

## OTHER THEATRES

**CHRISTOPHER COLLINS:**

ORCID ID: [0000-0003-0597-0762](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0597-0762)

Contemporary Irish theatre has a diverse investment in performance and place, an investment that necessarily demands different spatial practices: from sitting in ornate Victorian theatres to being immersed in city streets. What is critically apparent is that very few theatre companies in contemporary Irish theatre have their own space for rehearsal, let alone their own place for performance. On the one hand this trend clearly demonstrates the growth and diversification of contemporary Irish theatre and performance practitioners – on the other it demonstrates that contemporary Irish theatre operates within a funding infrastructure that privileges the larger houses over smaller ones, and by corollary those companies whose work that can fill these houses. There are, however, one hundred and three ‘other theatres’ and arts centres on the island (in 2018) that are filling an invaluable role in supporting the sector, particularly when it comes to offering spaces for rehearsal and places to perform.

This chapter seeks to foreground the unique places and spaces of these ‘other theatres’, so that the conversation about place, space and theatre and performance on the island can be more inclusive. Although my focus will largely be on the other theatres south of the border, I will certainly discuss other theatres in Ulster. Pat Kiernan, Artistic Director of Corcadorca Theatre Company based in Cork, points out that in Ireland ‘there’s still that chocolate-box image that can inhibit a first-time theatre-goer’.<sup>1</sup> The supposition remains that while the theatre might look in inviting, it is ultimately a risk because you don’t know what you are going to get, so it is probably best to stick to what you know. All the other theatres in this chapter use space to create a unique sense of place that directly challenges that chocolate-box image. From providing space for experimental work to being actively involved in their respective communities: other theatres on the island are individually placed in contemporary Irish theatre.

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<sup>1</sup> Pat Kiernan, “Ben Hennessy, Pat Kiernan and Ger Fitzgibbon in Conversation,” in *Theatre Talk: Voices of Irish Theatre Practitioners*, eds. . Lillian Chambers, Ger Fitzgibbon, Eamonn Jordan, Dan Farrelly and Cathy Leeney (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2001), 169.

## OTHER THEATRES IN CONTEXT

The late 1970s announced a change in the infrastructure that continues to support contemporary Irish theatre to this day. As Christopher Morash points out, 'until the late 1970s, virtually all theatre funding on the island went to the three main theatres: the Abbey, the Lyric and the Gate. However, policy changes in arts funding in both jurisdictions in the late 1970s initiated a new regional awareness'.<sup>2</sup> In 1979 in Ireland, An Chomhairle Ealaíon/The Arts Council introduced the Independent Theatre Managements' Scheme, which offered extra funding to different companies who were caught having 'to choose between the maintenance of the institutions where creative work can be performed or developing the conditions for the creation of art'.<sup>3</sup> With financial support from the Council, companies were able to tour their work to regional theatres across the island. For example, in 1980 Field Day Theatre company received support from the scheme so that Brian Friel's *Translations* (1980) could tour from Derry/Londonderry to Galway, Tralee, Cork and Dublin. The Council's Annual Report for that year reflected on the importance on the scheme because it made a 'contribution – both financial and artistic – to theatres outside Dublin', while acknowledging that they had a responsibility to create 'a network of adequately equipped theatres'.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the Annual Report for 1981 documents increased funding for the Everyman Theatre in Cork, Siamsa Tíre in Tralee and Hawk's Well Theatre in Sligo because 'the most important development which the Council can assist in the area of theatre' was growing 'the number and professionalism of theatres outside of Dublin'.<sup>5</sup>

As Vic Merriman notes, throughout the 1980s and 1990s there was an exponential growth in new places of performance 'from nineteen (eleven theatres and eight arts centres) in 1983 to fifty-five (twenty-eight theatres and twenty-seven arts centres) by 2001'.<sup>6</sup> Collectively, between 1990 and 2008, seventy-five new places of performance were built on the island and, as Merriman suggests, 'companies were involved either in generating performance spaces or in occupying them, once built'.<sup>7</sup> These theatres were all built and/or renovated in line with the the Council's commitment to public access and participation, which is why there was an increase in arts centres (a multi-purpose venue that includes a theatre

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<sup>2</sup> Chris Morash, "Places of Performance" in ed. Nicholas Grene and Chris Morash, *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 442.

<sup>3</sup> *An Chomhairle Ealaíon/the Arts Council Annual Report*, 1980, 29.

<sup>4</sup> *An Chomhairle Ealaíon/the Arts Council Annual Report*, 1980, 29-30.

<sup>5</sup> *An Chomhairle Ealaíon/the Arts Council Annual Report*, 1981, 24.

<sup>6</sup> Victor Merriman, "'As We Must': Growth and Diversification in Ireland's Theatre Culture 1977-2000", in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre*, 401.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

space), across this period; for example, in 1997 there was a significant increase (12%) in funding to arts centres and the annual report for that year justifies the expenditure on the basis that arts centres can be 'directed towards serving the needs of a particular interest group, such as children and young people, or a local community'.<sup>8</sup>

The rapid increase in places of performance from 1980 to 2008 was an essential support to the infrastructure of Irish theatre. However, since the economic downturn in 2008, places of performance on the island have been significantly affected due to the lack of funding from the Arts Councils in Ireland and Northern Ireland. If companies were once at the heart of building and restoring theatre venues, then by 2008 many of these companies were homeless as their funding had been cut. Nevertheless, companies and practitioners continued to emerge. What this means for the sector is that the venues that commission/receive/produce work are at odds with the number of spaces for performance and rehearsal. By corollary, the artistic visions of some venues are restricted; in order to keep the lights switched on, venues must make an effective use of their space. Likewise, the same can be said for theatre companies and practitioners who have to curate their practice with care to respond to the competition over space.

Some theatres on the island having distinctive artistic visions have not been affected by the funding cuts. The New Theatre, founded in Dublin in 1997, is an example of one theatre that had not been drastically affected by the funding cuts because their artistic vision was already bespoke: the theatre solely supports new writing. Yet the uniqueness of the New Theatre highlights the fact that the privilege of space results in a limited and limiting artistic vision. Enda Walsh, who first directed his play *Bedbound* in the New Theatre in 2000 puts the situation in apposite terms: When asked 'what's your favourite theatre space in Ireland?', Walsh replied: 'I must say I had a great experience in the New Theatre in Dublin doing *Bedbound*, because everyone had forgotten it as a venue. [...] there aren't places like that now.'<sup>9</sup> There aren't many theatres like the New Theatre because of the financial demands placed on theatres: new writing is a potentially risky business. For example, Bewley's Cafe Theatre, founded in Dublin in 1999, stages new writing, but the theatre also stages the lesser-known works of canonical playwrights and writers such as Tennessee Williams and Oscar Wilde.

With a lack of venues that have specific artistic remits, it is unsurprising that many of the theatres on the island are receiving venues supported either by local companies or as part of a touring network. If contemporary Irish theatre is to continue to flourish – particularly outside of the major towns and cities – then it is vitally important that the sector is supported

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<sup>8</sup> *An Chomhairle Ealaíon/the Arts Council Annual Report, 1987, 38.*

<sup>9</sup> Enda Walsh, "Enda Walsh in Conversation with Emelie Fitzgibbon," in *Theatre Talk: Voices of Irish Theatre Practitioners*, 473.

by a healthy combination of venues that serve the community, while at the same time facilitating contemporary practice on a touring network. The Strollers Touring Network is the largest touring network on the island, comprised of 9 theatres/arts centres: Draíocht Arts Centre (Dublin), Hawk's Well (Sligo), Linenhall Arts Centre (Mayo), Riverbank Arts Centre (Kildare), Siamsa Tíre, National Folk Theatre and Arts Centre (Kerry), Solstice Arts Centre (Meath), The Source Arts Centre (Tipperary), Visual Centre for Contemporary Art and the George Bernard Shaw Theatre (Carlow) and the Watergate Theatre (Kilkenny). The Network has a Production Award that offers companies and practitioners €10,000 to facilitate the tour, with a further fee guaranteed from each of the nine venues that cumulates in approximately €20,000 for each recipient.

The diversity of theatres across the island is an important material point. Morash and Shaun Richards have questioned: 'if theatre in performance creates an event that is by definition local, why is theatre – particularly Irish theatre – so often considered in the context of the national?'.<sup>10</sup> Other theatres in contemporary Ireland are no longer concerned with staging the national from the urban centre, but staging the local, often from the rural periphery. This is reflected by the work that regularly engages with a local sense of place, as well as the fact that regional theatres engage with their communities through youth theatre and/or amateur dramatics. For example, the Waterside Arts Centre in Derry/Londonderry has two youth theatre groups. It is therefore possible to ascertain an ideological reading of space based upon the distribution of these theatres across places on the island: contemporary Irish theatre privileges the local over the national. However, Morash and Richards have suggested that,

the spread of physical spaces for theatre around the national space [does] not necessarily reinforce the idea of a national theatre; it could, in fact, have the opposite effect, highlighting regional difference over national solidarity [...] For an audience in Navan, for instance, there is a difference between watching a play that has been produced in their home town at the Solstice Theatre by a locally based company, and one that is on tour from a national theatre based in the capital.<sup>11</sup>

While this is certainly true, it is also equally important to think about how a local theatre relates to a national sense of theatre. A regional, local sense of place is always intricately and inextricably interrelated to a national sense of place. As geographer Doreen Massey has argued, if we consider space as a multiplicity of connections, then this allows for theatres in contemporary Irish theatre to embody 'a politics of outwardlookingness, from

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<sup>10</sup> Chris Morash and Shaun Richards, *Mapping Irish Theatre: Theories of Space and Place* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 18.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

place to place'.<sup>12</sup> The local, regional spaces of contemporary Irish theatre should not be reductively bound to a fixed sense of locale; a territorial sense of place.

This alternative spatial reading of contemporary Irish theatre is most evident in amateur theatre. Amateur theatre on the island is fostered by the Amateur Drama Council of Ireland, which holds regional festivals, the winners of which proceed to the annual All Ireland Drama Festival in Athlone. The emphasis here is on staging the local in the national, or in other words, finding the ways in which a local theatre constellates into a national sense of theatre. In the professional sector other theatres on the island have emerged as playing an integral role in supporting the sector, while at the same time remaining active, engaged participants in their local communities. This is due in a large part to the role that arts centres have specifically played in supporting companies and practitioners with space to research, develop and emerge. These artists then go on to present their work in local theatres before touring them across the island. For example, WillFredd Theatre, Shane O'Reilly and Jack Cawley's *Follow* (2011) about deaf and hard-of-hearing culture on the island was developed in a short twenty-minute performance at Project Arts Centre in Dublin in 2010 under a scheme called Project Brand New, before premiering in 2011 at a local theatre in Dublin: the Lir. The production then toured to theatres and arts centres across the island, finally arriving at the Abbey Theatre in 2014. In this way, other theatres on the island are instrumental in ensuring that contemporary Irish theatre is not restricted by place, or that companies are not restricted by artistic vision. Other theatres facilitate a collective, shared sense of space in contemporary Irish theatre. As Massey points out, space is 'the sphere of a dynamic simultaneity, constantly disconnected by new arrivals, constantly waiting to be determined (and therefore always underdetermined) by the construction of new relations. It is always being made and always therefore, in a sense, unfinished'.<sup>13</sup> The same could be said for the use of spaces in other theatres in contemporary Ireland.

## **THEATRES AND ARTS CENTRES**

Theatres that commission or produce their own work are accordingly at liberty to curate their own spaces, and there are diverse curatorial policies on the island. Located in Galway city centre is An Taibhdhearc, the national Irish language theatre. Founded in 1928 An Taibhdhearc plays an invaluable role in allowing access to theatre for speakers of Ireland's national language (Gaeilge). Brian Ó Conchubhair has argued that An Taibhdhearc 'faces many of the problems it confronted in the 1930s and 1940s: the need to procure new scripts

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<sup>12</sup> Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2010), 192.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

and strike a balance between translations and original work'.<sup>14</sup> Yet, in 2014 Galway-based Moonfish Theatre worked with the theatre to stage an adaptation of Joseph O'Connor's novel *Star of the Sea*. The bilingual production premiered at the theatre during the International Galway Arts Festival before heading to the Dublin Theatre Festival. Ó Conchubhair points out that 'the fundamental problem is a mismatch between supply – a limited number of theatre companies – and demand – a fractured audience, scattered throughout the country, unaccustomed to attending semi/professional productions'.<sup>15</sup>

The difficulties that places like An Taibhdhearc face are very real, but the promise of space does result in a consistent artistic vision. The same can be said for Siamsa Tíre National Folk Theatre and Arts Centre, founded in Tralee in 1991. As the island's National Folk Theatre, the theatre engages with the island's folk heritage by predominantly staging work from their extensive repertoire. For example, the theatre performs *Fadó Fadó* (1968) – a production that celebrates life rural Irish past – almost on an annual basis. However, while it is important that both An Taibhdhearc and Siamsa Tíre have their own dedicated theatres that directly support national language and collective heritage, the point remains that the work of these theatres is not regularly incorporated into dialogue about contemporary Irish theatre practice, despite the success of the adaptation of *Star of the Sea* by An Taibhdhearc and Moonfish Theatre. This is another example of how a theatre's artistic vision can be potentially limited by their own specific use of space. However, this is not always the case. The Factory Performance Space in County Sligo is the home of Blue Raincoat Theatre Company. The theatre was founded in 1991, the same year in which the company was formed. Prior to becoming a theatre the Factory was a slaughterhouse throughout the 1980s, and Rhona Trench points out that 'the notion of the performance space as abattoir figuratively represents Blue Raincoat's rejection of the predominantly text-based theatrical style that dominated Irish theatre in the 1980s and 1990s'.<sup>16</sup> The company regularly bring a heightened sense of physicality and corporeality to their productions, as evidence in their 2014 production of J.M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*. Furthermore, as Trench points out, the company 'play a key role in the development of community access to and participation in the arts in Sligo'.<sup>17</sup>

Two integral arts centres on the island are Project Arts Centre in Dublin and the Metropolitan Arts Centre in Belfast. Project Arts Centre in Dublin uses its space to programme national and international contemporary art, theatre and performance. While Project has certainly had to adapt to changing economic markets, the artistic vision for

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<sup>14</sup> Brian Ó Conchubhair "Twisting in the Wind: Irish-Language Stage Theatre 1884-2014" in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre*, 268.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

<sup>16</sup> Rhona Trench, *Blue Raincoat Theatre Company* (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2015), 10.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

theatre and performance has remained intact: Project is synonymous with contemporary style and form. Founded in 1967 and finding its permanent home in Temple Bar in 1975, Project is a multidisciplinary venue with one art gallery and two theatre spaces that nurture new work just as much as it revives and restages historical and contemporary drama. What makes Project an innovative arts centre is its insistence on working with emerging and established theatre makers to give them a larger stage on which to present their work. Often these theatre makers have staged their work in a smaller theatre; the spaces that Project provide facilitates wider audience access to work that grew from more modest origins.

Project does not have any official relationship with theatres in Ireland, but current Artistic Director Cian O'Brien is always in dialogue with other theatres and theatre makers who might be interested in working with Project. 'We have always sought out new voices and artists; whether they are artists making their first work or experienced artists who wish to experiment with their practice' O'Brien explains, 'and Project Arts Centre is a place where artists can expand and develop their work, and bring it to new audiences and evolve their practice over long periods of time'.<sup>18</sup> For example, Emmet Kirwan's *Dublin Oldschool* opened at Project in 2014; it had premiered at Bewley's Cafe Theatre in the Tiger Dublin Fringe Festival earlier that year. The roots of the production are relatively humble: it was first developed by the Show in a Bag programme, an initiative run by the Dublin Fringe Festival and Fishamble: The New Play Company and the Irish Theatre Institute. However, Project gave the production a larger platform and supported a tour to international festivals and to the Royal National Theatre in London. Indeed, the production also appeared at the Metropolitan Arts Centre (MAC) in Belfast which is, in some respects, Belfast's answer to Project in Dublin.

Located in Belfast's Cathedral Quarter, the MAC is similar to Project, in that it programmes national and international contemporary art, theatre and performance. Like Project, the MAC also has two theatre spaces. However, the venue is considerably larger: it has three art galleries, one rehearsal space, one dance studio, three education and workshop rooms, as well as one artist-in-residence studio. MAC's spaces are invested with the history and heritage of Belfast. For example, Owen McCafferty's *Titanic: Scenes from the British Wreck Commissioner's Inquiry, 1912* opened at the MAC in April 2012, a month after the the museum Titanic Belfast opened. The MAC is committed to outreach and public engagement. Since its opening in 2012, the arts centre has had over 29,000 people take part in community groups partaking in a variety of art, music and theatre workshops; from cross-community groups to school and youth groups in Belfast.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Cian O'Brien, interview with Christopher Collins, August 31, 2016.

<sup>19</sup> See, <https://themaclive.com/about-us>. Accessed 7 June, 2017.

The MAC is an example of how arts centres on the island use contemporaneous styles and forms of theatre to engage with local communities. For example, Moonfish Theatre were the 2016 company residents at the Riverbank Arts Centre, Newbridge, Kildare where it created *Pop-Up Worlds* (2016). This production created mini pop-up audio storybooks in which actors recounted stories of Kildare people who were active in the 1916 Easter Rising. As part of the residency, the company hosted community workshops on 'Electric Theatre' in which people of all ages and backgrounds explored the relationship theatre and performance has with scenography, sound design, electronics and coding. It is because of their wider artistic visions, arts centres are able to use their spaces to cater to wider demographics. Indeed, some arts centres, like the Ards Arts Centre in County Down offer their own small-scale funding to local practitioners. In many respects, regional arts centres both north and south of the border lie at the heart of their communities, offering a dialogue with a local sense of place, while at the same time allowing companies and practitioners to stage their own work. Often these arts centres are in the larger towns in counties including Armagh, Wexford and Omagh. As the example of Moonfish theatre at the Riverbank Arts Centre points out, arts centres are instrumental in supporting the sector by offering artist in residency schemes that practitioners and companies apply for through the Arts Councils of Ireland and Northern Ireland. While not an arts centre proper, the Tyrone Guthrie Centre in Monaghan provides residencies to practitioners of all disciplines, and it is supported by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and the Arts Council of Ireland. The Centre hosts a week-long residency programme called MAKE that gives theatre practitioners and companies the space and time to generate new performance work.

The division between arts centres and theatres is far from simple. Theatres and arts centres rarely produce their own work, but they do co-produce work by offering a box-office split or a guaranteed fee. However, much more than this, theatres and arts centres accommodate a broad spectrum of contemporary practice while at the same time being at striving to be at the heart of their local community. In Sligo, Hawk's Well Theatre founded in 1982 (and renovated in 1986) provides a performance space for local drama groups, such as the St. Farnans Drama Group and the Sligo Everyman, while at the same time continuing to be a space for established companies to stage new work. For example, in 2014 the theatre co-produced *The Second Coming* with Fidget Feet, an aerial dance theatre company from Donegal. Based on W.B. Yeats's poem, "The Second Coming", the theatre became a space to interrogate Yeats's legacy in the very heart of Yeats country. In Dublin, Collapsing Horse Theatre were residents at The Civic Theatre in Tallaght from 2013-2014 where they developed and had work-in-progress showings of their production of *The Aeneid* (2016) that

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premiered at Smock Alley Theatre in Dublin – the oldest theatre on the island. The company were also residents at Draíocht Arts Centre in Blanchardstown from 2016-2017 where they developed *Conor at the end of the Universe* (2016), a theatre for young audiences production about astrophysics. Both residencies involved community engagement: in Tallaght the company held puppetry workshops with different age groups; in Blanchardstown the company worked with D15 Youth Theatre. Similarly, in Carlow WillFredd Theatre were company in residence at Visual Centre for Contemporary Art and the George Bernard Shaw Theatre, in which they developed and premiered *Jockey* (2015) in collaboration with local racing and equestrian communities. In many respects, other theatres and arts centres are the life blood of contemporary Irish theatre, particularly because they offer laboratory spaces for practitioners and companies to test out new ideas. However, arts centres have a specifically pluralist artistic vision, which means they are able to accommodate a broader spectrum of contemporary Irish theatre and performance. Consequently, arts centres are clearly at the forefront of nurturing and supporting new work from both emerged and emergent practitioners that can then be taken into theatres.

In Cork, Corcadorca established the Theatre Development Centre in the Triskel Arts Centre. The Theatre Development Centre in Cork led to the creation of another Centre in Waterford in 2016: A Little Room. A Little Room is housed in Garter Lane Arts Theatre, which is predominantly a receiving venue. The symbiosis between Garter Lane and the Development Centre affords the opportunity for work to be developed before transferring to a venue that is more public-facing. Indeed, the Theatre Development Centre in Cork is a fully-equipped space for organisations to rehearse and take up residences. The Centre holds the annual SHOW festival, a work in progress festival that is run over one weekend that offers a platform for companies to show their work to wider audiences. A company that have been residents at the Centre and has participated in the festival are BrokenCrow Theatre Company. BrokenCrow have staged work in other theatres in Cork: the Granary Theatre, the Half Moon Theatre (Cork Opera House) and the Everyman. Emerging companies like BrokenCrow are able to present work in these places because of the support they have received from places like the Triskel Arts Centre.

Such support is not always as forthcoming from established theatres under pressure to make a return at the box office. The largest and oldest theatre in Cork is the ornate Victorian theatre, the Everyman, founded in 1897. The theatre has a diverse programme ranging from various forms and styles of theatre, to music and comedy. However, a theatre like the Everyman is in an awkward artistic position due to its sheer size, in that they have a box office responsibility to sell 650 seats, and at the same time they wish to be a receiving and producing theatre. Programming consistency is often dictated by economics, which is why journalist Rachel Andrews argued in 2011 that 'it's a long time since Cork felt

theatrically exciting, at least on anything more than a sporadic basis'.<sup>20</sup> It is clear, then, that arts centres are more able to take risks whereas theatres are not. However, risks are essential to contemporary practice: they catalyse style and form. Risks give space to practitioners to research, develop, emerge and grow. Taking risks on new work is important, particularly because only one theatre in Ireland has a permeant, professional, full-time venue-based ensemble: Blue Raincoat.<sup>21</sup> Not only do arts centres fulfill the Arts Councils' objective of supporting practice and engaging with particular interest groups and communities, they also supporting established theatre buildings.

## OTHER SPACES

The lack of available space has resulted in companies radically altering their relationship with space and place. What is becoming increasingly important on the island is the specificity of site when making contemporary work; there is a very real shift from work presented in theatre buildings to site-generic and site-specific work. Fiona Wilkie's taxonomy of site suggests that performance can be placed in theatre buildings, outside theatres (for example, theatre in the park), or it can engage with site in three ways: performances at site can be site-sympathetic, site-generic or site-specific. Site-sympathetic includes an 'existing performance text physicalized in a selected site'; site-generic work includes 'performance generated for a series of like sites (eg: car parks, swimming pools)'; and site-specific work includes 'performance specifically generated from/for one selected site'.<sup>22</sup>

Based in Galway, Macnas have been making site-generic performances since 1986. Macnas turn public places into sites of performance in an attempt to question the perception of public space and place. For example, their 2012 production of *The Cockroach and the Inventor* saw an ensemble of clown-scientists perform whacky experiments for bemused spectators in public places across the island. ANU Productions mount site-specific work that immerses spectators in public places where they are forced to peel away the layers of history and collective memory at site. Their 2014 production of *Vardo* used collective memories and anecdotal evidence of sex work, human trafficking, asylum and migration in the Monto, a quarter square mile of Dublin's north inner city. As Brian Singleton points out, Anu Productions' 'site-specificity lies in its political efficacy to emerge from and engage with communities in the present but mindful of their past, and to engage communities of

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<sup>20</sup> Rachel Andrews, "A New Direction for Corcadorca," *Irish Theatre Magazine*, April 27, 2011, accessed September 2, 2016. <http://itmarchive.ie/web/Features/Current/A-new-direction-for-Corcadorca.aspx.html>

<sup>21</sup> Rhona Trench, "Blue Raincoat: Pushing the Boundaries of Theatre from WB Yeats to Étienne Decroux", *Irish Times*, October 27, 2014.

<sup>22</sup> Fiona Wilkie, 'Mapping the Terrain: a Survey of Site-Specific Performance in Britain', *New Theatre Quarterly*, Vol. 18, no. 2 (2002): 150

spectators in the lives and histories of a community's spaces and places respectfully but also to challenge them ethically in their intimate encounters.<sup>23</sup> For Macnus and ANU, the otherness of the city street is the new other theatre.

What Macnas and ANU demonstrate is that their spatial practices interrogate the public conception of place by creating what geographer Edward Soja terms as a Thirdspace. Building on the work of Henri Lefebvre and Michael Foucault, Soja understands a Thirdspace 'as an-Other way of understanding and *acting* to change the spatiality of human life, a distinct mode of critical spatial awareness that is appropriate to the new scope and significance being brought about in the re-balanced trialectics of spatiality-historicity-sociality'.<sup>24</sup> What Soja is modelling here is way of seeing space that is not just physically real, or mentally imagined, but both. Thirdspaces are limitless and constantly evolving and they have power to break down preconceived historical binaries and expectations about space in society. The work of Macnas and ANU create Thirdspaces that directly engage with our spatial sense of history and society in order to interrogate our categorisation of other places. However, could not the same be said about other theatres on the island?

Other theatres on the island are real because they exist; imagined because they involve diverse acts of artistic creation; and both real-and-imagined because they use their respective spaces to create a unique sense of place that breaks down all of those chocolate-box binaries about contemporary Irish theatre. Other theatres support artists and their communities and actively engage with a national sense of theatre. In so doing, they use their spaces to reconsider embedded, historical attitudes to theatre as being elitist in contemporary Irish theatre.

The critical importance of other theatres on the island, then, can hardly be overstated. At a time of disproportionate funding for the larger houses, at a time of restricted spaces and artistic visions, other theatres – particularly arts centres – allow companies and practitioners the freedom to create the work that they want to make, and the freedom to engage with local communities. It is true that all of the other theatres will always have a carefully curated programme but with one hundred and three other theatres on the island offering different programmes, there is a broad spectrum of places. Accordingly, other theatres on the island engage at the very crux of contemporary Irish theatre. Other theatres provide financial viability and aesthetic visibility to practitioners and companies across the island.

In 2017 the new Directors of the Abbey Theatre, Neil Murray and Graham McLaren, stated that 'we believe in the concept of a national theatre that reaches all of the country.

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<sup>23</sup> Brian Singleton, *ANU Productions: The Monto Cycle* (London: Palgrave, 2016), 7.

<sup>24</sup> Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1996), 10. Emphasis added.

This applies to touring work, but also addresses the issue of where shows and projects are rooted and made, regardless of geographical remoteness or perceived social barriers'.<sup>25</sup> Murray and McLaren were previously the Executive Producer (Murray) and Associate Director (McLaren) of the National Theatre of Scotland, a national theatre without walls that used diverse spaces to form a national theatre. There is precedent, then, for the other theatres south of the border at least, to be future national theatres. A national theatre without walls encapsulates Massey's emphasis on space being a multiplicity of voices. However, there is already a sense that the other theatres on the island already constitute a national sense of theatre without walls. As Massey argues, 'without space, no multiplicity; without multiplicity, no space. If space is indeed the product of interrelations, then it must be predicated upon the existence of plurality'.<sup>26</sup> The multiplicity of other spaces on the island testify to the plurality and interrelatedness of contemporary Irish theatre. According to Massey, space is always under negotiation by the material practices that happen in it, and the material practices of other theatres in contemporary Irish theatre connect audiences in the smallest of ways: from the company on tour; to the practitioner who takes up residency in the local theatre; to the company giving a community engagement workshop. 'Perhaps we could imagine space as a simultaneity of stories-so-far',<sup>27</sup> Massey suggests. Space in other theatres on the island connect the local stories-so-far to a national sense of place; a local story in a national conversation.

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<sup>25</sup> <https://www.abbeytheatre.ie/new-directors-of-the-abbey-theatre-appointed/>. Accessed 9 June, 2017.

<sup>26</sup> Massey, *For Space*, 9.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

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## **BIOGRAPHY**

Christopher is an Assistant Professor of Drama at the University of Nottingham, U.K. He has published widely on both Irish theatre including two monographs on the work of J.M. Synge (*Theatre and Residual Culture* [Palgrave: 2016], and *J.M. Synge's The Playboy of the Western World* [Routledge: 2016]), and a co-edited collection of essays on the performance of history and memory in Irish theatre (*Ireland, Memory and Performing the Historical Imagination* [Palgrave: 2014]).