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UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY



IRISH THEATRE INSTITUTE



## BALANCING ACTS

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## BOOK OF ABSTRACTS AND BIOS

**Abir Al-Laham, (Heidelberg)**

Title:

Of Bodies and Spaces: Balancing Inequality in Theatre Representations

Abstract:

How do we find balance between those who enjoy low-threshold access to theatre spaces and those who engage in theatre practices – or wish to do so – but are limited by borders that seem impossible to cross?

*Good Chance Theatre* was built in the Calais refugee and migrant camp at the height of the refugee “crisis” in 2015 and was “conceived as a place for people to come to express themselves” and “escape or confront the situations they were in” (Good Chance Theatre). Working with refugees stuck in limbo, forbidden to enter the UK, but unwelcome and ultimately evicted from the camp in France, the English playwrights Joe Robertson and Joe Murphy developed *The Jungle*, a play with and about the migrants and their individual stories. The play addresses important aspects such as empathy, resilience, political responsibility, and the implications of declaring the arrival of humans a “crisis,” while also sharing warm-hearted moments of coming together in a desperate situation. Staged as an immersive theatre experience in London in 2017, it also prompts the question of whose bodies are privileged enough to be present and represented on stage, who sits in the audience, who critiques the production – and who is excluded from the experience.

This contribution interrogates how the play and production balance the difficulty of playing two opposite and unequal spaces and in what ways they navigate the contradiction of using sites of

desperation and privilege. I highlight the relevance of transparency in theatre practice by detailing the importance of paratextual information: The playwrights documented their time in Calais online, which adds a crucial layer for our understanding of the play. Praised by *The Guardian* as “a rare thing: a necessary piece of theatre,” *The Jungle* provokes broader questions of representation, access, and participation in political and cultural processes, which this paper will investigate in depth.

Works Cited:

Billington, Michael. “The Jungle Review – Vital Drama of Hope and Despair at the Calais Camp.” *The Guardian*, 6 July 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2018/jul/06/the-jungle-review-migrant-life-and-death-calais-refugee-camp>.

*Good Chance Theatre*. Accessed 24 February 2023, <https://www.goodchance.org.uk/>.

Bio:

Abir Al-Laham is a PhD candidate at the English Department of the University of Heidelberg and a lecturer of English Literature and International Cultural Studies at the University of Mannheim. Her research project carries the working title *Theatre on Islam: Representations and Strategies in British Playwriting after 9/11*. She has published on the topic of religion and terror in contemporary drama and contributed to the CDE conference on “Fear and Anxiety” with a paper on “The Fearsome Other” in 2018. Further academic interests include postcolonial literature, artificial intelligence and discrimination, as well as contemporary dystopian fiction. Furthermore, she has taught various seminars and given lectures on questions of identity, language, and representation in Rap and Hip Hop.

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**Vicky Angelaki, (Mid Sweden)**

Title:

‘Balancing Intersecting Crises: Sustainability, COVID and Climate in Crimp and Kirkwood’:

## Abstract:

In 2022, London's Royal Court staged Lucy Kirkwood's *Rapture* (June) and Martin Crimp's *Not One of These People* (November). Kirkwood's play was advertised as Dave Davidson's *That Is Not Who I Am*; it was revealed to be Kirkwood's *Rapture* in the first minutes of performance. It had a full run. Crimp's play, on the other hand, running for four shows only, had a very limited one. The first balancing act, then, had to do with expectations: in the case of the former, putting trust into a play by a newcomer; in the second, cooperating with the strict schedule of the theatre, so as to ensure not to miss what was a contained and, by all accounts, unrepeatable event.

More balancing acts were required of spectators upon contact with the performance events, which involved negotiating different stimuli at the same time, as the plays made use of the Royal Court stage in novel and even groundbreaking ways, integrating technology that advocated for new interactions between the digital and the physical. Considering such factors, I will discuss how both productions developed new strategies for balancing two major crises: the climate crisis and the pandemic. I will propose that the sustainability of life and performance emerged as a key topic in different ways, both through the depiction of mental, emotional and physical health challenges, and through the development of new modes of creating and staging theatre at a time of programming uncertainty and a shifting artistic field, not least financially, and while dialogues concerning the footprint of performance making are emerging strongly.

The paper proceeds from research conducted for the project "Performing Interspaces: Social Fluidities in Contemporary Theatre", funded by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond (2022). It forms part of the monograph *Environment and Fluidity in Contemporary Theatre: Staging Interspaces*, completed and contracted with Palgrave Macmillan/Springer for open access publication.

## Bio:

Vicky Angelaki is Professor in English Literature at Mid Sweden University (Department of Humanities and Social Sciences). She was previously based in the UK, where she held full-time, permanent roles at Birmingham City University; University of Birmingham; University of Reading. Major publications include the monographs *Martin Crimp's Power Plays*:

*Intertextuality, Sexuality, Desire* (2022); *Theatre & Environment* (2019); *Social and Political Theatre in 21st-Century Britain: Staging Crisis* (2017); *The Plays of Martin Crimp: Making Theatre Strange* (2012) and the edited collection *Contemporary British Theatre: Breaking New Ground* (2013; 2016). She co-edits the series *Adaptation in Theatre and Performance* (Palgrave Macmillan, with Kara Reilly).

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### **Samantha Cade, (UCD)**

#### Title:

“Live” in a Pandemic: How Dublin’s Theatre Industry Addressed Work in the Covid 19 Pandemic

#### Abstract:

The closure and capacity restrictions placed on live theatre between March 16, 2020 - February 28th 2022 during the Covid 19 pandemic, brought about important moments of transformation and critical reflection within Dublin's theatre sector. The dramatic shift in the industry meant that artists, arts organizations, arts centers, and theatres had to invent new and innovative ways of addressing their audiences and performing their roles in the absence of live events.

This paper examines the actions taken by funders, arts organisations, independent artists, and theatres to adapt to new forms of engagement with audiences and of making work during the Covid 19 pandemic. In my paper I have addressed the roles of various arts organizations in ensuring the survival of the arts sector post-pandemic including the National Campaign for the Arts, Arts Council of Ireland, Irish Theatre Institute and Theatre forum as well as government public policy and government budgets. The paper is supported by reflections on interviews I conducted with some of Ireland's leading theatre artists and artistic directors. These artists include Louise Lowe: ANU productions, Cian O’Brien: Project Arts Centre, Tom Creed: theatre director and NCFE volunteer, Fionnuala Gyax: theatre maker and actor. I have investigated the creative responses of two of Ireland's most highly funded theatre companies, The Abbey (The

National Theatre Of Ireland), and The Gate Theatre. I have looked at how The Gate and The Abbey have engaged their audiences, artists and the broader community.

The restrictions on theatre during the pandemic fostered a re-awakening and re-working of theatre's balance between liveness and audience demographic and locational reach. As a result of the actions taken to improve and ensure the survival of the theatre sector post-pandemic, artists and theatre companies are now doing their work and engaging with audiences in more inclusive and accessible ways.

Bio:

I am a Canadian theatre director currently undertaking my PhD at UCD. My work focuses on combining scholarly theory based research with practices based work. Before beginning my PhD I completed my MFA in theatre directing at The Lir and a MA in theatre performance at UCD. Recently I was part of Rough Weekend with Rough Magic where I directed two new works by playwrights Jimmy McAleavey and Colin Campbell. Other directing credits include my site-specific immersive show *FETCH* as part of Dublin's 2019 Fringe Festival. I also directed a rehearsed reading of *LIVE GALLO NOW* at the Scene and Heard festival.

I have worked as an Associate / Assistant Director with ANU Productions across multiple projects. These include assisting and developing high profile works such as *THE LOST O'CASEY* (Winner of 3 Irish Times Theater Awards), *TORCH* (Arts Council England, Ambition for excellence Award) and currently associate director on *THE ANVIL* (Manchester International Festival) where I directed 3 episodes alongside *FAULTLINE* (a co-production with The Gate Theater and National Library). *HECTAOMB* (Short film) The Gate Theatre/ANU production. *BOOK OF NAMES* and most recently *STAGING THE TREATY*.

Outside of ANU I have developed a work in progress presentation of *GLUE* (a new play by Robbie O'Connor) at AXIS Theatre. I worked as assistant director on *GYM, SWIM, PARTY* with Gavin Kostick for the O'Reilly Theatre. I was assistant director on the Irish premier of *ANATOMY OF A SUICIDE* directed by Tom Creed at The Lir Academy.

Professional development tools include my participation in the Intimacy On Stage workshop with Idea O'Brien and Fast Track to dance as part of Dublin Dance Festival in association with Live Collision.

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## **Chaomei Chen, (TCD)**

### Title:

Gender, Ethics, Ableism: A Dramaturgical Balancing of Contemporary Irish Identities in *Ulysses* 2.2

### Abstract:

Dramaturgy is closely aligned with contemporary political discourses on 'sympoietic' and 'material thinking' (Haraway 2016), with post-representational human and non-human affective dynamics (Ahmed 2006, 2014), with debates on equality, diversity and decolonisation (Romanska 2014), and with collaborative 'commoning' that counters prevailing neoliberal logics of precarity and singularisation (Hardt & Negri 2008; Lorey 2020). In this sense, multidisciplinary dramaturgy serves as an effective way to balance the acts in theatre and performance industries. *Ulysses* 2.2 is a year-long project collaborated by three of the most innovative arts organizations and ensembles in Ireland, ANU Productions, Landmark Productions, and the Museum of Literature Ireland (MoLI) to celebrate the centenary of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. With its creative and experimental artistic responses to the 18 episodes of *Ulysses* from 18 groups of extraordinary artists including writers, musicians, dancers, theatre makers, architects, poets and visual artists (such as Emilie Pine, Paula Meehan, David Bolger, etc.), it is a multidisciplinary, dramaturgical "balancing" reconstructions of contemporary Irish identities between the digital and the site-specific, between the artistic and the official. Taking four performances of *Ulysses* 2.2, *Lolling* (Episode 5, "Lotus Eaters"), *All Hardest of Woman* (Episode 14, "Oxen of the Sun"), *Crippling Ulysses* (Episode 16, "Eumaeus"), and *Go to Blazes* (Episode 4, "Calypso"), as case studies, I would argue that this project serves as an interdisciplinary dramaturgical attempt,

concerted by both artists, writers, and the official cultural sector, to incorporate various artistic genres into theatre and performance to “balance” and delve into the complexities and diversities within contemporary Irish identities in terms of gender, ethics, and ableism.

Bio:

Chaomei Chen is a PhD candidate in Drama at Trinity College Dublin and an early career researcher at the Trinity Long Room Hub. Her research interests lie in postrevolutionary Chinese theatre, interculturalism, avant-garde arts and contemporary Irish theatre. She has also been a postgraduate representative of the Irish Society for Theatre Research and an editor for *the Journal of Ying Ming Theatre* (published by University of Göttingen) since 2021. Her recent publications include “Performance Review of *Abomination: A Dup Opera* dir. by Conor Mitchell”, *Theatre Journal* 74, no. 4 (2022): 517-519; “The ‘Grass Stage’ Collective and Zhao Chuan’s ‘Draft Theatre’” in *the Journal of Ying Ming Theatre*, no. 21 (2023): 28-36. Her essays and reviews have also appeared in *Platform: Journal of Theatre and Performing Arts* and *Theatre Research International*.

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**David Clare, (MIL)**

Title:

Otherness in Ursula Rani Sarma’s *Blue*

Abstract:

As numerous critics have noted, the work of Indian-Irish playwright Ursula Rani Sarma has been heavily shaped by her formative years in Lahinch, Co. Clare. Some critics have expressed surprise that, with the exception of her 2006 radio play *A Tiny Light in the Darkness* (about the 7/7 London bombings), her 2014 short film *Anywhere But Here* (with its half-Indian, half-white Irish protagonist James), and her 2017 stage adaptation of Khaled Hosseini’s novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, “her work does not explicitly address themes of immigration, nor the lives of



minority ethnic individuals” and people of colour. However, as Charlotte McIvor and Matthew Spangler rightly point out, Sarma’s plays “illustrate a more subtle interculturalism”. In this paper, I will show that, in her early, powerful play *Blue*, Sarma demonstrates an understanding of widely-held (negative) Irish attitudes towards ethnic difference, as well as additional forms of “Otherness”. *Blue* is set in a fictional version of Lahinch called Killshoran, and, while the plot involving the three main characters (usually assumed to be white Irish) may not seem to be centrally concerned with the marginalisation of particular groups in Ireland, the play has much to say about “traditionalist” Irish attitudes towards ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. Stray remarks by the characters regarding “funny last name[s]”, the “Chinese” language [*sic*], and “feckin Calcutta” all reveal the town’s relative lack of openness to “foreignness”. Additionally, Danny’s “tomboy” identity, which challenges the restrictive, traditionalist, binary beliefs around gender which prevail in the town, is the cause of many of her social problems (including the bullying she endures at school). And critics have failed to adequately address the possibility that Joe (usually assumed to be heterosexual) may actually be in love with Des.

Bio:

Dr. David Clare is Lecturer in Drama & Theatre Studies at Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick. His books include the monographs *Bernard Shaw’s Irish Outlook* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) and *Irish Anglican Literature and Drama: Hybridity and Discord* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021) and the edited collections *The Gate Theatre, Dublin: Inspiration and Craft* (Carysfort/Peter Lang, 2018), *The Golden Thread: Irish Women Playwrights, 1716-2016* (2 vols. Liverpool University Press, 2021), and *Across Borders and Time: Jonathan Swift* (SPECHEL, 2022). Dr. Clare is also curator of the Irish Research Council-funded [www.ClassicIrishPlays.com](http://www.ClassicIrishPlays.com) database.

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**Alexander Coupe, (Liverpool)**

Title:

## Stitched Up: Class and Compromise in Post-Agreement Feminist Performance

### Abstract:

The 1998 Good Friday Agreement promised to embed gender equality at the heart of public policy. Yet its commitment to ‘the right to equal opportunity in all social and economic activity, regardless of class, creed, disability, gender or ethnicity’ coincided with a programme of neoliberal pro-market reform that has widened economic and social disparities. Opportunities for women in the arts have expanded over the same period, but cuts to social welfare and arts funding have rendered their working conditions increasingly difficult. In the absence of the collective and socialist initiatives of prior generations, most notably the Charabanc Theatre Company, the folly of gleaning personal freedom through class compromise has emerged as a central preoccupation of feminist performance. Focusing in particular (but not exclusively) on the work of Abbie Spallen, this paper will show how theatre and live art dramatizes – both obliquely and directly – the loneliness, isolation, and competitive individualism that increasingly characterises the experiences of female art workers in the North. In exploring the difficulty of achieving genuine liberation in a context where survival threatens the bonds of solidarity needed for change, these plays exemplify the fragmented but resurgent inheritances of socialist-feminism in the North, both within and beyond the performing arts. They also form one part of a wider current of contemporary theatre and performance that questions the role of capitalist ‘modernisation’ in rendering patriarchal ideologies and social practices redundant.

### Bio:

Dr Alex Coupe is Lecturer in Theatre and Performance Studies at the University of Liverpool. His work focuses on contemporary theatre, live art and dance, with an emphasis on gender, conflict transformation and cultural policy. He is currently writing a monograph entitled 'The Gender Politics of Performance in Contemporary Northern Ireland' for Palgrave Macmillan and has published work on cultural policy, the arts, and reconciliation in a variety of academic journals.

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## **Fiona Fearon, (DKIT)**

### Title:

Balancing Acts: The Ethics of Teaching Trauma, Criminality and Deviance in Contemporary Irish Theatre

### Abstract:

For many people twenty first century theatre is seen as essentially a middle-class entertainment opportunity. Ticket prices in Dublin go from 13 euro for the back row at the Abbey on a Monday night, to 80 euros for a musical at the Bord Gais, with a play like Martin McDonagh's *Hangmen* at the Gaiety in Dublin starting at 25 euro and going up to over 50 euro in order to sit anywhere where you might actually be able to see the stage and comfortably enjoy the experience. And yet, contemporary theatre is preoccupied with trauma and deviance and in particular criminality – whether it is Marina Carr's troubled mothers who abandon or even kill their children, or McDonagh's murderous siblings, daughters or husbands, or Mark O'Rowe's foul mouthed gangsters and monsters, contemporary theatre needs to come with a health warning about the voyeurism of the Other. Louise Lowe's production of the Monto Cycle set in the inner city area formally notorious for its sex industry but now more commonly associated with drug crime, literally takes the audience into the streets and buildings of the Other and makes them into voyeurs or accomplices. As audiences we have choices and companies and marketing make it clear that a play or production is not suitable for audiences under a certain age or may come with a content warning, however students of programmes in Irish Drama are largely not given the option to step away from this subject matter. I now regularly give trigger warnings when discussing any play from Shakespeare to Marina Carr, but find that it is in contemporary theatre and performance I find myself having to balance the need to cover a syllabus that will justify the title of the module and the needs of a diverse student group who may have personal experience of racism, domestic violence, sexual assault, drug or alcohol dependency or gang crime. Some of my students may see themselves or their communities represented in these works as the Other and I as lecturer have to balance the implications of the impact of examinable texts on my student cohort. This paper will reflect on

some current issues and experiences of teaching contemporary Irish theatre to a student body and the ramifications of balancing the study of drama with an audience who do not have the choice to not address the elephant in the room.

Bio:

Dr. Fiona Fearon is a Lecturer in Drama and Theatre Studies at Dundalk Institute of Technology, Ireland. Her principal areas of interest are audience and performance studies, and she has published on audience ethnography and the performance of grief in contemporary society. Her most recent publication was 'Speaking from Beyond the Grave: The Voices of the Dead in Contemporary Irish Drama' in *The Graveyard in Literature: Liminality and Social Critique*, Cambridge Scholars, 2022. She has just completed an essay on twentieth century literature and drama in Louth to be published in the forthcoming *Louth: history and society. Interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county*, Geography Publications, and she is working on a forthcoming monograph, *Dundalk in Revolution: Cultural Life in Dundalk 1898-1923*.

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**Alinne Balduino P. Fernandes, (UFSC)**

Title:

Asphyxia and Isolation in Marina Carr's 'Grow a Mermaid': A Brazilian Radio Play

Abstract:

In this paper, I will provide an overview of my most recent ongoing practice-based research on radio drama and isolation. Although the corpus of the project involves the study and production of five works by Irish and Northern Irish women writers, namely, Christina Reid's *My Name, Shall I Tell You My Name?* (1989); Marina Carr's 'Grow a Mermaid' (1996); Paula Mehan's *Cell* (2000); Claire Keegan's 'Night of the Quicken Trees' (2007); and Stacey Gregg's *Override* (2013), here I will focus on my own translation into Brazilian Portuguese and adaptation of Carr's one and only shorty story, 'Grow a Mermaid' into a radio play. My objectives are twofold: to

consider the financial and social challenges of working with this particular dramatic genre in the Brazilian context, where radio plays have virtually ceased to exist since the 1940s; and to investigate the portrayal of isolation, and invariably repressive domestic context, experienced by the child-protagonist. One could argue that Carr's female protagonists often resort to suicide as a form of liberation from social and familial repression, expressed in the play in the form of an almost literal asphyxiation. With this project, I intend to stimulate debates about the impact of the prolonged period of social distancing recently experienced around the globe due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, a period when domestic violence soared in Brazil (Vieira et al., 2020; Souza & Farias, 2022; Fórum de Segurança Pública, 2022). This piece of research is interdisciplinary, as it crisscrosses Irish Studies, Translation and Drama Studies, with a focus on adaptations and productions for the radio; it is also practice-based as it makes use of its own artistic works as form of questioning, corroborating and formulating theories (Smith & Dean, 2009).

Bio:

Dr Alinne Balduino P. Fernandes is a theatre translator, dramaturge and Senior Lecturer in English and Translation at Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC). She is also Director of both UFSC's Irish Studies research cluster (NEI) and Radio Drama Lab. Her most recent publications include *Theatre, Performance and Commemoration* (Bloomsbury, 2023, co-edited with Miriam Haughton & Pieter Verstraete); the themed issue 'Theatre Translators as Creative, Political, and Artistic Actors' (*Cadernos de Tradução*, 2023, co-edited with Ruth Bohunovksy), and *Teorias da Tradução de 1990 a 2019* (EdUFSC, 2023). She has translated various plays for stage production, among them Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats...*, Patricia Burke-Brogan's *Eclipsed*, Mary Raftery's *No Escape*, and Stacey Gregg's *Override*. Her first radio drama production is a translation of Christina Reid's *My Name, Shall I Tell You My Name?* (*Meu nome, posso te falar o meu nome?*, 2022, to be aired on NEI's website soon).

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**Michael Finneran, (MIL)**

Title:

Balancing expectations and outcomes and so much else in Irish applied arts practices

Abstract:

The ISTR conference call for papers asks us to address something that we have all direct experience of – a struggle to maintain balance. For both artists and researchers, there is a permanent and lived reality of the business of plate spinning; a sense greatly accentuated during and since the pandemic. This is true of the work too, with a constant balance being sought between artistic ambition, audience expectation and resource availability. In certain places in the arts, the balancing act is even more profoundly present.

In creative practice that is socially minded, participatory and located in community sites, there is a struggle for balance across many fronts; outcome, purpose, aesthetics, ethics and form. The affect sought after is not always the effect achieved (Thompson 2009), and the labour expended is not always recognised (Nicholson 2020; Haughton 2021).

The paper will report on recently completed research (funded by the Irish Research Council and Creative Ireland) examining concepts and practices at the intersection of creativity and well-being in Ireland. These are two terms which have unique purchase at this moment in time, and yet have a range of colloquial and scholarly meanings. The paper will offer some analysis around the challenges two ideas present and examine their implications for artistic practice, particularly in theatre.

The presentation will dwell in particular on the implications of creativity and the ‘creative turn’ (Harris 2014) for the theatre sector and ecology, particularly given the recent announcement of the continuation of the *Creative Ireland* scheme. It will discuss how government policy and funding/reporting structures in the arts both lend themselves to greater balance, but also mitigate against it. Some of the vignettes of practice examined as part of the research will be shared in order to better understand the value, complexity and precarity of work in the applied arts. Finally, the paper will share some of the outcomes and findings of the research project.

Works Cited:

Harris, A.M. (2014) *The Creative Turn: Towards a New Aesthetic Imaginary*, Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Haughton, M. (2021) 'As much graft as there is craft: Refusal, Value and the Affective Economy of the Irish Arts Sector', *Performance paradigm: a journal of performance and contemporary culture*, 16, 40-58, available:

<https://www.performanceparadigm.net/index.php/journal/article/view/239> [accessed 7 November 2021].

Nicholson, H. (2020) 'Labours of social inclusion: amateur, professional, community theatres', *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 40(3), 303-308, available:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14682761.2020.1807207>.

Thompson, J. (2009) *Performance affects: applied theatre and the end of effect*, London: Palgrave MacMillan.

Bio:

Dr Michael Finneran is Head of the Department of Drama and Theatre Studies at Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, Ireland. His research interests include social justice, arts practice, creativity and arts education. He is author (with Kelly Freebody) of *Critical Themes in Drama: Social, Cultural and Political Analysis* (Routledge, 2021), co-editor of several volumes, and recently held an Irish Research Council award examining creativity and wellbeing. He was a Visiting Gilbert Fellow at the University of Sydney Social Sciences and Humanities Advanced Research Institute in 2022 and was named as a distinguished alumni of DCU 2020. Michael is an active theatre practitioner, working as a director and lighting designer, and chairs the boards of *Branar Téatar* and *Dance Limerick*. He is currently chairing the national group designing the first Leaving Cert. drama, film and theatre studies curriculum.

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## **Bogdan Mihai Florea, (Nu Nu Theatre)**

### Title:

Theatre, the pandemic, a bit of Treplev, some Sloterdijk, an academic journal, depression and (my) mental health in general

### Abstract:

In the middle of the pandemic, I produced a written piece called “Expel the Human from the Theatre” responding to a call for papers launched by a known journal. It was a provocative manifesto containing anthropo-nihilist ideas about theatre: a celebration of the pandemic’s temporary removal/sequester of humanity and its sudden expulsion from the theatre. In the piece, I was iterating the pessimistic/nihilistic view that theatre may be generating work in the same way as any other polluting industry, which is based uniformity, repetitiveness, serialization, predictability, excess. I wanted to playfully echo the views of Chekhov’s character Treplev, who – in *The Seagull* – advocates for the creation of new forms - “we must have [theatre] under a new form. If we can’t do that, let us rather not have it at all” (*The Seagull*, Act 1). I sought to reinforce those with ideas adapted from Peter Sloterdijk’s work *You Must Change Your Life* - more specifically ideas from the few pages united under the intriguing heading “Malign Repetitions III: The Self-Referential Art System of Modernity.”

The proposal triggered an ampler email conversation with the editor, moving quickly from more technical issues such as the critical framing of the argument to more personal topics such as exhaustion and depression (of both author and editor). I was very gently and caringly made aware of the fact that sometimes “investment in such nihilistic line of thinking might be getting mixed up with some untreated clinical depression (whilst not dismissing nihilism/pessimism as pathologies)” and that “we can mistake how we feel (awful, tired, numb, meaningless, hopeless) for how the world is (or how "theatre" is).” I was advised that I “must especially watch for times when it becomes all about me or the things I am involved in, e.g., *If only I/theatre did not exist, things would get better.*”



Underlying that my intention had always been only to toy with Treplev's and Sloterdijk's ideas (I had trained as an actor after all, so I could posit this as an improvisation exercise – what would have Treplev's theatre looked like if he hadn't killed himself?), I replied that I had the confidence to withstand the temptation of “the romance of the abyss.”

Starting from this context and maintaining total anonymity about anyone else involved in the conversation, I propose a discussion around questions such as: Was I experiencing depression? Can depression (ever) turn out to be good for me as a theatre-maker/theatre thinker? How healthy is it to play with nihilistic/pessimistic ideas about theatre? Can depression spur creativity and is depression creative? Is the statement true that “my philosophies may occasionally be depressing, but my depression is not philosophy” (quote from the email exchange)?

Bio:

Dr Bogdan Mihai Florea is a professional actor and researcher in Theatre Studies, who has published and presented academic papers in the UK, USA, Finland, Switzerland, Poland, Serbia and Lithuania. He is an

Associate Member of the Brokering Intercultural Exchange group, a global network of academics and cultural managers, and a co-founder of Nu Nu, a theatre company that supports professional actors who use English as a second language in the UK.

Some of his writings include “Egg-fying’ Hamlet: The Second Language Actor and Shakespeare Grammaticality,” which appeared in April 2019, in Shakespeare Jahrbuch 155 or “BANDIT: Here to Haunt You! On Why I Became an Émigré Theatre Maker” was published in 2020 in Journal MIK - Art History and Criticism Reviews, published by the Faculty of Arts, Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania. The article titled “I’ll do it when Dame Judi Dench does it. Song of Romania versus Arts Council England: the question of public engagement, relevance and diversity in theatre-making” has appeared in the Arts Management Quarterly (AIA) journal. Dr Florea is currently writing the chapter titled “Revealing Posthuman Encounters in Chekhov’s The Seagull – A Guide for Audiences” for the Revealing Posthuman Encounters in Performance, edited by Stefano Boselli and Sarah Lucie, to be published by Routledge in 2026.

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**Gavin Friel**

Title:

“Can We Ever Really Know This *Works?*”: Experimenting with Research-based Theatre as Consent Education with an Irish National Policy and Secondary School and Third-Level Education Ecology

(presented with Charlotte McIvor)

Abstract:

This paper links the learning from University of Galway-based Active\* Consent’s two national tours of our original research-based play in 2019-2020 (third-level) and 2022 (third-level and secondary schools) to debates over efficacy in theatre and performance studies since the 1970s and the post-2000s impact turn in both higher education and the creative industries sector in the UK, Ireland, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand among others. Active\* Consent’s research and evaluation led approach to consent education which also includes developing creative arts projects such as this play is unique internationally in that our research has led in generating benchmarking data on sexual violence and harassment amongst Irish young people (Active\* Consent, “Research”) as well as creating resources based on this data and then evaluating our own resources (including the play) for effectiveness on an ongoing basis.

This presentation focuses in on how Active\* Consent has evaluated our play-based data in 2019-2020 and 2020 in terms of the measures tested and the relationship of qualitative vs. quantitative audience feedback, Irish consent and sexuality data generally, and the artistic contributions of our actor-devisers to the play’s ongoing evolution and adaptation to be more “effective” for multiple audiences in multiple ways. The complexity of our negotiations as a research and creative team not only working with data and theatre craft but also intervening within educational and/or sexual violence prevention policy debates and initiatives more generally which overlap in a layered ecology of stakeholders ranging from activists to students

to educators to student services workers to health professional to politicians ultimately provides an illustrative case study of the possibilities for where we imagine theatre's efficacy as an art form might reach in terms of influence, but also reveals the layers of work and negotiation that cannot necessarily being captured by data or other emerging complex forms of impact measurement. We suggest ultimately that Active\* Consent's use of theatre at the centre of their data-led multi-nodal consent education approach makes visible how theatre and performance as art forms might be particularly effective forms through which to test the limits of the impact turn more broadly and to push theatre and performance studies scholars to move beyond thinking of impact at the scale of one production only.

Bio:

Gavin Friel (Ba, HDipA) is a psychology researcher in the School of Psychology, University of Galway. He has worked under the Active\* Consent program since 2019 as an actor and writer of *'The Kinds of Sex You Might Have At College'* and has recently begun assessing the show's consent and sexual behaviour attitude and perception change potential in audiences.

**Jackie Gallagher, (MTU)**

Title:

The Use of Contemporary Dance as a Tool to Enhance Wellness in Educational Settings  
(presented with Sharon Phelan)

Abstract:

The concept of Wellbeing is now at the core of educational policy agendas and practices and increased attention is focussed on enabling and empowering students to develop the knowledge, skills, and competencies to support their wellbeing now and into the future. While the terms "Wellbeing" and "Wellness" are often used interchangeably, subtle differences are acknowledged. The concept of Wellness is understood as the sum of the positive steps taken to

achieve wellbeing (Roscoe, 2009). In this paper, Contemporary dance is explored as a tool, through which Wellness can be enhanced in an educational setting.

Initially, “Contemporary dance” is addressed from philosophical and historical perspectives in the paper. The Rudolph Von Laban approach to Contemporary dance receives attention, as it focuses on movement principles versus set dance routines. These movement principles include use of the body, use of space, and the use of dynamics, time, and flow, in the composition of individual dance performances. Through this process the students release their thoughts, emotions and feelings using their bodies as instruments of expression. This holistic approach to dance distinguishes it as an appropriate tool through which Wellness can be explored and enriched.

In this paper, the notion of Wellness will be addressed as “a state of being that incorporates all facets and dimensions of human existence. These include physical health, emotional health, intellectual health, spirituality, occupational and social connectivity”. (Loria 2020 p18) Through Contemporary dance these “facets and dimensions” can be enriched using the body as the medium of expression.

The academic concepts of this paper are explored within the context of second level education, where Wellness is currently being addressed from differing perspectives. Practical examples are used to evidence Contemporary dance as a tool through which Wellness can be enhanced in educational contexts.

Bio:

Lecturer within the Department of Health & Leisure Studies at the Munster Technological University, Kerry Campus. Lectures in the areas of, Activity Leadership and Research Methods and supervises research at both Undergraduate a Postgraduate levels. Completed a PhD at Leeds Beckett University in 2015 which focused on the use of Sport Education as a form of Feminist Pedagogy in PE. Research interests are primarily in the areas of equality and inclusion in physical education and physical activity and strives towards creating inclusive learning environments.

## **Shonagh Hill, (QUB)**

### Title:

Moving in Feminist Solidarity

### Abstract:

My paper will address the balancing acts involved in a practice-as-research project which explored an intergenerational feminist solidarity. In 2022, I worked with Belfast-based dance company Maiden Voyage to devise a somatic movement workshop that enabled participants to address the tensions and solidarities of intergenerational relationships through exploration of how we move in feminist solidarity. This was the second part of my MSCA research project which began in 2021 with a somatic movement workshop which offered participants the opportunity to explore their embodied knowledge: to discover the histories in and of their bodies, and thereby investigate the embodied experiences of different generations of women in Northern Ireland. The key findings of the workshops in 2021 were that generational differences and tensions are exaggerated, and that they are not insurmountable. This provided the basis for the 2022 workshop which turned to exploration of intergenerational relationships through feminist solidarity.

The participants' movement responses and written reflections from the workshop have been gathered into a short film which I worked on with feminist filmmaker Elspeth Vischer. I would like to show the short film, approx. 10 minutes in length, and to then reflect on the balancing acts involved in developing the PaR, as well as discuss the research findings.

### Bio:

Dr Shonagh Hill is an AHRC Research Fellow at Queen's University Belfast, undertaking a project on 'Feminist Temporalities and Generations in Contemporary Northern Irish Performance'. Shonagh previously held a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowship at QUB (2020-2022). Her first

monograph, *Women and Embodied Mythmaking in Irish Theatre* (CUP, 2019) provides an historical overview of women's contributions to, and an alternative genealogy of, modern Irish theatre.

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### **Sarah Hoover, (UoG)**

#### Title:

Balancing on one heel: mixed live/digital dramaturgy in *It's True I Love You All So Much*

#### Abstract:

Digital theatres have recently demonstrated significant development in the diversity of approaches to and constructions of the performance-audience relationship, from Creation Theatre's *Tempest* (with audiences acting as effects) to Big Telly's *Department Story* with its bespoke interface, to Ontroerend Goed's *TM* (with constructed spaces for interrogation and reflection). New intimacies between performance and audience demand new 'navigational practices' that acknowledge a joint but disjointed 'becoming space' attending to the dynamic, unfixed in-between (Groot Nibbelink, 2019). Balancing between live and pre-recorded, between characters performed by humans and characters performed by images, between inward-focused exploration of self-harm and healing and the responsibility of a society towards mental health support, *It's True I Love You All So Much* by Galway-based playwright Jenni Nikinmaa balances resilience, resistance and vulnerability.

Drawing on autobiography and mythology, the play uses Achilles' heel to signal a valorised state of 'mental wellness' betrayed by a single vulnerability. It argues that instead, this vulnerability makes us aware of the relational forces shaping us individually and collectively. By attending to it we can heal, dragging others into healing with us. In a time of rising mental health crises the play's multi-modal form builds into a generous and generative architecture of interaction that highlights the struggle to maintain a 'balance' defined by social values while lacking vital

support from that society. The play's structures evoke, question, and revise these concepts from multiple viewpoints made possible by the mixed-interactive form.

This paper builds on my dramaturgical work with the performance and previous discussions of its development to demonstrate techniques of integrating characterisations with scenography using this in-between digital space. Drawing on the work of Rachel Hann and and Maaïke Bleeker it identifies three different modalities of relation: pre-performed video, live interaction, and an interactive website-as-performer, and expands on the balanced construction of the space.

Work Cited:

Groot Nibbelink, Liesbeth (2019). *Nomadic Theatre*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London, UK.

Bio:

Sarah Hoover is a postdoctoral researcher on the CLS INFRA project funded by EU Horizon2020, at the Moore Institute, University of Galway. CLS INFRA is a four-year Digital Humanities (Computational Literary Studies) partnership to build a shared resource of high-quality data, tools and knowledge to aid new approaches to studying literature in the digital age. Her research centers interactive theatres and dramaturgies of dissensus, reflection and affect. Hoover's forthcoming monologue, *Larping Audiences Into Theatre* (Palgrave-MacMillan), establishes a dramaturgical methodology using reflective and affective strategies that transform audience experience of interaction into explorations of social and individual power relation, building on techniques from live-action role-play studies. Hoover is a dramaturg whose most recent projects include *Game Theory Theatre / Theatre de la Pire Espece Writing for Objects* (Montreal, 2023), *The Untethering* (TBD), and *CharCharWitchy* (Galway Theatre Festival, 2022). Hoover is the incoming Treasurer of ISTR.

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**Eamonn Jordan, (UCD)**

Title:

Precarious and Intersectional Class Imbalances and Inequalities

Abstract:

Irish Theatre is marked by writing that often demonstrates complex class divisions and segregations, sometimes blatantly, sometimes surreptitiously and it is a tradition noted more for intra- rather than inter-class representations. If it is a tradition also besmeared by class hierarchies, antagonisms and conflicts, it also manifests class co-dependencies, mutualities and acquiescences. However, the tradition is less assured with dealing with class-based resistances and retaliations.

Class is not a siloed category but intersects with genders, ethnicities, sexualities, and increasingly races in Irish Theatre, in ways that complicate not just issues of identity, and belonging, but also discriminations, inequalities and injustices. In this paper, my focus will be on five ideas from across this tradition of writing. Firstly, the ways by which the durational aspects of wealth and poverty are under-explored in Irish theatre. Secondly, how forms of wealth and poverty shaming have shaped many dramaturgical inclinations, further twisted by the notion that wealth acquisition is likely to be aligned with corruption. Thirdly, the unease with which Irish theatre explores the notion of social mobility and how it obscures issues of merit and virtue. Fourthly, how working-class characters are afforded access to “resistant knowledge” (Collins Hill) and cultural competence by way of compensations for inequality. Fifthly, the paper wonders why there is so little demonisation of the marginalised “other,” and an unease about with the conferring of characters victim status, in contrast to how neoliberal agendas tend to reinforce the weakness and decrepitude of the working, precarious poor.

In light of such questions/observations, does the dramatization of substantial and insurmountable intersectional imbalances and inequalities serve as a major riposte to critical or dominant ideology - whose major beneficiaries are corporate, political and cultural elites - or are such criticisms, in the ways they are licenced, accommodated and facilitated, merely act as a safety value, a cultural letting off of steam that offers like by way of a counter-balancing?



Bio:

Eamonn Jordan is Professor in Drama Studies) at the School of English, Drama and Film, University College Dublin. Recent work include: *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Irish Theatre and Performance*, co-edited with Eric Weitz. *The Theatre and Film of Conor McPherson: Conspicuous Communities* has been published by Methuen Bloomsbury in February 2019. In 2020, *Justice and the Plays and Films of Martin McDonagh* was published by Palgrave as part of its Pivot series of publications.

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**Daithí Kearney, (DKIT)**

Title:

Balancing Time: Seeing the past, present, future and other time in the productions of Siamsa Tíre, the National Folk Theatre of Ireland

Abstract:

Siamsa Tíre, the National Folk Theatre of Ireland seek to balance a sense of past, present and future in their work as part of an effort to remain relevant to contemporary theatre audiences. Although early productions focused on the representation of rural Irish life, akin to much of the early twentieth century Irish drama influenced by cultural nationalism, developments from the 1980s in particular sought a greater balance between remembering past practices of intangible cultural heritage and seeking to devise and develop new work that incorporates influences from contemporary society. This balance reflects a need to be creative, attract audiences and funding, and remain relevant as an artistic community.

The representation of time is significant in many of the company's productions. In productions, such as *Samhain* and *Oileán*, there is an interruption in the time-space continuum, inviting audiences 'back in time', sometimes into another time. There is a suggestion of the *alltar*, another realm that exists simultaneously with the *ceantar*, the place or locality in which

physical bodies are present. While the stage is an unveiling of the past in the present, the representation through music and dance reflects an inversion, drawing on contemporary artistic practice. The representation of time past is performed through the reworking of older dance steps with reference to agricultural and maritime tasks but sometimes to newly composed music with greater incorporation of other dance styles and approaches to song that are out of time. Thus, the past is situated in the present as part of an attempt to protect its memory and practices for the future.

Bio:

Ethnomusicologist, geographer and performer Dr Daithí Kearney is a lecturer in music and tourism, and co-director of the Creative Arts Research Centre at Dundalk Institute of Technology. His research focuses on Irish traditional music, song and dance, and he has toured regularly as a musician, singer and dancer with a number of groups including Siamsa Tíre, The National Folk Theatre of Ireland. His research on the company has appeared recently in the *International Journal of Traditional Arts, Musicultures, and Confluente*, as well as book chapters in *Staged Folklore* (ed. Motherway and O'Connell, 2022) and *Timbres of Identity* (ed. Dogus Varli, 2021).

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**Maria Kurdi (Pécs)**

Bio:

Mária Kurdi is professor emerita in the Institute of English Studies at the University of Pécs, Hungary. Her research focuses on modern Irish, American and British drama and theatre. She has published seven books and edited or co-edited several essay collections. Her own books include *Representations of Gender and Female Subjectivity in Contemporary Irish Drama by Women* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 2010), *Approaches to Irish Theatre through a Hungarian's Lens* (University of Pécs, 2018) and a monograph on J. M. Synge in Hungarian (Pécs: Kronosz, 2021). Her edited volumes include *Radical Contemporary Theatre Practices by Women in Ireland* (co-edited with

Miriam Haughton, Carysfort Press, 2015) and a collection in honour of Arthur Miller's birth a hundred years before (AMERICANA e-books, 2015). She has scholarly articles in international and Hungarian journals and essay collections. In 2022 *The Theatre of Deirdre Kinahan*, co-edited by Mária Kurdi and Lisa Fitzpatrick was published with Peter Lang. Currently she is editing one of the *HJEAS Books, New Series*, on age, ageing, ageism in contemporary Anglophone literatures and theatre, to be published in 2023.

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### **Luke Lamont, (UoG)**

#### Title:

The author on stage: *auteur-ships*, precarious ethics and documentary aesthetics

#### Abstract:

In recent years, Irish theatre makers have increasingly adopted documentary methods, for a variety of purposes: to expose past injustices, to amplify forgotten historical voices, and even to query the boundary between fiction and documentary performance itself. A tension has emerged in the field of documentary theatre around the authorship of such plays, particularly when the script is adapted verbatim from the words of others. In such cases, whose play is it?

Metatheatrical performances of authorship – or *auteur-ship* – can deconstruct and interrogate the relationships between theatre makers, their process and the audience. This can act as gesture of comradeship toward the audience, or as a mechanism to break the ice when approaching an intimidating text or subject. It can be an earnest claim to authenticity, or a subversive waving of empty hands before the trick up the performer's sleeve is revealed. Either way, most tricks performed are received in good faith: it is a play, after all. The trust, or the willingness to be deceived, is made more complex by the curious position that the author, writer-director, or *auteur*, occupies in a collaborative performance ecology. When they tell us they are the author, do they believe it themselves?

This paper will discuss the performances of the author (and/or *auteur*) in four productions – *Chekhov's First Play* by Dead Centre (2016), *Rapids* by Shaun Dunne and Talking Shop Ensemble (2018), *Pasolini's Salò: Redubbed* by Dylan Tighe (2019) and *Masterclass* by Adrienne Truscott & Brokentalkers (2021) – to examine what is revealed, both intentionally and inadvertently, when the author takes the stage.

Bio:

Dr Luke Lamont (he/him/his) is a Government of Ireland Postdoctoral Fellow at University of Galway. His published work has featured in *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Irish Theatre and Performance* (2018) and *Fifty Key Irish Plays* (upcoming publication by Routledge), and current project will produce a monograph for publication, examining the emergence of documentary theatre and variations of this form in the mainstream of Irish theatre. Luke received his PhD from University College Dublin in 2019, completed under the Government of Ireland Postgraduate Scholarship Scheme (2016-2019). His research interests lie in 'theatre of the real' in Ireland, particularly documentary theatre, verbatim theatre and hybrid productions which demonstrate combinations of these aesthetics.

Apart from his teaching work in University of Galway and UCD, Luke has worked the Abbey Theatre — Ireland's national theatre — in both permanent and freelance capacities. He is an incoming committee member of ISTR as of 2023.

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**Patrick Lonergan, (UoG)**

Title:

Balancing Acts: Caryl Churchill and Anthropocene Feminism

Abstract:

Caryl Churchill's interest in ecological and environmental justice has been evident since the beginning of her career, particularly in such plays as *Fen* (1983) and *The Skriker* (1994). She has

also displayed an interest in exploring how climate justice overlaps with the need to come to terms with colonialism and capitalism, most famously in *Cloud Nine* (1979). This paper argues, however, that Churchill's twenty-first century plays represent a more explicit turn towards the ecological, which, in keeping with the conference theme, is 'balanced' with her interest in the development of new forms of dramaturgy and the politics of stagecraft. Beginning with *Far Away* in 2000, Churchill's plays also give focus to the need for balance between the human and the (rest of) the natural world, offering audiences new ways of understanding their place in, and responsibility for, the biosphere.

The title of the paper references a third form of balance, namely the intersections between feminism and environmental justice, especially as explored in the 2017 publication *Anthropocene Feminism* but also drawing on Stacy Alaimo's *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space* (2000). My suggestion is that, for Churchill, feminism and environmental justice have always occupied common ground: she shows that, as Alaimo argues, nature can be recast as a feminist space, but similarly she offers the possibility that feminism can offer ways to move beyond the construction of 'the natural' as a space that is separate from the cultural as we attempt to grapple with the politics of the Anthropocene era. The paper explores this theme by analysing productions of key recent works, including *Escaped Alone* (2016) and *What if it Only* (2021).

#### Bio:

Professor Patrick Lonergan is Vice-Dean for Engagement and Student Recruitment in the College of Arts, Social Sciences and Celtic Studies, and he lectures in Drama, Irish Literature, and Music at the School of English and Creative Arts. He is a member of the Royal Irish Academy.

He has edited or written eleven books on theatre and Irish literature, including *Theatre and Globalization: Irish Drama in the Celtic Tiger Era* (winner of the 2008 Theatre Book Prize), *The Theatre and Films of Martin McDonagh* (Methuen Drama, 2012), *Theatre and Social Media* (2015) and *Irish Drama and Theatre Since 1950* (Bloomsbury, 2019). His next book, *Theatre Revivals for the Anthropocene*, will be published by Cambridge University Press in 2023, and

other forthcoming publications include work on Shakespeare, Yeats, Synge, Joyce, and the history of blackface performance in nineteenth-century Ireland.

He is on the board of directors of the Galway International Arts Festival, a member of the Executive Committee of the International Federation for Theatre Research, and is an Editorial Associate of *Contemporary Theatre Review*. For Methuen Drama, he is co-editor of the 'Critical Companions' series which has published new books on such dramatists as Friel, Murphy, Pinter, Beckett, Churchill, Hwang, and Ruhl, and on topics including disability theatre, verse drama, and the British and American stage musical.

He has lectured widely on Irish writing internationally, including recently in Princeton, Florence, Florianapolis (Brazil), Wroclaw, and Tokyo. He was the 2019 Burns Visiting Fellow for Irish Studies at Boston College, and is a member of the editorial board of *Irish University Review*.

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### **Clara Mallon, (UoG)**

#### Title:

Tipping the Balance: Representing Systematic Oppressions in Working-Class Performance

#### Abstract:

Social realism has long dominated representations of the working class in Irish theatre and performance. The tendency to focus on dislocation, social exclusion, and violence posits working-class people largely as a social problem in need of addressing. Kate Beswick notes how social realism's claim to show the world 'as it really is' may "appeal to a socially progressive politics" but can offer "'no alternatives' to the material conditions they represent, or the dominant narrative of working-class lives" (77).

This paper examines three performances that highlight systematic oppressions and demonstrate the specifically classed implications of certain oppressive policies and

governmental institutions. Grace Dyas's *Heroin* (2010) centres on the heroin epidemic, Brokentalkers' *The Examination* (2019) on the Irish prison system, and Fiona Whelan, Feidlim Cannon, and Housing Action Now's *The Apology* (2022), depicts the housing crisis. Built upon personal testimony and anonymous stories drawn from individuals and communities, these works can be situated broadly within the genre of documentary theatre, which according to Emilie Pine "allows the person whose story is being performed . . . to move away from being portrayed as an object of representation, toward instead portraying their experience as an agent of their own lives and memories" (22).

While there is a tendency in dramatic forms of theatre to separate the individual character from the conditions that create them, documentary theatre places value on a plurality of voices and testimonial perspectives, subverting this displacement of attention on wider structures. Rather than prioritizing individual responsibility and naturalising the oppressions that leave the working class exploited, dehumanised, devalued, excluded, and marginalised, each work highlights the responsibility of the State and wider power structures in maintaining forms of social exclusion and class prejudice, speaking back to systematic oppression and reinforcing the right to human dignity.

Works Cited:

Beswick, Kate. 'Capitalist Realism: Glimmers, Working-Class Authenticity and Andrea Dunbar in Twenty-First Century'. *International Journal of Media and Culture* (2020) 16/1 pp.75-89.

Pine, Emilie. *The Memory Marketplace: Witnessing Pain in Contemporary Irish and International Theatre* (Indiana: Indiana University Press 2020)

Bio:

Clara Mallon is an Irish Research Council postgraduate at National University Galway within the discipline of Drama and Theatre Studies. Her research interest is contemporary Irish working-class theatre and performance. She is currently co-editing a collection of essays on working-class women in Irish theatre.

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**Fiona McDonagh, (MIL)**

Title:

*Teacher-artist partnerships: Navigating between education and theatre*  
(presented with Dorothy Morrissey)

Abstract:

Over the past two decades, Government departments with responsibility for the arts and education in Ireland and Ireland's Arts Council have reiterated their commitment to a partnership model of arts education in Ireland's primary schools, which is reflected in both policy (*Points of Alignment 2008, Arts in Education Charter 2013, Making great art, Arts Council Strategy 2016-2025, 2015*) and practice:

- the establishment of a National Arts in Education Administrative Office, at Tralee Education Support Centre (under the direction of the Department of Education's (DoE's) National Director for the Integration of the Arts and Creativity in Education) and its flagship partnership initiatives, Teacher-Artist Partnership (TAP), Bringing Live Arts to Schools and Teachers (BLAST) and Creative Clusters
- the Arts Council's flagship partnership initiative, Creative Schools

Mary Immaculate College's undergraduate programmes include an initial (primary) teacher education (ITE) BEd programme and a BA in Contemporary and Applied Theatre Studies (BACATS). A module in Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) is offered as an elective module on the BEd programme and as a core module on the BACATS programme. With the aforementioned focus on partnership in mind, it was thought that the co-participation of these student cohorts on a TYA module co-taught by a lecturer in education (and former teacher) and a lecturer in drama and theatre studies (and former TYA artist) would: 1) provide a model of teacher-artist partnership in action, and 2) enable both student cohorts to understand and appreciate TYA from the other's perspective.



In our proposed paper, which tracks two iterations of the module, we will interrogate:

- Student and lecturer perceptions of the modelling process in terms of balancing both teacher and artist perspectives
- The impact of co-participation in the module of students' understanding and appreciation of the opportunities and limits afforded by the other's context as teacher (school ethos, parents, curriculum) or theatre artist (to challenge, to earn a living)
- The extent to which co-participation on a TYA module sowed the seeds for balanced teacher-artist partnerships grounded in mutual understanding

Bio:

Dr Fiona McDonagh is a Lecturer in Drama and Theatre Studies at Mary Immaculate College (MIC), Limerick where she teaches on the BA in Contemporary and Applied Theatre Studies. She is a founding member of the Talking TYA Research Network, and a member of the MIC FemFest Committee (MIC's Feminist Festival). Fiona was the Artistic Director of Cups and Crowns Children's Theatre Company for over ten years, she continues to work in this sector. Recent work includes a collaboration with colleagues from MIC on a storytelling project '*Finding lost endings through an integrated arts project*'. The project involved MIC's Education and Arts Faculty staff and students, Bualadh Bos Children's Festival, and classes from Limerick School Project. Her research interests lie in Theatre for Young Audiences.

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**Aoife McGrath, (QUB)**

Title:

Shared Experiences of Care: embodied knowledge in PaR collaborations between dance and social science

Abstract:

This paper discusses the screendance project, *Dance Conversations* (McGrath and Wycherley, 2021), funded by the Irish government's Co-operation with Northern Ireland scheme and collaboratively led by a dance scholar (Aoife McGrath/QUB) and a social scientist (Victoria Durrer/UCD). The project brought together 6 female-identifying dance artists from both sides of the Irish border in a process of choreographic exploration and danced dialogue responding to questions about (un)shared living and working conditions and experiences of borders, understood both territorially and conceptually.

Employing a methodology informed by critical border thinking (Anzaldúa (1999); Tlostanova and Mignolo (2006); Brandstetter and Hartung (2017; 2018)), the project allowed for dancers' articulation of multiple (often conflicting) identities, and acknowledged dancers' embodied experience - a traditionally marginalised site of knowledge production – as being an initiator of thought and discussion. The paper will focus particularly on insights provided by dances of care and motherhood shared during the project. The challenges face by dancers with caring responsibilities emerged as one of the strongest areas of shared experience and points of connection across the island, with the methodology employed by the project allowing a rare glimpse into daily struggles faced by freelance dance artists in juggling their personal and professional identities.

Bio:

Dr Aoife McGrath is a choreographer, PaR dance scholar, and Senior Lecturer in Drama at Queen's University Belfast. Her research spans dance scholarship, practice, and policy, and she is interested in collaborative creative processes and how embodied knowledge can be integrated into decision-making processes. She is PI, with Co-PI Dr Victoria Durrer (UCD), for the Youth Dance Matters project (HEA North South programme), PI, with Co-I Professor Ali Duffy (Texas Tech) for the Parenting and Dance Network (AHRC), and PI, with Co-PI Dr Victoria Durrer for the Sites of Significance project (Cavan County Council). Books include her monograph, *Dance Theatre in Ireland* (2013) and *Dance Matters in Ireland* (with Dr Emma Meehan, CDaRE) (2018), and she recently co-edited a special issue of *Theatre Research International*, 'Sounding Corporeality', with Dr Marcus Tan (Nanyang Tech, Singapore), Dr Prarthana Purkayastha (Royal

Holloway) and Dr Tereza Havelková (Charles University Prague), 46:2 (2021). She is Co-President of ISTR.

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## **Charlotte McIvor**

### Title:

“Can We Ever Really Know This *Works?*”: Experimenting with Research-based Theatre as Consent Education with an Irish National Policy and Secondary School and Third-Level Education Ecology  
(presented with Gavin Friel)

### Abstract:

This paper links the learning from University of Galway-based Active\* Consent’s two national tours of our original research-based play in 2019-2020 (third-level) and 2022 (third-level and secondary schools) to debates over efficacy in theatre and performance studies since the 1970s and the post-2000s impact turn in both higher education and the creative industries sector in the UK, Ireland, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand among others. Active\* Consent’s research and evaluation led approach to consent education which also includes developing creative arts projects such as this play is unique internationally in that our research has led in generating benchmarking data on sexual violence and harassment amongst Irish young people (Active\* Consent, “Research”) as well as creating resources based on this data and then evaluating our own resources (including the play) for effectiveness on an ongoing basis.

This presentation focuses in on how Active\* Consent has evaluated our play-based data in 2019-2020 and 2020 in terms of the measures tested and the relationship of qualitative vs. quantitative audience feedback, Irish consent and sexuality data generally, and the artistic contributions of our actor-devisers to the play’s ongoing evolution and adaptation to be more “effective” for multiple audiences in multiple ways. The complexity of our negotiations as a

research and creative team not only working with data and theatre craft but also intervening within educational and/or sexual violence prevention policy debates and initiatives more generally which overlap in a layered ecology of stakeholders ranging from activists to students to educators to student services workers to health professional to politicians ultimately provides an illustrative case study of the possibilities for where we imagine theatre's efficacy as an art form might reach in terms of influence, but also reveals the layers of work and negotiation that cannot necessarily being captured by data or other emerging complex forms of impact measurement. We suggest ultimately that Active\* Consent's use of theatre at the centre of their data-led multi-nodal consent education approach makes visible how theatre and performance as art forms might be particularly effective forms through which to test the limits of the impact turn more broadly and to push theatre and performance studies scholars to move beyond thinking of impact at the scale of one production only.

Bio:

Dr Charlotte McIvor is a Senior Lecturer and Head of Discipline in Drama and Theatre Studies at the University of Galway and was one of the co-founders of Active\* Consent, an Irish national research-led consent education programmed based at the University of Galway. She created and directed the Active\* Consent original play in partnership with students and alumni, in continual development since 2014. She is the author of multiple books and edited collections examining interculturalism, migration, gender and sexuality studies and contemporary performance practices.

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**Dorothy Morrissey, (MIL)**

Title:

*Teacher-artist partnerships: Navigating between education and theatre*

(presented with Fiona McDonagh)

## Abstract:

Over the past two decades, Government departments with responsibility for the arts and education in Ireland and Ireland's Arts Council have reiterated their commitment to a partnership model of arts education in Ireland's primary schools, which is reflected in both policy (*Points of Alignment 2008, Arts in Education Charter 2013, Making great art, Arts Council Strategy 2016-2025, 2015*) and practice:

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- The extent to which co-participation on a TYA module sowed the seeds for balanced teacher-artist partnerships grounded in mutual understanding

Bio:

Dr Dorothy Morrissey is a lecturer in drama education at Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick. She holds an EdD (Narrative Inquiry) from the University of Bristol (UK) and is the author of a recently published Government of Ireland, Department of Education commissioned report *Creative Clusters: A collaborative approach to cultivating creativity in schools*. Dorothy is a member of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment Primary Arts Education Development Group and has published widely on the arts, arts education, teacher-artist partnership, and gender.

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**Marianne Ni Chinnéide, (UoG)**

Title:

Ar Ais Arís and coming back again

Abstract:

This paper interrogates the VR theatrical work and resulting legacy of Brú Theatre, under the Artistic Direction of James Riordan, which emerged during in 2020 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The immersive 180 VR experience ‘Ar Ais Arís’ was an intervention in the crisis, preventing the cancellation of the project and also transforming the artistic practice of the company. ‘Ar Ais Arís’ was one of two commissions made with the support of the University of Galway and Galway 2020, as part of the larger ‘Aistriú’ project. This monetary and producing support was essential at a time when the pandemic put an abrupt stop to in-person collaborative work and the temporary closure of Venues and festivals nationwide.

‘Ar Ais Arís’, which translates as ‘Coming Back again’ is inspired by texts from Máirtín Ó Cadhain, Pádraic Ó Conaire and Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill around the theme of migration. The title

also suggests, in relation to the work of the company, a resilience at a time of great uncertainty in the arts. Brú's team of performers, creators, designers and composers came together in new ways 'to create three unique 180° films, immersing audiences in a fusion of movement, text, music and Connemara landscape through the use of VR headsets'. ([aistriu.eu](http://aistriu.eu)) The piece has now been shown over 80 times throughout the country and continues to tour to national and international theatre and arts festivals. This paper argues that this work, created at a moment of great transition, constitutes, not only a new module of creation for the company but 'Ar Ais Arís' also provides a roadmap for a new touring model that is cost effective, sustainable, inclusive and extremely mobile.

#### Bio:

Marianne Kennedy is a lecturer in Drama, Theatre and Performance at The National University of Ireland, Galway and Head of Production and Curation of Drama and Theatre Studies, NUI Galway based at The O' Donoghue Centre of Drama, Theatre and Performance. She is also a theatre-maker with 20 years professional experience as a producer and director in the Performing, Irish language and Traditional Arts. In 2016 she co-directed *Dún na mBan Trí Thine* by Éilís Ní Dhuibhne for The National Theatre of the Irish Language and the Galway International Arts Festival. Kennedy has spent six years as the CEO of Siamsa Tíre, The National Folk and Arts Centre in Tralee, Co. Kerry as well as six years as Head of the Performing Arts for Acadamh na hOllscolaíochta Gaeilge, NUI Galway. Kennedy is currently a member of *Garraí an Ghiorria*, a collective of multidisciplinary artists working in the Irish language on the western seaboard which was recently chosen for the Abbey Theatre's inaugural 5 X 5 programme which highlights work engaging with Ireland's lesser represented voices. Their project, *STRINGS, ROPES AND CHAINS: Silencing the Voice of a People*, explores the silencing of the Irish people and their language by Cromwell with a special focus on the harp as both a musical instrument and as a symbol of Irish creative expression. The project also examines similarities between historical Irish issues and contemporary issues of migration:

<https://www.abbeytheatre.ie/introducing-inaugural-5x5-projects/>.

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**Sinéad O'Donnell-Carey, (ATU Sligo)**

Title:

Where is live performance in a post-pandemic world?

Abstract:

Where is live performance in a post-pandemic world? We are more online, more digital, and more hybrid. There are live and pre-recorded performances online, interactive performances online and live in-person performances with video. Although some of these forms existed pre-pandemic, the lockdown encouraged theatre-makers to experiment and invest in new technologies to continue bringing their work to the public. Theatre companies such as ANU, Druid and the Abbey had become efficient in filmmaking and production by expanding their practice and allowing the industry to reflect and reassess how to produce new work accessible to house-bound audiences nationwide.

Recent work that I am developing is a form of design-led theatre-making that utilises moving images and digital art projected on the performance space. One project investigates women from the past who slipped through the cracks of society into the obscurity of an Irish asylum. The piece explores the imbalance of female agency, power, taboo, sexuality, and transgression in a society that refused to understand the complexities of being a woman. Digital image and information art utilised with live actors allow makers and spectators to explore the phenomenological experience of female entrapment in Irish asylums. This paper seeks to balance the hybrid nature of film and in-person liveness as a form of design-led storytelling in the context of a post-pandemic world.

The asylum play was created through investigating archive records, patient case files and witness testimony. However, how do we embed the patient's voice in the work? How do we represent personal trauma and lived experience? Giles Deleuze posits that nothing can ever be



truly repeated and that every repetition of something will have difference. Richard Kearney articulates that that is a problematic difference between narrative memory and historical record. The asylum work attempts to balance this conundrum of reality and perception, memory and fact. Attempts to stage trauma represent the past by ensuring that this repetition is not repeated in reality. By using post-modern techniques of digital image and the body, makers can use an exterior image and sound to recreate a story, reminding the audience that this is theatre and performance. A space with an immersed audience provides both the human/haptic/memory/reality, and the digital/phenomenological/ interaction as a multifaceted way to experience the past.

Bio:

Sinéad O'Donnell-Carey is a queer theatre-maker, designer and researcher from Dublin, living in Donegal, Ireland. Sinéad explores digital media technology for theatre and performance art, combining visual art practices with the live body. She is a PhD candidate at ATU Sligo, has an MA in Film & Theatre, NUI Galway and BA in Performing Arts and Theatre Design, IT Sligo. She is on the committee for the Prague Quadrennial in 2023 & 2019 and exhibited her work in the Irish Student and Graduate section of the PQ. She is the North West Co-ordinator for the National Campaign for the Arts. Sinéad was the Yeats Design Resident in the Abbey Theatre, Dublin 2017.

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**Ciara O'Dowd, (SGI)**

Title:

Should the Arts Council of Ireland be paying by the word?

Abstract:

This paper will analyse the supports for playwrights and writers for the stage in Ireland and explore potential solutions to address the challenge in a way that is both meaningful and

financially feasible. In a country that continues to prize and showcase our world-class writers and playwrights, there are sparse practical resources to ensure the ongoing development of new writing in a structured, rigorous way. The traditional notion that playwrights are born, not made, continues to thwart policy development in this area.

The increased funding to the Arts Council of Ireland (ACI) in 2020 to €130 million resulted in a number of different initiatives and schemes to generate artistic work and support a diverse range of artists to produce work in a less precarious fashion. The theatre portfolio continues to hold a significant proportion of ACI's overall budget. But when ambition and innovation remain central tenets of evaluation schema, where is the space for long-term, rigorous development of playwrights? And how does it support the quiet, slow work of drafting, re-drafting and revising texts with dramaturgical input? Using quantitative and qualitative measures, I will explore the contours of the issue and look to American and Scottish models for potential solutions.

The long-term development of writers is an expensive, and risky, investment. But what is the alternative? In an era when highly successful projects and international endeavours in this area are closing their doors due to limited funding and increased questioning of the value of playwrighting in the theatre landscape, what could happen in Ireland? Are we too late? Or are we now poised to find a model that allows us to build on our national legacy and lead out as a country of and for writers?

#### Bio:

I studied Drama Studies and English Literature at Trinity College Dublin and Glasgow University, before graduating first in class with a first-class honours MA in Writing from NUI Galway. As a College of Arts Doctoral Fellow at NUI Galway, I developed and taught the first-ever module on the Abbey Theatre Digital Archive. I wrote my PhD thesis on *The On- and Off-Stage Roles of Irish Actresses of the 1930s* and subsequently received the HD Fellowship in English Literature from Yale University. I was a member of the research team of #WakingTheFeminists, and co-authored the report, *Gender Counts: An Analysis of Gender in Irish Theatre 2009 – 2015*.

My writing on Irish theatre, past and present, has been published in academic journals such as *New Hibernia Review*, *Theatre Topics*, *Critical Stages* as well as in literary journal *Banshee*. Since

2012, I have been an assessor for the Arts Council of Ireland, including three years as main Theatre Adviser working directly with the Head of Theatre to manage the ACI's largest portfolio. I currently work with Science Gallery International, where I am leading the research group to assess the impact of the Science Gallery experience across its global network.

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## **Finian O'Gorman, (TCD)**

### Title:

Artificial Intelligence and Irish theatres studies: How ChatGPT can turn academics into amateurs.

### Abstract:

In November 2022, a new version of the artificial intelligence (AI) program ChatGPT was released on the internet by the tech startup OpenAI. By January, it had amassed 100 million active users, becoming one of the fastest-growing applications in history.

Following the launch of ChatGPT, media outlets and networks abounded with examples of its various applications, from computer coding to writing Hollywood screenplays. Of particular concern to those working in higher education in the humanities is the fact that it can generate a highly-informed, grammatically perfect and accurately-formatted essay in seconds.

This paper provides an overview of the points of discussion that have emerged in relation to AI and scholarship in the wake of the release of ChatGPT. It identifies elements of the wider debate that apply to theatre research and lists the main challenges and opportunities that AI applications present to theatre scholars.

Drawing on research on the historical emergence of amateur theatre – and inspired by the 'love' (*amāre*) at the heart of amateurism this paper argues that the feel, or feelings, that we have as human beings represent a clear point of departure between artificial and 'real' or 'sincere' intelligences. It encourages theatre scholars to reaffirm their expertise by focusing on

the 'feel' that they have for their chosen subjects; to leave the instrumental, conventional tasks of scholarship to AI applications and to focus instead on posing questions inspired by a love of theatre and performance.

Bio:

Dr Finian O’Gorman is an Irish Research Council (IRC) Postdoctoral Fellow in the School of English, Trinity College Dublin. His published work has featured in *Review of Irish Studies in Europe* (2021), *Irish Drama and Theatre Since 1950* (Bloomsbury, 2019), *The Theatre of Enda Walsh* (Carysfort, 2015), the *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* (2015), *New Hibernia Review* (2013), and *Irish Theatre Magazine* (2013). Dr O’Gorman was previously an IRC Postgraduate Scholar at the University of Galway. He is the incoming Early Career Researcher (ECR) Support Officer for the Irish Society for Theatre Research (ISTR) and is currently working on a book on the amateur theatre movement in Ireland.

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**Gustav Parker Hibbert, (TCD)**

Title:

Reimagining Othello

Abstract:

In “Letting Go of *Othello*,” Fred Moten points to a “perfect vacuum” at the heart of the character Othello. He asks: “Does Othello, who is given as a function of surface made over to servility’s enactment of nobility, have a soul? Does Shakespeare offer soul or a profound and problematic soullessness in *Othello*?” (Moten). Relatedly, scholar Elise Marks finds a historical pattern of white actors and audiences using *Othello* performances as playgrounds for their primitivist fantasies of Blackness, noting: “Apparently, Othello’s perceived African-ness and his descent into ‘savage madness’ grants Europeans an excuse to shuck their superegos and let loose with a momentary burst of emotional frenzy” (Marks 107). *Othello* is much more about

whiteness than it is Blackness — so is there any way of viewing the character as anything other than caricature? And is it possible to perform *Othello* without reproducing or lending legitimacy to that caricature, to balance critical engagement with artistic performance?

If so, I think it involves a variation of “critical fabulation” a term which Saidiya Hartman introduces in “Venus in Two Acts,” to see Shakespeare as a type of “failed witness” for this representation of Blackness and look at the recording of this fictional life as we would look at archival recordings of real lives (Hartman 11, 2). Through “critical fabulation,” informed by archival research and bolstered by the radical “capacities of the subjunctive (a grammatical mood that expresses doubts, wishes, and possibilities),” one is able to “jeopardize the status of the event, to displace the received or authorized account” (11). I believe, for example, that Lolita Chakrabarti’s *Red Velvet* can be read along these lines, as injecting the absence with a new presence (in this case the dramatized experiences of actor Ira Aldridge) and therefore displacing Shakespeare’s cultural shadow.

Bio:

I am currently a research PhD student in Trinity College Dublin’s Literary Practice doctoral program, with a dissertation of essays (some autoethnographic creative non-fiction and some traditionally academic) focused on the relationship between language and power in colonial and post-colonial societies and institutions, explored through the lens of my experience growing up Black in the United States. Born in California and raised in New Mexico, I hold a BA in English from Stanford University. My creative work (both essay and poetry) has been appeared or is forthcoming in journals and magazines such as *Guernica*, *North American Review*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *The Adroit Journal*, *32 Poems*, *The Stinging Fly*, *Banshee*, and *The Missouri Review*.

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**Sharon Phelan, (MTU)**

Title:

## The Use of Contemporary Dance as a Tool to Enhance Wellness in Educational Settings (presented with Jackie Gallagher)

### Abstract:

The concept of Wellbeing is now at the core of educational policy agendas and practices and increased attention is focussed on enabling and empowering students to develop the knowledge, skills, and competencies to support their wellbeing now and into the future. While the terms “Wellbeing” and “Wellness” are often used interchangeably, subtle differences are acknowledged. The concept of Wellness is understood as the sum of the positive steps taken to achieve wellbeing (Roscoe, 2009). In this paper, Contemporary dance is explored as a tool, through which Wellness can be enhanced in an educational setting.

Initially, “Contemporary dance” is addressed from philosophical and historical perspectives in the paper. The Rudolph Von Laban approach to Contemporary dance receives attention, as it focuses on movement principles versus set dance routines. These movement principles include use of the body, use of space, and the use of dynamics, time, and flow, in the composition of individual dance performances. Through this process the students release their thoughts, emotions and feelings using their bodies as instruments of expression. This holistic approach to dance distinguishes it as an appropriate tool through which Wellness can be explored and enriched.

In this paper, the notion of Wellness will be addressed as “a state of being that incorporates all facets and dimensions of human existence. These include physical health, emotional health, intellectual health, spirituality, occupational and social connectivity”. (Loria 2020 p18) Through Contemporary dance these “facets and dimensions” can be enriched using the body as the medium of expression.

The academic concepts of this paper are explored within the context of second level education, where Wellness is currently being addressed from differing perspectives. Practical examples are used to evidence Contemporary dance as a tool through which Wellness can be enhanced in educational contexts.

Bio:

Dr. Sharon Phelan was a full-time performer with Siamsa Tíre, National Folk Theatre of Ireland and director of the Ionad Cultúrtha, Ballyvourney, Cork. Currently, she lectures in Performing Arts and Cultural Theory at Munster Technological University. Her interests include academic publishing, postgraduate supervision, and distance learning in dance.

Sharon has published peer-reviewed papers internationally, focusing on theatre and dance from cultural and educational perspectives. Her peer-reviewed academic book, "Dance in Ireland: Steps, Stages and Stories" was published by Cambridge Scholars Press in 2014. She is currently completing another academic book focusing on "Dance-in-Education: An All-Inclusive Approach".

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**Maria Tivnan, (UoG)**

Title:

Parent as Artist/Artist as Parent: Making Work 'work'

Abstract:

This paper is based on feedback from interviews and surveys with independent theatre artists in Galway who are parents. It aims to explore the practical, emotional and economical aspects of balancing a career as an independent artist with being a parent, and consider both the challenges and the advantages to this position. The paper will thus draw from the experiences of the artists and from my own experience as a mother of two children and an independent theatre artist. These experiences will be analysed within a larger socio cultural context looking at the available supports for independent theatre artists who are parents in Ireland, and the UK. It will also consider the potential for creativity and/or artistry within parenthood, which benefits both child and adult.

Bio:

Maria is a fourth year Irish Research Council doctoral candidate at the University of Galway. Her project examines the performance and politics of 'home' in Galway, Gaza and Mexico City. She holds a BA in Psychology (NUI Galway), an MA in Modern Drama (University College Dublin) and an MA in Social Work (NUI Galway). Maria is a performer; writer, director and the artistic director of Galway based Fregoli Theatre, founded in 2007 and has 27 productions to date. Maria was co- chair and founder of Galway independent theatre collective Theatre57 2018 to 2023. Maria also works as a director of the Macnas Youth Spectacle theatre and as a performer with Macnas, Galway. Maria was a social worker and has worked in a variety of community settings, and has taught workshops and classes in theatre practice in community and academic settings including University of Galway.

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**Ian R. Walsh, (UoG)**

Title:

Crossed Wires: Galway Community Circus's *LifeLine* and Issues in Measuring Wellbeing

Abstract:

On July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022 one hundred and fifty people of all ages and backgrounds crossed the River Corrib in Galway City on a high wire as part of Galway Community Circus's *LifeLine* event that featured as part of the Galway International Arts Festival. Twenty thousand people witnessed this momentous free event that ran continually over five hours with a finale performance on the high wires performed by BassAlto, a wire-walking company made up of both professional and amateur performers.

The site on the river where the performance took place is one where suicide is prevalent. On their website Galway Community Circus write that *LifeLine* aimed to use 'wirewalking as a practice to improve wellbeing, and aspired to reinfuse hope into a landscape that carries great



sadness and beauty.’ This event which had balance at its core in the practice of wire walking also sought to balance the demands of community arts with those of a commercial festival, amateur participants and professional performers, the inclusion of local artists and international collaborators.

Analysis of the event brings to the fore many issues facing performance scholarship. Where does the rapidly growing discipline of social circus fit? How to measure the impact on wellbeing that this project sought for its participants and spectators? When conducting such measurement how can we ensure balance between a conception of individual wellbeing that avoids being reduced to a neoliberal tool for corporate advancement with a more community-based wellbeing model that can lead to collective action? I aim to explore these questions in my paper drawing on C. M Keyes’s conception of ‘social well-being’, J.B Spiegel’s and B.O Choukroun’s work on social circus’s potential to resist neoliberalism through ‘collectivity’ and a range of other scholars working in this area such as S. Cadwell, A. Funk and I. Bessone.

Bio:

Ian R. Walsh was appointed to Lecturer in Drama and Theatre Studies at University of Galway in September 2014. He previously worked as a Lecturer in Drama at University College Dublin from 2010 and was Doctoral Scholar at the Drama Studies Centre, UCD in 2006. He was promoted to Lecturer above the bar in 2017.

He has published widely on Irish theatre and has been invited to give talks in Ireland, Germany, Brazil and the United States and was elected as an Executive Member of The Irish Society for Theatre Research in 2015 and elected as Executive Member of the International association for the Study of Irish Literature in 2016. His monograph *Experimental Irish Theatre, After W.B Yeats* was published in 2012 by Palgrave Macmillan. Edited collections include *The Theatre of Enda Walsh* (Peter Lang/Carysfort Press 2015) co-edited with Mary Caulfield and *Cultural Convergence: The Dublin Gate Theatre, 1928-1960* (Palgrave 2021) co-edited with Ondrej Pilny and Ruud van den Beuken. With Siobhán O’Gorman and Elaine Sisson he is editing an issue of *The Review of Irish Studies in Europe* (4.1 April 2021) entitled The Gate Theatre: Staging Europe

in Ireland. He is also currently co-writing *Contemporary Irish Theatre and Performance* with Charlotte McIvor which will be published by Palgrave Macmillan.

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## **Stefanie Weenink, UoG**

### Title:

Gawd and Gulder: Language as a Key Marker of Identity and Irishness in Brian Friel's Plays

### Abstract:

To state that themes of language, identity, and Irishness are central to the work of playwright Brian Friel is in no way innovative. Anyone who has gone anywhere near *Translations* knows this to be true. This paper, therefore, examines these key themes in a way that attempts to balance out the scales slightly: by looking at two plays that are not *Translations*. The paper provides a broader study of the themes of language, identity, and Irishness in Friel's work beyond the limitations of a single script.

If one of the key roles of theatre is to act as a reflection and exploration of culture and society, and texts, as Leela Gandhi (1998) writes, "are the most significant instigators and purveyors of colonial power and its double, postcolonial resistance", then what do Friel's scripts say about Irish identity? Through a close reading of *The Loves of Cass McGuire* and *The Communication Cord*, I assert that language in these plays is used by several different characters to both embrace and reject Irishness. Furthermore, when language is either not accepted or misunderstood, these characters seek to further explore their use of language in order to maintain their role in the scenario and achieve their intended objective.

Taking into consideration the inherent postcoloniality of Irish art, text, and indeed the language (whether implicit or explicit), Brian Friel's writing explores the hybrid nature of Irish identity and the way that speech and language are used to confront said identity. Be it a rejection of Irish-Americanism or a total breakdown of the 'common communicational structure', Friel's use of

language contains a deep understanding of the images and illusions it creates. By looking away from *Translations*, this paper highlights Friel's continued exploration of language and Irish identity on the stage throughout his career.

Bio:

Stefanie Weenink is a Maltese theatre practitioner and academic currently based in Galway, Ireland. She completed an MA in Drama and Theatre Studies at the University of Galway, and has just begun a Ph.D. at the same university. Her Ph.D. focuses on the use of language in the theatre practices of bilingual countries, specifically theatre in Ireland and Malta.

Stefanie is focused on the creation of original theatre performances for audiences of all ages. She writes primarily in English but has also written original scripts in Maltese. Although her primary target audience is teenagers, she believes that the universal human experience is at the centre of all art, and therefore age doesn't matter once you're in the audience. Stefanie has also taken part in several performances ranging from devised work and pantomime to Shakespeare and musicals. She also has significant experience working in stage and production management, puppetry, and dramaturgy.

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**Yingjun Wei, (TCD)**

Title:

"Hybrid organising saved us": Hustling Feminist Theatre through the Precarity of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Abstract:

One of the most active Chinese feminist theatre groups based in Beijing, Vagina Project (VP) staged *Dao Yin (Vagina Saying)* in October 2021 during the Covid-19 pandemic. The performance was only made possible after it was postponed once and a planned digital performance failed due to compounded Covid restrictions. Travel bans enforced by Covid

tracking apps created huge obstacles for the logistics of costumes and props produced in factories outside Beijing. The shutting down of theatre venues, struggles for funding and volunteer recruiting added to the already escalating hardships or grassroots, “underground” feminist theatres.

Drawing on my interviews with the producer of *Dao Yin*, this essay investigates in depth the feminist theatre organisation and theatre-making during the precarious time of the Covid-19 pandemic. Specifically, the difficulties of theatre logistics, hybrid volunteer coordination, venue rental and funding are analysed. More importantly, the creative reworking of VP which allows them to readjust their organisation is also highlighted. Engaging with Elaine Aston’s proposed principle of feminist theatre projects – ‘non-hierarchical sharing and dramaturg’ (2005: 22), this essay argues that it is the non-hierarchical, flexible and feminist organisation of VP that empowered them to push forward in spite of the precarity. Further, the strong feminist consciousness of VP and its members enabled them to critically reflect on the Covid-19 precarity particularly for women in China and across the world in *Dao Yin* and their social media presence.

Bio:

Yingjun Wei is a PhD candidate in Drama at Trinity College Dublin. Her research focuses on feminist theatre and street performance in China since the early 2000s. Exposed to feminist theatre research and practices in Ireland, she has recently developed a strong interest in Lady Gregory and the retellings of her plays in China during the WWII for the Chinese nationalist agenda. Her work has been published in the *European Journal of Theatre and Performance* and she is working on a book chapter on Chinese feminist street performances and a monograph on Chinese feminist theatre since the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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**Jiayu Yin, (Soochow/TCD)**

Title:

## On the “Going Out” and “Going Back” of Chinese Intercultural Theatre: Reflecting on Meng Jinghui’s Intercultural Adaptation

### Abstract:

There has long been a contradiction between Chinese and cosmopolitan features in the adaptation of intercultural theatre in China. How to originate a “standardized” production of intercultural theatre that is both nationally and internationally renowned, so that Chinese theatre can benefit from the intercultural communication, has become a tough question for Chinese dramatists and directors. As the contemporary icon of avant-garde theatre in China, Meng Jinghui accomplished the intercultural adaptations of Lao She’s *The Teahouse* and Stendhal’s *Le Rouge et Le Noir* respectively in 2018 and 2021. Despite mixed reviews at home, the former has turned into the first Chinese drama to break into the IN unit of Festival d’Avignon. Not as controversial as the former, the latter has earned unanimous praise from critics in its initial round of domestic tour. What kind of adjustment has Meng Jinghui made on the adaptation strategy so as to reverse the domestic reviews? From *The Teahouse* to *Le Rouge et Le Noir*, what do Meng Jinghui’s intercultural practices provide for the development of Chinese intercultural theatre? This paper explores the experimental paradigm of Meng’s two intercultural performances from the perspectives of adaptation and spectatorship, with a view to exploring the development of intercultural theatre in China.

### Bio:

Jiayu Yin is a PhD candidate in the School of Foreign Languages, Soochow University and is currently employed as a visiting PhD student in the School of Drama, Trinity College Dublin. Her research interests include intercultural theatre, Chinese theatre and Irish theatre. For her doctoral dissertation, she is working on a geocritical study of Irish theatre in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, investigating a sense of national anxiety hidden in the local narrative of J. M. Synge, Brian Friel and Martin McDonagh.

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## Helena Young, (UCD)

### Title:

Gender Balance in Brokentalkers

### Abstract:

Brokentalkers theatre company first set up in 2001 may be described as a fearless, innovative organisation which has from the outset tried to balance the inequalities prevalent in Irish society. It comprises of Feidhlim Cannon and Gary Keegan who describe their ethos as to devise original, accessible live performance and explore new forms that challenge traditional ideologies of text-based theatre. They use the postdramatic medium in order to convey the urgency of a particular situation and in line with this, their performances can often include slapstick, violent physical action, pop cultures, breaking of the illusion and hysterical outbursts from the actors. One of their more recent performances, *Woman Undone*, which premiered in 2018, is an impactful reimagining and reconstruction of an aspect of blues singer, Mary Coughlan's life. Cross gender casting is one of the dramaturgical strategies used in this performance in order to draw attention to not only the abuse this artist underwent as a young person but that which women still endure in society today. Female performers playing male roles as a plan of action is used here, not only to disrupt ritual and allow for immediate attention by the audience but more importantly, it acts as a means of feminist activism as female-male re-gendering can, not only highlight and question misogyny but more importantly as in the case of this production also expose the ideological structures that continue to collude with these values on the contemporary stage and in society more generally. This paper will explore the importance of the gender equilibrium being restabilised with particular emphasis on *Woman Undone* but will also address Brokentalkers' upcoming performance *Manifest*, described as a frank and unflinching new performance exploring the current state of masculinity.

### Bio:

Helena Young is currently a PhD student at U.C.D and recently completed a Masters in Drama and Performance there having previously achieved one in Anglo Irish Literature and Drama. She is presently a tutor in Drama Studies in the U.C.D school of English, Drama and Film and her thesis is looking at Brokentalkers' political and social activist role.

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### **Justine Zapin, (UCD)**

Title:

***Playboy, Blanco, and a Jury of One's Peers: Balancing Drama Off and On the Irish Stage***

Abstract:

The premieres of John Millington Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* (1907) and Bernard Shaw's *The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet* (1909) at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin were monumental events in the Irish Dramatic Revival for two very different reasons. The perceived anti-Catholic sentiment in Synge's drama instigated riots inside the theatre, while disagreements over censorship and British rule in Ireland happening offstage in many ways overshadowed Shaw's playtext. Despite their very different aesthetic approaches, Synge's and Shaw's plays have more in common than they initially appear. Both plays deal squarely with issues of morality, responsibility, and law. Both male protagonists, Christy Mahon and Blanco Posnet, are confronted by their peers and struggle to overcome their pride as they plead their cases to bloodthirsty, prejudicial tribunals. Most interestingly, both playwrights force the audience to acknowledge their own complicity in maintaining the status-quo by manipulating the stage picture in such a way that the audience assumes the jurist perspective.

In *Shaw, Synge, Connolly, and Socialist Provocation*, Nelson O'Ceallaigh Ritschel argues convincingly that these playwrights use their plays' textual arguments to respond to each other's socialist aims. A paratextual investigation reveals the ways in which Shaw and Synge also adapted their dramaturgical style and production features to influence the aesthetic and

political future of Ireland's National Abbey Theatre. Bubbling underneath the struggle for the Abbey's artistic future was a more potent conflict between the two, whose respective roles in the project of Irish independence would be defined by the affective potency of their plays in performance. This paper will articulate the ways in which Shaw and Synge performed balancing acts on and offstage to intervene and establish their dissident voices in Irish nationalist politics.

Bio:

Justine Zapin is an actor and theater professional who received her MA in Literature at American University and a BFA in Acting and Classical Theater at Marymount Manhattan College. She is a PhD candidate in Drama at University College Dublin. Her thesis situates Bernard Shaw's Abbey plays thematically and theatrically to excavate Shaw's evolving political views on Irish independence.

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**Chengyun Zhao, (TCD)**

Title:

'A Study of the *Xiqu* Features in Lin Zhaohua's *Three Sisters Waiting for Godot* from the Perspective of Taoist Philosophy'

Abstract:

My paper aims to examine the deconstructed *xiqu* (Chinese opera) features, which might be inspired by Taoist arguments, deployed in Lin Zhaohua's collage production, *Three Sisters Waiting for Godot* (1998), attempting to interpret Lin's attitude towards the Chinese society at the turning point of the millennium. The paper would first interrogate the relatively static performance of the three sisters, which might be considered a modernized manifestation of "*liangxiang*", a frequently used technique in *xiqu* to express the psychological conditions of the characters with a short-term posture. The deployment of this technique in the three sisters' performance is synonymous with the humans' dilemma depicted in Taoism, and tallies with Lin



and his contemporaries' situation that their eagerness of modernizing *xiqu* with *huaju* (Chinese spoken drama) was suppressed by the Chinese authorities. Further, the water enclosing the three sisters could be elaborated as a de-constructed manifestation of "*shuixiu*" (water sleeves), an emblematic costume of *xiqu* that features symbolic function. The Taoist argument that "water could symbolize humans' psychological states" might inspire Lin to turn "*shuixiu*", a conventional *xiqu* form, to real water so as to delineate the moods of the three sisters. The water stirred by the leaving soldiers, who are cast by the actors of Estragon and Vladimir, reflects the restlessness of the three sisters who might represent Lin and his contemporaries staring at their audiences showing no interest in their *xiqu*-influenced *huaju* and leaving during the performance. Accordingly, Taoism might be a potential resource inspiring Lin to adopt modernized *xiqu* aesthetics in *Three Sisters Waiting for Godot* to display the suppressions from both above and below.

Bio:

Chengyun Zhao is a 2nd year PhD student studying intercultural performance and Daoist philosophy at Trinity College, Dublin. He has already published 2 academic essays inside China, one of which is "On the Role of Translation in the Chinese Drama 'Going Out' Strategy" in *New Perspectives in Translation Studies [yi yuan xin tan]* (2019), and the other of which is "Victims of Post-industrial Era— A Review of *Sweat*, the 2017 Pulitzer Prize Winning Drama" in *New Perspectives on World Literature [wai guo wen xue dong tai yan jiu]* (2021, a CSSCI journal). A theatre review, "Technology, Parole, and Truth – A Review of *Duck Duck Goose*, A Theatre of 2021 Dublin Theatre Festival", was published in *Ying Ming Theatre and Drama*. He gave 3 papers respectively at Global View and Local Practice of Comparative Literary Studies: Youth Forum on Comparative Literature (Shenzhen, 2019), IAMCR (online, 2022), and the New Scholar Forum of The International Federation for Theatre Research (Reykjavik, 2022).

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