraction of a movie) but also stimuli designed to move people to buy and consume, which are social practices. In this sense theatre is not distinct from the media” (Ubersfeld 30). Here, Ubersfeld identifies the two-fold system of communication that is found in both theatre and media; message and stimulus. It is not enough for the spectator to receive and understand the message that is demonstrated, but also to be stimulated into action. While an advert urges the spectator towards consumption, one assumes that theatre urges the spectator towards social action. As such, even though the digital language of a performance may operate as another means of performance writing, it has a specific stimulus for the spectator that distinguishes it from other digital media. Birringer states that it is vital that liveness and making the text present in performance should not be lost in cultural discourses concerned with the postmodern aesthetics of the surface. These discourses, Birringer argues, “have drawn on metaphors of staging that invoke the projection of spectacle, immediacy, presence, and transience as if the exhibitionism of technologically reproducible and interchangeable visual images in our mass-mediated culture could be readily compared to the visible presence of a performer, a visual design, or a stage image in the theatre” (Biringner 43). Indeed, there is something to be said for postmodern culture and its response to, if not expectation of, digital composition in contemporary performance.

“Postmodern culture is not just a set of aesthetic forms, it is also a technological package. Television, which was so decisive in the passage to a new epoch, has no modernist past” (Anderson 122). In our contemporary society, technology has made it possible for text to be a constant presence yet, paradoxically, this results in a reduced awareness of text.

Contemporary theatre-makers must contend with our postmodern culture’s attitude to text, unconscious of text by its excessive presence, as they attempt to make the text visible; a challenging task in what Anderson refers to as postmodernism’s “machinery of images” (Anderson 88). Post-dramatic practitioners aim to expose the text, rendering text as exposed as the means of performance, the positioning of the spectator and the design of the space. We return to earlier considerations of the spatial quality of text, as Pavis observes “a tendency to treat the text, even the classical text, by way of ‘showing’, ‘quoting’ and ‘displaying’ it in a sort of sonic and graphic installation. It is thus no longer a question of interpretation, or illustration, but of exposing the text like sonic material, of finding a device that allows the audience to walk around it” (Pavis 125). In a sense, this results in attempts to present the text as image. Popular if simplistic approaches are poster displays in the performance space, often straight from rehearsal rooms. These displays are easily understood as legitimating the production of the performance while simultaneously undermining any fictive separation that the audience could achieve. This is a purposeful text made visible throughout the performance as a way of making the act of performance itself visible. Currie argues that, in the context of postmodern theories of identity as increasingly superficial and visual projections of meaning, the tension between word and image “is a kind of power shift away from the linguistic aspects of identity towards the visible signs of identity like clothing, the body and the face” (Currie 129). Keir Elam echoes Currie’s argument for a nuanced understanding of the varieties of text in theatre as he claims that “the researcher in theatre and drama is faced with two quite dissimilar – although intimately correlated - types of textual material: that produced *in* the theatre and that composed *for* the theatre” (3). Although Elam is here referring to the written text, the same thought may be applied to the performance text. The material of theatre is produced both within the theatre and without; where the performance text can be

taken as the observed performance within the space, one could argue there is a production text that establishes the performance as it should be performed. As the production text is formed over time, it can only be the live iteration of a performance which represents a production in a shared sense. The performance is shared between performer and spectator in a spatial-temporal sense, while broader analysis takes place outside of this communication. Harvie and Lavender suggest that post-dramatic theatre “engages deliberately and self-reflexively with theatre’s aesthetic practices and forms, the ways it offers itself for perception. [...] this engagement is always explicit in rehearsal and remains so in production” (13). Post-dramatic practitioners attempt to make this reflexivity explicit in performance, displaying text, its structures and its processes of creation in order to subvert it.

Fragmenting a narrative is a practical way of approaching a text differently in practice and also disrupting established patterns of reception. For example, Marranca identifies fragmentation as an aspect of the Wooster Group’s work, a means for building a textual collage. “Built on the transformation of the fragment into an anthology, this is a new conception of dramaturgy, not merely a play or text, and more than drama. If The Wooster Group is a theatre that looks like it only cares about its image, it is just as interested in rhetoric” (Marranca 42). Indeed, the development of dramaturgical practice has a notable influence on how theatre-makers conceive and structure their work – by title alone, dramaturgy indicates an obvious awareness of structure in terms of performance. Fragmentary narratives are the result of a considered approach to narrative and an active dedication through dramaturgy to subvert traditional narrative structure.

Beyond the Wooster Group, Johannes Birringer points to the work of Forced Entertainment as an expression of “postmodernity as an antirationalist free-play world of agonistic language games that invent their own rules and strategic definitions of reality” (Biringger 18). Forced Entertainment’s free-play world with their own rules and reality is clearly demonstrated in the production *Void Story*, presented at the Project Arts Centre in 2011. For Tim Etchells, writer and director of *Void Story*, it is a world that flaunts “its own cut and paste construction and its own hybridity.”<sup>4</sup> *Void Story* follows a

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<sup>4</sup> Forced Entertainment, *Void Story* – Programme Notes

beleaguered pair of protagonists through one terrible cityscape after another and incident after incident; the protagonists are mugged, shot at, bitten by insects, chased through tunnels, stowed away in refrigerated transport, shackled up in haunted hotels and pass through everything from wilderness to funfairs. Performed by Robin Arthur, Richard Lowdon, Cathy Naden, and Terry O'Connor as if it were a radio play, the ensemble sit at two separate tables either side of the performance space, turning the pages of the script, performing character voices and adding in sound effects for gunshots, rain and bad phone-lines. As Etchells describes it, "voices tremble, echo and pitch shifts perspective further out of whack. A hallucination in the aural zone, someone's talking in the darkness but soon you figure out that it's not the person you thought."<sup>5</sup> The upstage wall is dominated by a series of projected images, a series of photo-shopped, collaged images to match Etchells' unsettling and fragmentary text. Somewhere between the live dialogue, the recorded sound effects and the collaged images attempting to visualise the narrative, is where *Void Story* actually takes place. Indeed, Tim Etchells opines that in creating *Void Story*, Forced Entertainment were most interested in "the plurality of possible stories that might emerge from any collection of material, fascinated by incompleteness, and by the meeting of different things over time and in stage space (characters, images, music tracks, texts, textures), in the ways that stories appear to fly out like sparks from the meeting of disparate elements."<sup>6</sup> Even at its most experimental, *Void Story* does not represent a non-narrative production – if anything, the disparate and fragmentary quality of the production is achieved by an abundance of brief narratives, constructed without the formal requirements of unity or resolution. While Forced Entertainment have assembled these fragments in a certain pattern, each spectator may focus or remember the pattern in a different and even unique way.

In some ways, fragmentation occurs as a natural result of a spectator's inability to either comprehend or interpret the performance as one whole entity. Ubersfeld explains that many of the virtual and real structures of the literary text disappear or cannot be perceived "because they have been erased or lost by the actual system of performance. Indeed, even if by some miracle performance could speak or tell the

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<sup>5</sup> Forced Entertainment, *Void Story* – Programme Notes

<sup>6</sup> Forced Entertainment, *Void Story* – Programme Notes

whole text, spectators would not hear the whole text. A good part of its information is erased or lost" (Ubersfeld 5). In a connected way, Pavis suggests that intentional fragmentation is not problematic, as "we do not worry about reading bits of the text as a whole, but we assemble, we edit, we bind together these verbal and extra-verbal fragments within a show. Afterwards we grasp the logic of the director, the synthesis that he has made from these heterogeneous materials" (Pavis 118). These methods of disruption are not alien to us, yet our established patterns of reception have provided us with a fixed approach to linear narrative. Practitioners are actively seeking new ways to push these methods outside of disruptions of the internal structure. Indeed, as Marranca observes, the Wooster Group's project is "to foment doubt and confusion through the performance, quotation, and collision of images, texts, and styles, thwarting habitual responses to complex ideas" (Marranca 53). The idea of decentring marries well with fragmentation of narrative, as without a clear linear pattern to follow, the effect is that of decentred reception of the text. It is, in another sense, also fitting in the unconscious experience of postmodernity that there should be no fixed centre for the post-dramatic text. As dramaturgical practice shows us, however, these alternatives are best achieved when the original structure is understood. Or, to put it another way, there can only be decentring when one knows or understands the centre. Ubersfeld highlights this in arguing that "reverse textual activity begins only once the text has been constructed" (Ubersfeld 112). Textual deconstruction aligns with the post-dramatic in this sense; deconstruction requires a structure to depart from as post-dramatic requires dramatic form to experiment beyond. Currie sums up the post-structuralist shift from narrative coherency to complexity in the following way: "For the traditional critic, the most profound hidden design in a narrative was its unity, the exposure of which would also be a revelation of the work's formal, thematic or even polemic coherence. In other words, in the critical quest for unity there was a desire to present a narrative as a coherent and stable project" (Currie 7). Unity as a term has a broad set of connotations for theatre practitioners, most commonly traced to Aristotelian unities. The need for a digression from unified narrative is brought on by incoherency in our cultural experience, by human experience failing to reflect one stable project. This leads us to consider a move beyond narrativity and into thematicity.



### Articulation; from Narrativity to Thematicity

If the postmodern text achieves incoherency through the unease between performance and text, then articulation of the postmodern text is challenged on larger scale of production, if not beyond. We articulate the world around us through text. Within this argument, elements of language and its functions are present although it is not language that is the concern. Text and its role in our articulation of the world around us, not language for its role in communication or speech act. The written drama is conceived as text that will become speech; that is a thing of its own. If we concern ourselves with the dominance of text as the form of articulation – the written drama, newspaper review, and promotional poster – these texts form an essential part of contemporary theatre. Yet, we experience text in radically new ways and these presentations of text have changed in a relatively brief period of time. Similarly, our ideas of text – paper-based or electronic – have multiplied. All of the foregoing is an attempt to place text at the centre of investigation in terms of contemporary Irish theatre. Articulation is an individual process and, as such, it is important to assert from the outset that this section in no way intends to close off articulation or individual responses. As Barthes puts it, “the discourse on the Text should itself be nothing other than text, research, textual activity, since the Text is that *social* space which leaves no language safe, outside, nor any subject of the enunciation in position as judge, master, analyst, confessor, decoder” (164). Far from closure of interpretation, this outline from Barthes establishes a necessary guideline for analysis; a preference for the descriptive rather than the prescriptive. Indeed, it will be of greater benefit to look at examples of interpreted text in contemporary theatrical practice instead of proposing a set of rules that theatre-makers and performance writers follow. This latter response would be futile in any case; as has been established, the rules of creation are also created throughout the development process.

Lehmann observes in present society that “almost any form has come to seem more suitable for articulating reality than the action of causal logic with its inherent attribution of events to the decisions of individuals. Drama and society cannot come together” (Lehmann 181). Jerome Carroll argues that, in such a statement, “Lehmann rejects conventionally dramatic approaches to character and action because he views

the faith they indicate in comprehensible causal connections and individual agency as an erroneous representation of the individual's experience of political and economic reality in advanced capitalism" (Jürs-Munby, Carroll and Giles 250-251). The idea of reality and how we experience it is a source of contention in these two opposing views, but they might be framed by a broader philosophical concept of knowledge. Indeed, text and articulation merit attention as, most often, text becomes the site of modernity and postmodernity's arguments about knowledge. According to Lyotard, "Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable" (Lyotard xxv). Lyotard's incredulity to metanarratives is a sceptical position towards one of the authorities of modernity, but also a distrust of text as carrier of singular reality, thus limiting knowledge. Currie states that "Contemporary approaches to narrative generally insist on the idea that narrative constructs a version of events rather than describing them in their true state, that it is performative rather than constative, or inventive not descriptive" (Currie 120). For Currie, then, it is hardly productive to criticise narrative as being reductive on the one hand and yet operate with a limited or reductive approach to narrative on the other. Yet, Lyotard's subversion of metanarratives creates a polarization around grand and small narratives rather than a new approach, a point that draws criticism from Currie, in particular, who argues that the "proliferation of difference and the standardisation of the world seem to go hand in hand" (Currie 115). In this way, text is not removed nor is it compelled to a new approach, nor is narrative done away with altogether either.

However, post-dramatic theatre seeks new forms and methods to express knowledge beyond the standard narrative approach. Jen Harvie and Andy Lavender insist that the shift to a 'theatrical theatre' of the post-dramatic is evident in "a turn from *narrativity* to *thematicity*", a process that consistently involves works that contain "some narration and narrative in play, but are usually strongly organised around a core of thematic concerns" (Harvie and Lavender 14). This is more than a trend in post-dramatic work, it is rather a constant. While the point may be made that post-dramatic is not a rejection of narratives, it is certainly pushing the limits of the form. For example, in Pan Pan's *Everyone is King Lear...*, a work that responds to and incorporates William Shakespeare's original text, Jesse Weaver observes: "The relationships and themes

written into the language — that of infirmity, mental instability, or loneliness — find compelling associations here, and force us to really listen, as if for the first time, to Shakespeare’s words, which pulse in this instance with strange possibility while at the same time denying a crystallisation of meaning” (Weaver). This performance is organised on a multitude of levels; in terms of rhythm, emotion, action, repetition, and a variety of performance elements that do not necessarily align in a convenient narrative arc. In place of linear narratives which progress through a plot in a certain order, post-dramatic work is often composed of various scenes under a broader theme which may be performed in any number of sequences. The performance creates the rules of its interpretation in this way, composed of textual and non-textual signs from the conception of each performance moment. Ubersfeld argues that it is not possible to use the same tools to examine both textual signs and the non-verbal signs of performance. (7) Michael Kirby suggests that there may be a ‘theatrical syntax’ but this is based on the assumption that set rules exist for connections between the sign character of performance elements [Kirby, *A Formalist Theatre* 39]. This may be the kind of confusion that Ubersfeld is hoping to avoid by making a clear separation for the elements of text and elements of performance.

So, while we have seen that performance is realised as separate from the text, how essential is text in articulation of performance? Susan Conley explains that she did not attempt to read the source text, James Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake*, prior to attending the performance of *riverrun*; something that Olwen Fouéré commends her for:

You’re right, because in a way, that’s very much the approach I took [...] There are so many Joyce academics out there, I was incredibly tempted to sit down with them all when this idea was born. I realised that I had to make my own journey through it, find out what I wanted to do first — and then it started to lead me (Conley, 2013).

More than anything else, what *riverrun* shows us is that comprehension of the text — our articulation of the literal words used in performance — is secondary to what we interpret from the performance itself. It is this desire to undermine the literal that may be misconstrued as the post-dramatic abandoning text. Instead, the post-dramatic is taking text to its extremes in order to expand its boundaries or expose the limits of text.

Marranca observes that the Wooster Group “revels in the rhetorical play of text and image and hearing and sight, as they demonstrate the very process of “articulation”. Meaning is less important than the contrapuntal and polyphonic “voices” each aspect of the staging expresses. What matters is the frenzy of presence” (Marranca 57). Ubersfeld critiques the assumed status of performance as “no more than an expression and translation of a literary text” by observing that this requires a presupposition of “an underlying basic idea of semantic equivalence between the written text and its performance” (Ubersfeld 5). On the contrary, Jane Daly reacts to the utter lack of equivalence between text and performance in *riverrun*, noting that “Fouéré channels a barrage of voices and languages into a fragmented narrative doused with linguistic acrobatics and tenacious experimentation. Phrases or expressions that seem to promise recognition are gleefully subverted: “Bring us this day our mailing bag”, “I beg your burden”, “A nation once a game”. Attempting to thread the unfolding action into anything resembling a storyline is fruitless” (Daly, 2013). This fragmentation is not only a re-working of the whole structure, but also the minute details of individual sentences and phrases. In this way, *riverrun* is an example of post-dramatic work attempting to push beyond literal text to explore responses that are less literal in their articulation. Sidiropoulou argues that, in the latter part of the twentieth century, a performance script became a synthetic construction out of pieces of literature, history, bits and pieces of dialogue, improvisations, or media reports. In this way, “the idea of *fragment* as a structural device for theatre also became very pronounced” (Sidiropoulou 31). Fragmented text has an impact on immediate response as it applies to theatre because, as Ubersfeld suggests, “more than in any other textual domain, the text takes on meaning only through what is unspoken, and more precisely, through what is implicitly understood...” The characteristics of the implicitly understood are listed as “dependence upon relations in context; instability; opposition to literal meaning to which something seems to be added on; discovery through discursive procedures” (Ubersfeld 156-7). These characteristics are present in *riverrun* in different ways; instability and opposition to literal meaning are the central acts of play, yet the only dependence upon relations in context is to the present act of performance. Lyotard argues that limits are placed on language by institutions and that “the boundaries only stabilize when they cease to be stakes in the game” (Lyotard 17). Thus, the instability of

text emerges as its active quality in place of literal text which has been processed for articulation. Ubersfeld states that the implicitly understood “seems to be that which conditions and sometimes constitutes the central function in the domain of theatre” (Ubersfeld 157). In this sense, making both text and its articulation explicit reduces the theatrical possibilities of performance and interpretation, whereas embracing the instability of text allows for a range of articulation from explicit to implicit.

While *riverrun* presents a fragmentation of a text on every level, this is only one disruptive approach to text in post-dramatic theatre. Using multiple texts either simultaneously or throughout an act of performance forms another strategy of disrupting linear narrative; a definitive performance strategy of the Wooster Group, for example, whose response to text is perhaps best described as excess: “A single text or site is far too confining and claustrophobic for The Wooster Group. Putting more and more complications into it, by way of other texts and other media, points to a way out of it” (Marranca 44). This innovative approach uses the literal qualities of text against itself, overloading the spectator with texts and complicating the act of articulation. For Barthes, multiplicity is not only an act of combining texts, but something that is present in individual texts in any case. He argues that “a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author” (Barthes 148). Two interesting ideas emerge from Barthes here; the first relates to the internal multiple relations of a text, while the second identifies the reader as the focus for text and its multiplicity.

In the manner of direct address, Pan Pan open their performance of *The Rehearsal* by explicitly relating the text to the audience, as Professor Amanda Piesse “gives a short, persuasive and slightly timorous lecture on the instability of text, meaning and being in *Hamlet*. This she delivers while holding the dog’s leash and concludes by playing Greensleeves on a recorder” (Crawley, 2010). Even in this explicit act, there are implicit textual connotations of another kind operating simultaneously; the physical joke in combining an academic reading and a restrained ‘Great Dane’, for example. However, this reflexive act is actively requesting the audience to be aware of their own relations to the text of *Hamlet*, to be conscious of the instability of the text

and so open their interpretations to other ideas. In observing the early experiments of 'New Formalism' [created by Richard Foreman, Robert Wilson and Michael Kirby], Nick Kaye analyses "an attempt to throw the viewer's effort to read the performance sharply back upon itself" (Kaye, *Postmodernism and Performance* 46). This is the effect that Pan Pan achieve through this act of direct address, returning the reading of performance back to the audience, and it is something that has reappeared in their later work. Reviewing the production of *A Doll House*, Harvey O'Brien observes that "[Aine Ní Mhuirí] helpfully explains the function of the theme of death and the symbolism of disease, points out how Nora's final speech summarises the entire play, and consistently reminds us of the intellectual frame like an annotated playscript while also doubling as the servants and children and other minor roles" (O'Brien). As such, Pan Pan construct a playful relationship with text and welcome the spectator to engage with text in the same way; remaining self-conscious of text, its presence, and its functions throughout performance. Barthes asserts that "we know that to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (148). Andrew Bennett critiques this assertion, identifying "the stringency of a certain circumscription, a certain subjectivity, as one model of unity and essentialism centred around the figure of the author is replaced by another, centred around the figure of the reader" (18). Yet, Ubersfeld argues against reading as it pertains to theatrical text: "To read theatrical discourse is to be involved in something that is secondary to performance; in reading theatrical discourse we reconstitute, in our imagination, the conditions for its enunciation" (Ubersfeld 159).

Returning to *A Doll House*, Helen Meany argues that Pan Pan "seem to be x-raying rather than reviving the drama of a young woman who comes to realise that she must leave her stifling marriage and make her own way in the world" (Meany). With a similar interpretation of the performance as 'uncovering' the original text, Harvey O'Brien suggests that "Pan Pan have found a way through the layers of analysis, politics, history, and accrued learning and invigorated the human heart of this play" (O'Brien). It becomes clear that Pan Pan's process is not inherently a deconstruction of the chosen text, rather it is an act of separating core text from the accumulation of secondary readings and framing contexts. Elsewhere, these frames actively allow a reader to

articulate the text, creating an orderly interpretation; yet, it is this sense of a unified and orderly frame that post-dramatic work is attempting to subvert. Yet, Pavis questions whether or not it is possible to escape normative thinking, the kind of thinking that demands completed articulation:

Are we not ourselves – as spectators, actors, directors – always after-the-act: in the act of reading, interpreting, using language, staging the word? [...] This desire for coherence, for verification, validation and fidelity, runs very deep. As deep, indeed, as the desire to create another theatre, less logocentric and more eccentric (Pavis 124).

Barthes identifies an issue with these processes and frames that can be built-in to a text and get between the reader and the text: “The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination” (Barthes 148). Of course, the distinction that post-dramatic work achieves is to deliver non-unified texts so that it is the reader / spectator who articulates their own unity in a deeper sense. That is to say, the desire for coherence that Pavis cites is the responsibility of the individual spectator and not compelled by the performance. For instance, *A Doll House* does not suggest that the audience should only perceive closure with the ‘slammed door’, but that there are other possibilities: as Helen Meany observes that Nora’s “painful movement towards self-knowledge is only beginning. Rather than a feminist rallying call, Quinn's production gives a riveting exposure of the limits of love” (Meany). In this way, text for performance remains open rather than closed, an incomplete articulation, or as Harvey argues: “It is vain to try and master a text because the perpetual interweaving of texts and meanings is beyond our control” (Harvey 49-51). Post-dramatic resistance to closure of the text is ultimately an attempt to keep interpretation open. Jürs-Munby states that resistant texts “remind us not only of the ways in which we are continually being ‘scripted’ and ‘conscripted’ by dominant ideologies but, equally, of the ways in which writers are engaged in creating spaces to expose these dominant scripts” (Jürs-Munby, *Text Exposed* 113).

Ubersfeld propels this argument on in asking: whose discourse is discourse in the theatre? On the one hand, theatrical discourse is that of “a sender-author and as

such can be thought of as a textual (articulated) totality”; on the other hand, it is “also, inseparably, the discourse of a sender-character and in that sense the discourse is not only articulated but also fragmented” (159). For Ubersfeld, this ambiguity is specific to theatre, notwithstanding the ambiguous nature of discourse as it stands. On another level, Mark Currie argues the position that criticism forms a kind of fiction about performance. He suggests that seeing “fiction as theoretical or criticism as creative is to recognise their mutual contamination. The ambiguity designates the problem of whether literary meanings are discovered or invented by a critic, revealed or created by the act of reading” (Currie 63). Peter Crawley posits that “the persistence of written text, the residue of the theatre event, tends to dominate critical reception and analysis” (Crawley 11-12). Given that moments of theatre are fleeting and ephemeral, it is possible that there has been an overdependence on the play-text as the source of critical analysis in Irish theatre. However, Crawley identifies an issue that reaches beyond initial critical reactions to performance. Paul Ricoeur offers the philosophical view that:

...the movement of transcendence by which every work of fiction, whether verbal or plastic, narrative or lyric, projects a world outside of itself, [...] which in turn is capable of providing a space for a confrontation between the world of the text and the world of the reader (Ricoeur, *Volume 2* 5).

Applying this logic to performance criticism, these texts should be seen as a site for further engagement – or as Ricoeur suggests, a space for confrontation – rather than a completed and framing text. Lehmann states that post-dramatic theatre “takes on a fragmentary and partial character. It renounces the long incontestable criteria of unity and synthesis and abandons itself to the chance (and risk) of trusting individual impulses, fragments and microstructures of texts in order to become a new kind of practice” (Lehmann 57). Taking the notion that post-dramatic theatre is a different kind of practice into account, and that the practice incorporates fragments and microstructures of text, it should follow that another kind of critical response is required. Ubersfeld urges a sequential analysis, stating that “The search for the kernel allows that which is concrete in the text to speak to us” (157). This approach of sequences and micro-sequences reduces the text into units for ease of articulation; however, this is articulation for the critical reader or analyst. Such an approach,



focussing on the minutiae of theatrical text and performance, may bear little resemblance to the experience from the performed work. Nevertheless, Balme astutely notes that should we continue to “examine contemporary texts with analytical instruments developed for a different aesthetic system [...] without first trying to understand the communicative and aesthetic codes that these new texts seek to activate, we will miss a large part of the aesthetic and innovative potential of such texts” (Balme 126). To this end, one reason for limited interpretations is not only that the form of theatre is different, but also that our cultural language has also evolved throughout postmodernity. In a contemporary sense, our literacy may be considered to incorporate more than one vocabulary or language. Thus, considerations of singular textual constructions may no longer be appropriate.

Our contemporary relationship to text has expanded beyond words and language. Indeed, Lefebvre insists that for a critical analysis to “underestimate, ignore and diminish space amounts to the overestimation of texts, written matter, and writing systems, along with the readable and the visible, to the point of assigning to these a monopoly on intelligibility” (Lefebvre 62). As Barthes asserts, a text is not a line of words, “but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture” (Barthes 146). Text as a multi-dimensional space presents the idea of the spatial quality of text; that is to say, words as objects or design, a consistent trend in post-dramatic work. This approach to text is not unique to post-dramatic form. Historically speaking, theatre was late to professionalise in terms of the specialist roles we now treat as common; particularly in the case of a stage director and Sidiropoulou suggests that “in the late nineteenth century, directors triumphed in their role as authors of the theatre text, exploring the possibilities of an ever-growing array of scenic languages available to them” (29). In this way, it is necessary to conceive of the space of performance alongside the text as ‘scenic languages’ or authored qualities of performance. Yet, text as a spatial quality evolves into something more in post-dramatic theatre; we have visible text, posters, projections, performances with live subtitles. Karen Jürs-Munby suggests that “written words do not simply vanish in performance but are displayed on stage to be read by the audience, or scripts or texts are read from by the performers as a visible reminder of their speech’s origin in writing” (Jürs-Munby,

*Text Exposed* 102). Marranca identifies the physical use of text in the Wooster Group's performances as 'texture rather than text':

A dramaturgy of the dispersed text. The Wooster Group are not beloved readers. They are browsers who skim the pages of books, randomly collected. They like the sound of words rather than their meaning. They are more interested in passages than in writing. This is the contemporary style of reading – scattered, naïve, non-linear. Texts that can be interrupted. A book that can be opened to any page (Marranca 40).

Marranca's term of 'dispersed' text is useful; any act of decentring or deconstruction of text takes away the structure that contains the text, open to dispersal. The Wooster Group develop their work through the manipulation of textual materials, work that is propelled by "competing forms of narrative, allegory, and the critical impulse. [...] The intention is not to make anything meaningful, but to empty everything – the body, the word, the object – of meaning" (Marranca 58). For example, in their 1981 production, *L.S.D. (Just the High Points)*, the manipulation of text is overt throughout the Wooster Group's performance. The stage is set with one long table, littered with a range of texts that are read at random; works by Aldous Huxley, Arthur Koestler, Timothy Leary, Alan Watts, William Burroughs, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and others. Jürs-Munby states that "reading of text onstage – as an integral part of the dramaturgy rather than just part of the rehearsal process – is, on the surface, one of the simplest uses of exposed textuality in theatre. [...] it can produce a dynamic that is anything but simple" (Jürs-Munby, *Text Exposed* 105). The Wooster Group's process invokes what Jean Baudrillard refers to as "death by proliferation", an over-saturation of text for the spectator to process; or what Lehmann refers to as "simultaneity" (87). This practice of layering has a curious result in that the over-saturation of text actually causes the text to become invisible. As Baudrillard claims, nothing disappears by coming to an end; rather, "things disappear through proliferation or contamination, by becoming saturated or transparent, [...] Rather than a mortal mode of disappearance, then, a fractal mode of dispersal" (Baudrillard 4). This point echoes back to earlier discussions of presence and absence in terms of performance and spectatorship. Applying Baudrillard's point to text, proliferation of text results in fracturing of the

performance as excessive texts becomes increasingly difficult to interpret or even resolve in a meaningful way. This fracturing of performance tests our evenly-hovering attention, dispersing the spectator's focus and pushing our capacity to interpret up to and beyond its limits. So it is that text does not disappear from post-dramatic theatre but rather it takes on an ambivalent form, both present and absent through excess.

Yet, the result of the Wooster Group's overloading of texts is more than an oversaturation of the performance with text. Instead, it leads to text becoming a physical presence. This is consistent with Forced Entertainment's *Speak Bitterness*, as Jürs-Munby asserts that "the lines of text, collectively written by Tim Etchells and the company, are not simply memorized and then spoken, but are present on written 'documents' from the very outset [...] A major scenographic element on stage, they are present as a material for the performers to work with and to be contextualized in the live situation" (Jürs-Munby, *Text Exposed* 108). Not far removed from the design of the Wooster Group's *L.S.D. (Just the High Points)*, *Speak Bitterness* involves a long table strewn with papers and texts that the performers either hold or select at random. First presented in 1994, the performance is indicative of Forced Entertainment's style, where the text and explicit actions of the performance are secondary to the implicit game that is being played by the performers. Sidiropoulou asserts that "each theatre event has its own logic and that part of the director's job is to organise and communicate to the spectator the rules that govern it" (Sidiropoulou 78). In the case of *Speak Bitterness*, the ensemble compete to confess to anything from the most despicable, most hilarious, or most genuine act listed on their piece of paper. Jürs-Munby opposes any suggestion that the presence of the written text on stage subverts theatrical presence altogether, arguing instead that exposed textuality in contemporary performances is not only an important aspect, but also "part of their capacity to highlight, rather than obscure, the gap, tension and conflict between text and performance" (Jürs-Munby, *Text Exposed* 102). As Jürs-Munby indicates, there is receptive activity beyond the visible that is simultaneous to the exposed text in performance.

From dispersed text to exposed text, it is plain to see that there are multiple levels of text functioning in contemporary theatre practice; both implicitly and explicitly, both in performance and in spectator articulation. Barthes claims that the Text is plural; that is, "not simply to say that it has several meanings, but that it

accomplishes the very plural of meaning: an *irreducible* (and not merely an acceptable) plural. Barthes continues: “The Text is not a co-existence of meanings but a passage, an overcrossing; thus it answers not to an interpretation, even a liberal one, but to an explosion, a dissemination” (159). These plural functions of text are not constructed to be isolated and interpreted; rather, as Barthes suggests, a text that is already internally plural combined with another one or more texts are an explosion. Thus we do not interpret the isolated text, but the amalgamation of texts. Bennett counters that “Barthes’s text is intertextual. But this idea embraces a new conception of intertextuality that goes beyond specific and identifiable echoes, allusions, or references. Barthes’s is a radical intertextuality without origin” (Bennett 15-16). It is in this sense that we might move beyond intertextuality to consider hybrid texts for post-dramatic theatre, a pluralised form of texts where we observe the connections instead of the individual pieces. After all, this reflects our contemporary experience of text in a world where text is such a pervasive force. As Jürs-Munby notes:

We are bombarded not just with media images and sounds but also with media texts. Together they mediate our sense of the world and of ourselves. Therefore, new uses of exposed textuality onstage also have something to do with the way in which theatre companies, writers and directors try to give an account of our electronically mediated world – *whether or not* they actually use such new technology onstage (Jürs-Munby, *Text Exposed* 104-105).

Before giving consideration to the effect of technology on text, it is necessary to assert that performance is combining these varieties of text, forming hybrid texts, evolving from the literary criticism pattern of intertextuality, albeit in a radically altered sense. The hybrid shares the intertextual characteristic of “being the text-between of another text”, as Barthes states; arguing further that an ‘original’ work is not as important and that “to try to find the ‘sources’, the ‘influences’ of a work, is to fall in with the myth of filiation; the citations which go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet already read: they are quotations without inverted commas” (Barthes 160). Julia Kristeva coined the term “intertextuality”, stating that every text is “a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralise one another” (Kristeva 36).

However, as Bennett argued, this is a radical intertextuality. For post-dramatic theatre, the permutations expand to include more than literal texts; in a sense, the performance is a collection of texts in its own right, where no one text is more valuable than the arrangement of the texts. Jason Byrne, the artistic director of Loose Canon Theatre Company captures how this hybridity enhances the theatrical experience: “To just put on Shakespeare, it doesn’t do anything; it’s a completely dead form. [...] Moments may speak but it needs to be imbued with something that is contemporary... I mean contemporary thought processes” (Chambers et al 51). Offering a complementary position, Antonin Artaud states:

Past masterpieces are fit for the past, they are no good to us. We have the right to say what has been said and even what has not been said in a way that belongs to us, responding in a direct and straightforward manner to present-day feelings everybody can understand (Artaud 55).

It is this desire to enhance performance to respond to contemporary experience which drives the radical approach to text in Irish theatre. Companies like Pan Pan, Brokentalkers, ANU Productions and The Company have engaged with texts ranging from writers like Sophocles, William Shakespeare, Samuel Beckett, James Joyce and Jorge Luis Borges to documentary evidence from interviews, gathered testimonies; even the Ryan Report on institutional abuse. While these sources are varied, there is a point of consistency in the production process of each group; the central text is not the only textual influence of the production. In this sense, these companies aim to reflect a condition of contemporary life as they experience it. Julie Sanders labels this ‘the intertextual impulse’, an idea that displays hybridity in action (Sanders 17). The intertextual impulse in post-dramatic theatre provides us with an array of hybrids: tradition with the present, local and global cultures, audio and visual with kinaesthetic; far more than combinations of written or adapted texts. As an example, Parker-Starbuck identifies the complex levels of text operating in the Wooster Group’s *Hamlet*:

The Wooster Group production then, is the Wooster Group performing a *Hamlet* about the film version of a *Hamlet* that was about Burton’s stage version of a *Hamlet* which was directed by another famous Hamlet, that echoes and ghosts

the many *Hamlets* before it, creating a cascading mirror effect of *Hamlets* as far back as our historically trained minds can remember (Parker-Starbuck 25).

Making theatre of this type speaks to the contemporary sensibility, where communicating through imagery and sound has as important a place as text alone. This also speaks to the academic sensibility, where Elinor Fuchs notes; “Reading today has become an elusive activity of intertextuality, discerning veils through veils. We may still read “for the story”, but we read through Freud, through Marx, Saussure, Darwin, Einstein and Relativity, Heisenberg and the uncertainty principle, through Foucault, Derrida, Lacan and other poststructuralists” (Fuchs 192). In particular, the work of Pan Pan throws up some interesting examples of theatrical practice and textual multiplicity. Peter Crawley describes Pan Pan’s theatre aesthetic as “a theatre in which text abounds but the play is not the thing”, making the overt reference to Pan Pan’s take on *Hamlet* in their production *The Rehearsal: Playing the Dane* (Crawley 11). Indeed, intertextuality is a core element of Pan Pan’s process; in *The Rehearsal*, the performance begins with an academic lecture on the intertextuality of *Hamlet* as a play, citing references from Samuel Beckett and Tom Stoppard, and goes on to further evoke the connection of Shakespeare to academia through a secondary-school groups’ performance of *Hamlet* which acts as the play within the play. Pan Pan’s creative process exemplifies a new Irish literary theatre; taking an established text, exploring its cultural significance, finding points of contemporary relevance and presenting a performance that speaks with the audience about shared contemporary perspectives.

Essentially, this is an adaptive process that reflects our hybrid experience; yet this is not to suggest a radical departure in theatre altogether. Again, post-dramatic is to be considered as a departure from dramatic and so, whether under the term of adaptation or recycling, theatre has sought new and contemporary forms of expression since the origins of formalised dramatic theatre. As Carlson explains, however, new forms do not always necessitate new content:

All three [Aristotle, Bharata, and Zeami] allow for both the retelling of stories and for the creation of new stories for dramatic purposes, but all three also consider the superior and more significant drama to be that in which the material is already familiar to the audience, drawn from a shared body of

historic, legendary, and mythic material treating heroes, kings, and gods (Carlson 18).

In the adapted work, we cannot overlook the significance of the altered perspective. On one hand, this is being careful to say that neither original nor adaptation should be automatically granted an authority for greater artistry, truth or advancement of thought. On the other hand, it is important that – regardless of intent – there is a subconscious comment being made upon the original that is not about the context in which the original was created but rather the context of the act of adaptation; that is to say, the contemporary moment.

However, there is a suggestion of subversion in every adapted work. Indeed, Sidiropoulou criticises the limiting hierarchical structures of drama that “surrender to the primal “authority” of the writer” and argues that “meaningful auteur theatre keeps resisting this, oftentimes, uncritical complacency, renouncing the illusory nature of security in an age marked by fissure, perturbation, and chance” (Sidiropoulou 138). So it is that texts are not left alone, in a sense, but always adapted, recycled, or combined with new forms and references to connect and become relatable to any contemporary audience. In contrast though, subversion is also evident in what Sanders terms as ‘defamiliarisation’; the achieved re-imagining of a canonical text leads to established perspectives becoming open to scrutiny once more, wherein the canonical text has been rendered unfamiliar. (Sanders 99) As such, it is necessary to render an original unfamiliar in the first instance, albeit without removing the entirety of the original. Linda Hutcheon argues that, with adaptations, “we seem to desire the repetition as much as the change” (Hutcheon 9). In the main, Sanders shares a similar position – suggesting that adaptations “are all about multiple interactions and a matrix of possibilities. They are, endlessly and wonderfully, about seeing things come back to us in as many forms as possible” (Sanders, 160). To all intents and purposes, Carlson agrees:

When recycled characters appear without a specific accompanying recycled narrative, audiences are encouraged to focus not so much on changes in the new versions but, on the contrary, on what has not changed, that is, on the predictable quirks, characteristics, and interpersonal relationships of the character or characters being recycled (Carlson 49).

Pre-existing relationships with texts that are being adapted infer that the audience will arrive with expectations connected to the performance. In this sense, an adaptation is automatically an audience-centred performance, asking to engage with the text in a new way. Carlson's choice term of 'recycling' is a provocative one, as it connects with Parker-Starbuck's analysis of the Wooster Group's process, as she states: "Recycling is an ongoing characteristic of the Group, from texts to bodies, from costumes and props to settings" (Parker-Starbuck 26). Yet, this strays from Artaud's ideal for theatre, as Jacques Derrida suggests that "Artaud wanted to erase repetition in general" (Derrida 310). Repetition is not performed exclusively through text in post-dramatic theatre – sometimes gesture or generally in structure – but is most often employed as a device to subvert rather than affirm meaning. In the idiom of the post-dramatic, repetition is not simply performing an action to offer multiple interpretations; it can also express the futility of repeating an action that has already been acted. At the same time, the prolific, self-reproducing, or repetitive act interrogates its own capacity to mean anything. As is often the case, our attention is not drawn to repetition as much as it is to aspects of change. Julie Sanders says that an audience of an adapted work "must be able to participate in the play of similarity and difference perceived between the original, source, or inspiration to appreciate fully the reshaping or rewriting undertaken by the adaptive text" (Sanders 45). As Carlson notes, such practice is indicative of theatre's traditional association with cultural memory and "how central a role theatre has always played in a culture repeating again and again to its members its own particular stories" (Carlson 24). Parker-Starbuck explains that this association is present in the work of the Wooster Group, only that it goes further; not only do the Wooster Group "draw on cultural memories and memories of their own pasts as well, and succeed in presenting a Hamlet for the twenty-first century – one resonating with recent theories of fragmented identities and post-modern sensibilities, but also with a devotion to the theatrical space and bodies found in that space" (Parker-Starbuck 26). In essence, this is the argument for post-dramatic's trend for hybrid texts; even if a performance operates with only a single written text, the unwritten text of contemporary experience is combined with our reading and interpretation of work. In this way, our experience of text is always – to some extent – a hybrid experience.



As has already been noted, text and its forms now exceed what may be simply called the written word. Images, music, films and other art can all be considered text in a contemporary sense. There is also an important argument to be raised for audio-visuals and multimedia forms. As Jonathan Pitches puts it, “Western first-world inhabitants are gradually becoming ‘digital natives’ [...] Some are more fluent in the languages of digital media, but all are deeply embedded in the culture” (Pitches and Popat 114). An influx of these different textual forms offers post-dramatic theatre a level of selection in terms of performance composition. However, Pitches’ expression of ‘languages of digital media’ raises the earlier topic that our contemporary moment involves multiple forms of literacy, including the digital. Jennifer Parker-Starbuck insists that the Wooster Group’s *Hamlet* (presented at O’Reilly Theatre as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival in 2012) speaks to a generation ‘embedded in technology’ and “for whom both bodies and text are flexibly interpreted as simulacra” (Parker-Starbuck 25). These ideas flow from our dissonant contemporary attitude towards technology; accepting the benefits of technology while remaining sceptical of technology’s capacity for misuse. For instance, the capacity of digital technology to generate simulacra exacerbates our scepticism of technology and provokes larger questions of reality. As Baudrillard states, “Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal” (Baudrillard 1).

Channelling Baudrillard’s idea of the simulacrum combined with inspiration from a Jorge Luis Borges story, The Company’s debut production *Who is Fergus Kilpatrick?* is described as a re-imagining of Irish history – part-documentary, part-investigation in the attempt to uncover a man supposedly lost to history. Presented in The Cube at Project Arts Centre as part of the Dublin Fringe Festival 2009, the central figure of Fergus Kilpatrick is a creation, a generated model of a real person without any origin or reality in keeping with Baudrillard’s notion of a hyperreal. The conceit of a mockumentary around an invented historical figure would be simple enough, yet The Company go beyond this in subtly employing and dismantling the textual devices of documentary and investigative forms as simulations themselves. In this way, the performance simulates both the hyperreal of ‘Fergus Kilpatrick’ and the documentary devices that can be so easily manipulated. Allain and Harvie interpret Baudrillard’s

argument as suggesting “that the media saturation of contemporary consumer culture made it impossible to distinguish between the real, or truth, and the representation: everything is simulation” (Allain and Harvie 191). Brandon Woolf observes a similar subversion of the innate trust granted to technology in attending Gob Squad’s performance of *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*:

On the large screen overhead appears a two-way TV-apparatus standing on the sidewalk directly in front of the Volksbühne. We are instructed to holler at passersby, many of whom ignore our cheers. Those who do stop to examine the TV-apparatus have no idea what to make of the images they see of the action happening inside the theatre. The frustration in the room grows quickly. What is the point of this apparatus if we cannot manage to communicate with anyone? (Woolf 146).

Both The Company and Gob Squad are questioning the perceived advantages of technology in terms of communication, asking why it is that our contemporary societies privilege digital communication above the live act.

Within post-dramatic performance, there is an implicit critique of technology’s level of saturation, and of the ways in which both our culture and our lived experience have been pervaded by technology. Of course, this concern is not unique to the post-dramatic form alone. While analysing a trope of “verbal flood” in selected dramas, Malkin observes that “Verbal proliferation is found in the accelerating propagation of speech-coins and slogans by the electronic media, advanced technology, and the press; in the ease with which propaganda, commercial and political, invades every home; in the growing bureaucratization of society, producing endless compartmentalization and specialized jargon” (Malkin 225). To some extent, the creation of jargon has penetrated contemporary theatre, most assuredly at an administrative level where language and its role in branding and presentation has inevitably taken on the language of the marketplace. Yet, because of the capacity of theatre to absorb and investigate new technologies, a distance between technological media and live communication is exposed. Lehmann posits that “video technology tends to be used for the co-presence of video image and live actor, functioning in general as the technically mediated *self-referentiality* of the theatre” (Lehmann 168). As an example, one of Parker-Starbuck’s first impressions in watching the Wooster Group’s *Hamlet* is not of media’s intersection

with bodies, “but of the spaces between the actors on screen and those on stage. These gaps and ruptures between the bodies challenge the audiences viewing perceptions, reminding us that we are active viewers” (Parker-Starbuck 29).

In some respects, the language of the digital is always a second language. The digital is exposed through theatre as something foreign to the human body, even if it is comprehensible. For Jürs-Munby, there may even be a strategic purpose for abstaining from uses of digital technology in performance, as she argues that “using texts or writing on stage – as an older *techne* – could also be seen as a way of slowing down perception in order to get a perspective on newer technology. [...] the uses of texts as artefacts and ‘players’ onstage are, in any event, not mere avant-garde gimmicks but can have important perceptual and political implications” (Jürs-Munby, *Text Exposed* 105). Indeed, as Parker Starbuck observes in the Wooster Group’s *Hamlet*, it is a challenge “to measure the similarities and differences of movement between the actors on stage and those they emulate on screen, or to dart between stage and screen in comparison” (Parker-Starbuck 29). If we extend the metaphor of the digital as a second language to Parker-Starbuck’s observation, it could be argued that the challenge of the show is a result of what is effectively an act of live translation for the spectator. The digital text that results from this evolving language offers some insights into developments of post-dramatic theatre, particularly if we re-consider the move from narrativity to thematicity in contemporary theatre. Text, in a digital sense, can be an internet language with a variety of possibilities, but one expressly-digital text is the hyperlink or, in formal terms, hypertext. Among the proliferation of text online, hyperlinks are present in all manner of internet communication – email, websites, online articles, etc. – and connect texts in an endless chain of references. George P. Landow argues that “one of the greatest strengths of hypertext lies in its capacity to permit users to discover or produce multiple conceptual structures in the same body of information” (Landow 27). In this digital language of ever-expanding references, we see a digital comparison for the post-dramatic move towards thematicity, achieved through non-linear form and connected by theme. As such, the body of information is the theme of performance and the theatre-makers produce multiple conceptual structures to the extent that each spectator will discover and thus articulate the information in different ways. Indeed, Landow adds that “All hypertext systems permit the individual reader to choose his or

her own center of investigation and experience.” (Landow 58) In this way, hypertext is the decentered postmodern ideal, the proliferation of texts, an abundance of possibilities. This may explain why it is that the referent is often outside the performance; a text is one of many connected texts, if not intertextually then in some broader sense, placing the performance as a hybridisation of multiple texts rather than as an intersection.

In every case where text is selected for performance, communication is the primary concern above form and structure. As such, Ubersfeld claims that theatrical text, “more than any other text, depends closely upon the conditions of its enunciation. We cannot determine the meaning of an utterance by considering only its linguistic component. We must consider its rhetorical component, its link to the situation of communication in which the utterance is proffered; the importance of the rhetorical component is unique to theatre” (Ubersfeld 159). Taking all of these components into account, the essential rhetoric of post-dramatic theatre is ambivalence; allowing the performance to disrupt or undermine any attempt to articulate it before it is complete.

## Performance Writing; Multiple Authors and Interpretations

In this evolving sense of text, where our understanding and engagement in terms of reading and interpretation have changed, the creation of text for performance has also changed. Indeed, Derrida suggests that the author of a play-text “lets representation represent him through representatives, directors or actors, enslaved interpreters who, primarily through what they say, more or less directly represent the thought of the “creator”.” For Derrida, the ironic rule of this representative structure is that the author “creates nothing, has only the illusion of having created, because he only transcribes and makes available for reading a text whose nature is itself necessarily representative; and this representative text maintains with what is called the “real” [...] an imitative and reproductive relationship” (Derrida 296). In this way, the role of the playwright as autonomous author has been undermined by alternative forms and theatrical experiments, where the author may be at best a collaborator. As such, the individual author is not the standard for post-dramatic theatre. Andrew Bennett suggests that the author – in the modern sense – emerges “as an individual dedicated to writing either for a living or for a sense of identity, the author as autonomous and as independent of patronage and ultimately of society itself” and that the emergence of this sense of authorship is “a function of, and reflected in, changes to the legal status of published writers, changes which are in turn a consequence of the burgeoning culture of print” (50). When text represents another device of theatre and adaptation or intertextuality are common forms in theatre-making, the central question reverts back to one of authorship; yet, there is no clear answer to this question in post-dramatic practice. As Harvie and Lavender state, post-dramatic theatre “pays consistent attention to fixing meaning or leaving it open; in other words, to authorship, its democratic dispersal and autocratic control” (Harvie and Lavender 13). Taking the example of Pan Pan and the production of *Oedipus Loves You*; the script is credited to Simon Doyle and Gavin Quinn. However, original music for the production is credited to GordonisaMime, and design is credited to Aedín Cosgrove. That may seem complicated in one sense, but as an alternative, consider the same company’s production of Samuel Beckett’s *All That Fall*. Clearly, Samuel Beckett can be listed as author of the text; yet, the radio play is

accompanied by an installation for spectators that enhances the performance experience. In the end, the question is not as simple as who the author is but may even extend to what exactly they are the author of. For instance, Sidiropoulou addresses the stage director as a “scenic writer” and “*author of the performance text*” (32).

Naming the author is further troubled by productions like Ontroerend Goed’s *A Game of You*. This performance, presented as one of the *Internal* trilogy at Smock Alley at the Dublin Theatre Festival 2010, employs authorship as a game with six different levels – “it is a process of authorship rather than of progress between stages...” – and allowing for reflection on one’s own “authorial responsibility” (Radosavljevic 168). Ultimately, the author of the piece is the individual spectator in what Radosavljevic terms as ‘relational dramaturgy’. Nibbelink observes that Ontroerend Goed’s *The Smile Off Your Face*, another performance in the *Internal* trilogy, “is a collaborative essay, in fact, with as many authors as there will have been spectators to the performance. The performance then is always in a process of becoming, to appropriate Deleuzian terminology: an assemblage of a multiplicity of events” (Nibbelink 414). As a philosophical argument, however, Paul Ricoeur contradicts this possibility in arguing that “What is experienced by the spectator must first be constructed in the work” (Ricoeur, *Volume 1* 50). Taking Robert Wilson’s *Hamlet* as an example, Sidiropoulou remarks that “authorship of the performance text is vital: even when auteurs stage a pre-existing play, the final performance cannot but carry within it their own mark, and to some degree the production will always retain its stature as the director’s work” (78). In these terms, identifying an author unravels a number of layers of performance without yielding a clearly defined answer. There is no clear answer for autobiographical performance either, though it is a little easier to attribute the text to the writer/performer. As Deirdre Heddon observes, autobiography renders the performer as in-between; the performer plays between identity and its construction, in-between themselves and a persona, or in that liminal space that blurs fact and fiction, moving between past and future (Heddon 31). As such, it renders the text ambiguous when delivered by the author; paradoxically, the authentic source being present raises questions about authenticity. In this way, it is rather the authority of the text that is uncertain. In the case of *riverrun*, the adaptation of Joyce’s text creates a clear combination of authorship between Joyce and Fouéré. Yet, even this is not an explicit

claim of authorship, as the Emergency Room credit the developmental contributions of other artists including composers Susan Stenger and Mikel Rouse, designers Monica Frawley and Paul Keogan, directors Tom Creed, Annie Ryan and Sarah-Jane Scaife and choreographer Megan Kennedy.

Providing an alternative view, Peter Szondi states that “The dramatist is absent from the Drama. He does not speak; he institutes discussion. The Drama is not written, it is set. All the lines spoken in the drama are dis-closures. They are spoken in context and remain there. They should in no way be perceived as coming from the author. The Drama belongs only to the author as a whole, and this connection is just an incidental aspect of its reality as a work” (Szondi 8). Of course, drama offers privileged status to the text and in questioning if this might lead to granting privileged status to codified ways of performing a particular text, Ubersfeld observes “not only the extent to which granting privileged status to the text can make theatre sterile, but also why, in theatre, it is so necessary to distinguish clearly between what is essentially of the text and what is essentially of the performance” (Ubersfeld 6). In a general sense, Barthes suggests that identifying an author for a text “is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing” (Barthes 147). It is worth noting the equivalence that Barthes draws between the end of writing and the closure of meaning. Indeed, a common feature of contemporary ‘performance writing’ is the idea that the creation of meaning is an unfinished – if not unending – pursuit. In the form of text for performance, there is a clear expression of post-dramatic as being ‘beyond dramatic’, as a form seeking new ways of creating performance without a privileged text. For instance, Radosavljevic cites Tadeusz Kantor, Ariane Mnouchkine, Living Theatre, Welfare State International, as well as the training practices of Jerzy Grotowski and Jacques LeCoq, as “individuals and groups of artists around the world, particularly in the 1960s, [who] resorted to alternative forms of authorship” (82). Sidiropoulou considers it helpful to point out that “these artists share a common impulse, namely, to reconsider the notion of text as a dynamic field of interaction for playwrights, directors, actors, designers, and spectators, who come together in order to co-author the event of performance”, something that Sidiropoulou titles as a “synergetic process” (75). The experiments of these practitioners result in the broader, contemporary term

'performance writing' which is, as Ric Allsopp explains, "still an unstable and exploratory term that attempts to hold in tension both writing and its performance, performance and its writing. It is a frame through which a range of writing and performance practices are brought into view – the textualities of sonic, visual, graphic and movement performances; the performance of sonic, visual, graphic and movement texts" (Allsopp 77). In a similar way, John Hall relates that the rationale for employing the term 'performance writing' was "deliberately invoking plural relations between processes of writing and processes of performing. A performance process that might have (at least) two outcomes – a performance event and a written text – prepares the ground for an openness to a plurality of writings, for an active engagement with genre as a compositional variable and for the variable output machine that is the computer" (Hall 148). Ubersfeld notes that the "text-performance opposition" is a contradiction inherent in theatre, and one that may not be an opposition in the true sense; "However, a refusal to accept the text – performance distinction will lead to all kinds of confusion since the same tools are not used for the analysis of both" (Ubersfeld 5).

With this consideration in mind, it is more rewarding to address post-dramatic theatre as a performance mode of multiple authorship, in assessing not only the text but also the textualities of the performance's composition; as Allsopp suggests, sonic, visual, graphic and movement. Derrida observes that "we say "writing" for all that gives rise to an inscription in general, whether it is literal or not and even if what it distributes in space is alien to the order of the voice: cinematography, choreography, of course, but also pictorial, musical, sculptural "writing." [...] All this to describe not only the system of notation secondarily connected with these activities but the essence and the content of these activities themselves" (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 9). John Hall draws attention to the term 'writing' as, "in the context of performance writing – and the very wide range of writing practices included in the field – it is by no means always obvious what writing is – where it begins and ends, where it is to be found or recognised" (Hall 160). Yet, Allsopp argues that questions of what writing is and where it takes place become fundamental when "aspects of sonic writing, of visual writing, of installed writing, of physical writing or even durational writing are practices defined alongside the linguistic and the literary. If pen and paper are still considered the abc of writing, its full alphabet has long since exploded into an array of surprising permutations" (Allsopp



79). With the condition of contemporary text implying all of these qualities along with the written word, it follows that writing for performance is a concept of plural rather than singular authorship. Indeed, Barthes goes on to observe:

In the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be disentangled, nothing deciphered; the structure can be followed, 'run' at every point and at every level, but there is nothing beneath: the space of writing is to be ranged over, not pierced; writing ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning (Barthes 147).

There is an inherent risk in allowing the concept of multiplicity to expand unchecked, however. While there are multiple possibilities for what writing can be used to construct, it figures that there should be few examples that represent the end product. As Ubersfeld states, "the theatrical text, like any other text, is a linguistic object" (Ubersfeld 98). Indeed, Barthes suggests that, rather than tracing back to writing as creative origin, "there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written *here and now*" (145). Pavis goes further in a critique of experimental work and doubts that remain after seeing that "many experiments do not take any certainty as a starting point, but that they invent a framework of enunciation, and a tuning and adjustment which will bring out unexpected solutions from the text, which only acting and staging can invent. The artists do not wonder what the text or what they themselves wanted to say" (Pavis 120). For Pavis, the separation of text and performance does not always demand interpretation of new approaches to performance writing.

On the other hand, Allsopp asserts that the quality of performance writing is in "acknowledging that textual events are produced not only through syntactical and semantic exploration of language but also through the impact of its material treatments" (Allsopp 78). John Hall offers the following equivalency between writing and language, suggesting that, "Since writing uses language, the different modes of writing are inescapably "cultural" in this sense of participating in the carrying and exchange of value and meaning" (Hall 152). Ubersfeld concedes that "theatre makes it possible to say things that do not conform to the cultural code or to social logic. What is unthinkable logically and morally, what is socially scandalous, topics and themes that

can be handled only in accordance with very strict procedures – in theatre, all of these are in a state of liberty, they are in contradictory juxtaposition” (Ubersfeld 29). Barthes surmises that writing can no longer designate an operation of recording, notation, representation, or depiction; rather, it designates a performative – “a rare verbal form (exclusively given in the first person and in the present tense) in which the enunciation has no other content (contains no other proposition) than the act by which it is uttered” (145-6). Andrew Bennett observes that Barthes “seeks to move authority away from the author, the author as source of the work, the fount of all knowledge and meaning, towards the system of language, the textual codes that produce effects of meaning: for Barthes, language speaks, not the author” (13). There must be some level of moderation, even for experimental theatre. Again, Ubersfeld demands a distinction between text and performance in the composition of a theatrical event and its subsequent analysis. “Any concrete analysis of theatrical discourse must take into account the fundamental fact of theatre’s twofold enunciation: the character speaks under the name of his or her character, but the author causes that speech, requires that speech, and chooses the words that are spoken” (Ubersfeld 90). Ubersfeld urges us to consider the constructed process of theatrical enunciation in this way. In a connected way, Andrew Bennett critiques the sense of authorship wherein “the author guarantees the meaning(s) of the text since she was present to herself as she wrote or composed it...”, arguing that this idea “presupposes that the author is not subject to the ‘external’ forces of history, society, the law, and politics that after Marx we call ‘ideology’; and not subject to the kinds of ‘internal’ forces, drives, desires, impulses, that, after Freud, we know as the ‘unconscious’” (8). Nevertheless, Barthes insists that writing is “the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing” (Barthes 142). Andrew Bennett counters that, as “capitalism is intellectually and ideologically grounded in the autonomy and self-fulfilment of the humanist conception of the individual, the ascription of meaning to the author can be seen as part of a wider historical privileging of subjectivity” (Bennett 16).

In contemporary Irish performance writing, we observe an altogether different process; authors who distance themselves from the produced text. Introducing the collected fragments of *Heroin*, Grace Dyas provides this “author’s note”:

I would invite anyone wishing to stage this piece to use these texts, along with their own rigorous research process, to create their own narrative using these texts as a framework. [...] it would be impossible for anyone to stage the version of HEROIN that I ‘wrote’. However, I invite you to use these texts to make your own (Conway 18).

This approach is radical in the context of Irish theatre, particularly in the dramatic tradition and when one considers the often legal demands of copyrighted material. Against this tradition, Dyas offers the written texts as a framework rather than a fixed blueprint for performance. This is non-prescriptive text for performance and Dyas undermines any such privilege of author or writer being attributed to her in explicitly crediting other contributors: “The performance text is a combination of improvisation from the actors, written testimony from interviewees in Rialto and Dolphin’s Barn, Dublin 8, Rachel Keogh’s autobiography *Dying to Survive* (Gill & MacMillan, 2007) and authored texts by Grace Dyas” (Conway 16). Pavis is positive about authors who acknowledge the distinction between text and performance, where “the author gives free reign to the director, to allow her to explore the possibilities of the text. This dramatic text is not ‘incomplete’ because it is an orphan of the stage, but rather ‘full’ because it is open to be used by actors and spectators alike” (Pavis 123). Harvey insists that “the cultural producer merely creates raw materials (fragments and elements), leaving it open to consumers to recombine those elements in any way they wish. The effect is to break (deconstruct) the power of the author to impose meanings or offer a continuous narrative” (Harvey 51). In a similar vein of thought, Pavis questions the demand for fidelity between text and performance: “such is the illusion that we have of reading, interpreting and performing the play according to the author’s intentions, as if there existed a correct reading, a reading that reveals a verifiable truth in the play or the interpreted work” (Pavis 119). Barthes argues that the removal of the author is utterly transformative as “the text is henceforth made and read in such a way that at all its levels the author is absent” (145). However, Bennett suggests one possible reason

for the desire for fidelity in that, “unlike acts of speech, acts of writing can be read after the absence, including the radical absence that constitutes death, of its author” (10). Acts of writing become texts and these continue beyond the author and, most assuredly, beyond the performance. Yet in privileging text above performance, the dramatic tradition becomes limited in its relation to text as language and speech act.

In contemporary theatre, Sidiropoulou observes the “shifting of emphasis from mimetic, plot-driven drama to an ever-fluid image-based performance where various media, textualities, cultures, and styles combine and collide,” and it is in this collision of forms that practitioners are “developing their own singular methods and stage idioms” (Sidiropoulou 75). This example illustrates that Ireland’s current surge of experimentation in theatre is indeed connected with a larger investigation of established theatrical conventions. The idioms and performative possibilities of theatre are not simply being made redundant or thrown out; rather, there is an active engagement with form that is using established practice as something to challenge, to improve, and in some way re-invent if at all possible. Allsopp assures us that “writing will certainly continue to develop as a technological medium, and as such, as performance – performance (in whatever form) will continue to be an increasingly complex interaction of signifying systems” (Allsopp 76). In this way, writing and text are not abandoned by post-dramatic practice. In some sense, text remains a part of the very fabric of Irish theatre. Rather, what has changed is the result of the cultural evolution of text, where the written text is only one means of expression in our postmodern society.

## Conclusion: Post-Dramatic, or the Theatre of Ambivalence

Looking back at one particular scene in The Company's *As You Are Now So Once Were We*, there is a standout moment of theatrical magic involving the cardboard boxes placed around the performance space. While the ensemble drift into discussions of how their fellow, Rob, is always so quiet, Rob focuses out towards the audience with an expression of day-dreaming aloofness. Behind Rob, three of the standing cardboard boxes begin to move across the performance space, seemingly without any assistance. It is a pleasant, well-executed piece of theatricality and is indicative of the playfulness and imagination that the ensemble bring to the fore in all of their work. However, it is also a moment of reflexivity in that each spectator acknowledges that these boxes cannot move unaided. Thus, any pleasure taken from this moment exposes our ambivalence. Share and Corcoran suggest that this ambivalence is indicative of broader aspects of Post-Celtic Tiger Irish society, in that "Irish people find themselves caught in a dilemma between two countervailing tendencies: the attraction of illusion on the one hand and confrontation with reality on the other" (Share and Corcoran 6). This moment in *As You Are Now So Once Were We* presents a clear example of the attraction of the illusion and confrontation with reality, leaving us to reflexively occupy an ambivalent position between these countervailing tendencies. Nevertheless, there is a kind of charm in a piece of theatricality such as this and it shows that, even in postmodernity, there is still a hopeful desire for magic in our reality. Indeed, the qualities of playfulness and imagination are consistent in Ireland's post-dramatic theatre and are most often where ambivalence is evident in performance.

Throughout this thesis, ambivalence has emerged as a central feature of post-dramatic theatre. As the organisation of this thesis reflects, post-dramatic theatre shares the theatrical elements of performance, spectatorship, space, and text. While the forms and relationships that are engaged in have expanded, these categorisations still apply. It should be clear at this point that the dramatic and the post-dramatic are not oppositional. That is to say, these forms are not the same in a number of crucial ways, but neither are they each other's opposite. Indeed, there is one element that places the post-dramatic as an expansion of dramatic form rather than a negation; the

drama makes meaning. One might argue that the post-dramatic is meaningless and thus presents a viable opposition; this would ignore the crafted performances of post-dramatic theatre that leave meaning open to interpretation. Where dramatic theatre has created meaning, the post-dramatic creates ambivalence. This is not opposition, but continuation. The post-dramatic expands the dramatic form to its extremes, a stress-test of theatre's ability to make meaning while resisting closure. As such, dramatic theatre's opposite would be non-meaning, whereas post-dramatic theatre proliferates meaning to challenge the limits of each spectator's interpretive abilities. Of course, this may often appear to be non-meaning, in keeping with Baudrillard's idea of death by proliferation.

Beyond asserting ambivalence through the work of performance, the post-dramatic resists definition where this resistance is an active quality of the work. In this way, ambivalence and the resistance of meaning are simultaneous yet individual processes. Dramatic theatre actively makes meaning while post-dramatic theatre both insists on ambivalence and resists the closure of meaning. There are substantial examples to enforce this point: the active refusal of *riverrun* to be anything other than fluid, the encouragement in ANU's *Boys of Foley Street* for spectators to re-negotiate their interpretations of place, the constantly shifting spaces of The Company's *As You Are Now So Once Were We*, the simultaneous presence and absence of Beckett's radio plays in Pan Pan's productions of *All that Fall* and *Embers*, and so on. These examples display not only the prevalence of ambivalent performance craft, but that resistance to the closure of meaning through performance is an intentional quality of the work and form. It is no accident or coincidence that these productions sustain an ambivalent position. Rather, it is the mark of post-dramatic practice. As has been shown, ambivalence is the defining attitude of our postmodern experience.

We live in an unconsciously postmodern society and this is reflected in the theatre absorbing those aspects of culture which we take for granted, such as our mediated interactions with one another. These are tools of the digital age that make it possible to discern urban and cosmopolitan cultures from their counterparts. Postmodernism is active to varying extents across the global sphere, yet the reality of these technologies is one of increased separation in spite of a perceived increase in

connection. Our ambivalence is witnessed in incredulity of the modern, even though modern structures persist in our society. Amid the rupture and disruption throughout the fall of Celtic Tiger, the greatest exposure in Irish society is that of our ambivalence. As an example, one of Lyotard's central claims for postmodernity is "that the old poles of attraction represented by nation-states, parties, professions, institutions, and historical traditions are losing their attraction. And it does not look as though they will be replaced, at least not on their former scale" (Lyotard 14). When we apply this idea of Lyotard's to our contemporary situation, it is interesting to note that the loss of attraction is by no means uniform or in any sense total. Here in Ireland, the collapse of certain institutions over the last decade or so has not driven out a national identity, nor has it struck away the existing political parties. Share and Corcoran suggest that while Ireland's recent history has witnessed rapid change and transformation, "much of that change occurred on the surface, while the structural scaffolding of traditional Irish society remained resolutely in place" (Share and Corcoran 5). One could argue that these aspects may be reduced in their attraction, but they are by no means dissolved. To this end, Ireland remains postmodern in a nascent way; perhaps quite fitting in Lyotard's espoused notion of the postmodern as a nascent condition. The Irish theatre sector has adapted to recent challenges and difficulties while simultaneously evolving into a sector that may be described as aligned with postmodern sensibilities. This change from the dominance of the playwright-centred dramatic model to a more open exchange of theatrical forms and ideas is a radical change when compared with historical contexts as recently as pre-Celtic Tiger. As such, there is something special about the Irish theatre practitioners who are – in many ways – pioneering experimental theatre forms for Irish audiences.

Observing the post-dramatic form in Irish theatre and the changes in practice that accompany it align well with what Jacques Derrida described as "*revelatory invention, the discovering and unveiling of what already is*" (Derrida, *Without Alibi* 168). Post-dramatic practice is evident on the fringes of Irish theatre-making long before the period of interest to this thesis, yet its history – albeit a narrative that would inevitably be resisted – is largely lacking consideration. Crawley and White observe that the post-dramatic theatre is difficult to categorise, overlooking the inherent flaw in

categorisation for a form that resists definition. As Lyotard points out, postmodern artists are “working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done” (Lyotard 81). To some extent, it would appear that post-dramatic theatre reflects upon itself with a certain ambivalence; a form of theatre worth pursuing, but lacking critical attention, disappearing as soon as it appears. Performance is, as Peggy Phelan argues, an act of disappearance; these movements between presence and absence are the same aspects that create ambivalence in performance. These are some of the hallmarks of the post-dramatic work focussed on within this thesis; practitioners who reside in the liminal with their work, rendering bodies as present and absent simultaneously, challenging spectators to find answers where none are prescribed. All the levels of disruption, interruption and intervention that prohibit a performance from achieving too literal a meaning are vital to post-dramatic form. Of course, these attempts at reflexivity are communicated to spectators through the post-dramatic, engaging a spin-off process of self-conscious spectating.

Unconscious postmodernity is perhaps best expressed in spectating the everyday, a pattern of engagement that post-dramatic aims to disrupt. A number of performance strategies discussed in this thesis show that theatre-makers can alter a spectator's perception. ANU's *Monto Cycle* encourages spectators to engage or participate, to bear witness to aspects of Irish society which their unconscious has overlooked. The Company's *Politik* challenges spectators to reflect on their unconscious assumptions towards human interaction and political action. Of course, it is equally important that the spectator remains an individual with their own agency and capacity to engage or disengage. The contract between performer and spectator or any performance strategy that aims to disrupt traditional patterns of reception are kept in check by a duty of care that applies on a human level. Both performer and spectator are capable of shaping the performance experience in post-dramatic theatre, by way of returning to each spectator their own potential to activate social or political engagement, extending to digital space where theatre-makers and their audiences may remain engaged through social media. So, spectators are mobilised, engaged, manipulated, and cared for in post-dramatic work in a process that reaches outside of



theatre, making each spectator reflect on the pervasive ambivalence of their lived experience.

Outside of spectatorship, post-dramatic theatre shows that our experience of space can be an influential factor, whether in attitudes to landscape or the associated identities of urban, rural, and regional spaces. The spaces that we are surrounded by or that we surround ourselves with contribute to our experience of the world, to the extent that these spatial frames might even affect our engagement with a performance. In postmodernity, however, we are unconscious of these spatial influences and the effect of space on our general perceptions. We take it for granted that certain buildings should adhere to certain expectations for the purposes of their use, even our theatre buildings. From landscapes to architecture, our established expectations have created places that are culturally absorbed, yet unconsciously so. This is why post-dramatic theatre intervenes in our understanding of space. ANU disrupt established spatial narratives of Dublin's inner city with their *Monto Cycle*. The Company present an ever-shifting cardboard city space in *As You Are Now So Once Were We*, reminding us that we are constantly renegotiating our attitudes to the space around us as much as the spaces themselves. The integral focus of these productions is resetting the spatial perception of each spectator to become self-reflexive, a kind of spatial reflexivity. In this way, there is a knowing reflexivity in the design for *The Rehearsal*, as Peter Crawley observes: "Like the mirrors lining opposite ends of the playing space, everything is reflected back on itself" (Crawley, 2010). Designed spaces, and how spectators interpret these spaces, render this ambivalence of perception explicit in post-dramatic theatre. Even though there is intention on the part of designers and theatre-makers, this is intended commitment to the ambivalence of space.

The ambivalence of our postmodern experience extends to text, where anything is a text in contemporary discourse. From the written word to the image, audio, and film, this liberal approach to text breeds the incoherence, fragments, and multiplicity in post-dramatic performance that are so prevalent in the digital age. Post-dramatic performance responds to contemporary experience, one that is driven by a radical approach to text. In the work of Pan Pan, Brokentalkers, ANU Productions and The Company, texts that influence the creative process are varied. Yet, one point of

consistency is that more than one textual influence is employed. Reflecting contemporary life as they experience it, these practitioners show that our experience of text is as ambivalent as it is multiple. Harvie and Lavender's observation of a move from narrativity to thematicity is also reflected in this frequent use of multiple texts. Our contemporary experience is related most often through ideas by association rather than singular readings. The post-dramatic performance follows suit, bearing multiple authors and interpretations as it reflects our contemporary ambivalence back upon us, questioning how we have become so unconscious of its effect on our experience of the world around us.

In conclusion, it is evident that post-dramatic theatre is a theatre of postmodern ambivalence. In implicit and explicit ways, theatre reflects the society that it serves and it is clear that between 2009 and 2014, Irish society is reflected effectively by a theatre that is both inwardly and outwardly ambivalent. It is perhaps an expression of our sense of inequality that the world is filled with disparities and we can both acknowledge that these issues exist and maintain a level of inaction. Our ambivalence is deep-rooted in a postmodern culture of incredulity, yet offers no new mode of existence. For Lyotard, the modern is ceaselessly pregnant with its own postmodernity and it seems to have followed the course – in Ireland, at any rate – of critiquing the modern yet following its established pattern. This is the ambivalence of an Irish theatre where one can experience the feeling of exclusion that belongs to inner-city Dublin through the work of ANU yet also leave with no prescribed resolution. And that is the world we live in; where there are no easy solutions, but there are easy attitudes that need to be disrupted. We are ceaselessly ambivalent – we acquire narratives like the Celtic Tiger and suggest when they fail that we were sceptical all along. The transition of post-dramatic theatre from the fringes of Irish theatre in 1995 to the mainstream of the Dublin Theatre Festival in recent years provides a fascinating parallel with the rapid and aggressive modernisation that Ireland experienced in the Celtic Tiger era, as well as the introspective postmodernity which emerges as it falls apart. As such, when Róise Goan acknowledges the cultural antagonism of the Dublin Fringe Festival towards traditional Ireland in the early years, but insists that “it is not about being ‘counter’ all the time any more”, she unconsciously exposes that counter-traditional has become a mainstream

form in its own right in contemporary Irish theatre. Our theatre reflects so much of ourselves and, while dramatic theatre is not absent throughout this period, crucial aspects of contemporary Irish experience are most prominent in our post-dramatic theatre.

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