The Gender Politics of Performance in Post-Agreement Northern Ireland: Reckoning With Interdependence

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Declaration of Authorship

I Alexander Coupe hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed:

Date:

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No piece of research is a solitary enterprise. This PhD carries in it the advice, care, and solidarity of those who have supported me through the process. Without my family, both chosen and unchosen, I would never have made it past the first paragraph.

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Abstract

This PhD uncovers a new and emergent current within theatre and performance produced after the Good Friday Agreement consisting of work critically engaged with the reconstruction of gender norms amidst Northern Ireland's social, political and economic transformation. In an attempt to demarcate the aesthetic parameters of this current, it proposes a re-reading of the Agreement as simultaneously challenging gendered narratives of national identity by insisting upon the internally differentiated and interdependent nature of competing group identities, while embedding conditions of economic precarity that work to inhibit the development of a redistributive politics of gender and class. In a context where theatre and performance has been pressed into underwriting the success of the peace process and gilding the reputation of Northern Ireland as 'open for business', a subset of playwrights, live artists, and choreographers have highlighted how this negation of the sectarian past and pursuit of a neoliberal vision of the future breeds new forms of gender-based violence and class inequality. While dramatising this state of political suspension, practitioners have sought also to embody the unfulfilled emancipatory potentialities of the Agreement, teasing out its spirit and promise in new and experimental performance forms. This body of work has moved beyond identity politics to emphasise those fundamental conditions of dependency and vulnerability denied within both patriarchal nationalism and androcentric individualism. By illuminating the critical possibilities that open up when inequalities of gender and class are thought together, and where economic violence is understood alongside sectarianism to be a fundamental feature of contemporary life, the performances discussed here created a space to imagine alternative futures, alternatives in which respect for difference is coupled with efforts to foster sustainable and egalitarian forms of interdependency.

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On 17 June 2013 Barack Obama, President of the United States, delivered a speech to a crowd of young people at the Waterfront Hall in Belfast. In it he sought to hold up Northern Ireland as a source of hope in a world bracing the consequences of the global economic recession of 2008. He declared that those gathered had "unique reasons to be hopeful", for they were reaping the "economic and social benefits" of the "courageous path towards a permanent peace". He focussed in particular on Belfast's transformed cityscape:

> Once-abandoned factories are rebuilt. Former industrial sites are reborn. Visitors come from all over to see an exhibit at the MAC,[1] a play at the Lyric,[2] a concert here at Waterfront Hall. Families crowd into pubs in the Cathedral Quarter to hear "trad." Students lounge at cafés, asking each other, "What's the craic?" So to paraphrase Seamus Heaney, it's the manifestation of sheer, bloody genius. This island is now chic.[3]

In 1998 the political violence that marked thirty years of conflict, known euphemistically as the 'Troubles', had come to an end in the Good Friday Agreement and by 2013, despite many stops and starts, the power-sharing government of Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionist Party had just entered an unprecedented second term. In this context, Belfast's new cultural institutions

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[1] The Metropolitan Arts Centre, a hybrid venue hosting a range of artistic practices, including theatre and visual art, opened in the city centre of Belfast in 2012 and cost around £18 million.

[2] The Lyric Theatre was opened in 1968, having emerged out of Mary O'Malley's Lyric Players Group. It was redeveloped on its original south Belfast site between 2008 and 2011. Ironically given its early resistance to the encroachments of the unionist state, it has become the *de facto* national theatre of Northern Ireland.

[3] See Barack Obama, "President Obama in Belfast, Northern Ireland", *C-Span*, 17 June 2013, https://www.c-span.org/video/?313409-1/president-obama-belfast-northern-ireland&start=246 [retrieved 1/1/20].

seemed to stand as emblems of the social and economic benefits that has flowed from the peace in Northern Ireland. A city that had been witness to much of the violence of the 'Troubles' was now a lucrative and convivial site of leisure and consumption, with Belfast's playhouses and art galleries taking centre stage. "The image of the 1970s was of a city dominated by the threat of terrorism", one commentator remarked, "Today, however Belfast is emerging as a shiny new metropolis of head-turning galleries, museums, restaurants, luxury hotels - and exciting new property developments."[4] Here fractious issues of identity were being turned into cultural assets that marked out Belfast, and Northern Ireland, as a place to visit. It was a narrative that posited a utopian role for arts institutions as placed beyond political conflict and seamlessly integrated into a commercial environment where the circulation of culture as capital, rather than as a source of sectarian violence, enabled Northern Ireland to liberate itself from its conflicted past.

Obama's speech elaborates what has become a dominant conception of the shifting role of culture and its relation to the politics of the Peace Process in Northern Ireland. Terry Eagleton has remarked on the tension at the heart of culture: on the one hand it "pluck[s] unity from diversity" and secures bonds of solidarity beyond the individual; on the other hand, it can be used to draw up sectarian stockades and exclude those who are perceived to be different.[5] However, the consociational model of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement sidestepped the controversial issue of whether culture was reflective of an already embedded sectarian politics or whether it could provide a bridge between and beyond conflicting identities into alternative forms of political affiliation. Rather, it employed a liberal model of human rights that sought to guarantee "mutual respect for the identity and ethos of both communities and parity of esteem."[6] Within this multicultural discourse, the fractious identity politics of the "two traditions" was to be subsumed within a broader celebration of, and respect for, difference on egalitarian terms. The separation of the everyday life of culture from the elite politics was deemed necessary in enabling the establishment of devolved government in Northern Ireland. Though the recognition of the equal legitimacy of nationalist and unionist "traditions" threatened to expose the

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[4] Ben West, "Belfast's Ship Comes In", *The Observer* (London: 8 October 2006), p.20.
[5] Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p.13.
[6] Northern Ireland Office, *The Belfast Agreement* (London: Northern Ireland Office, 1998), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/136652/agreement.pdf [retrieved 14/12/2019].

illegitimacy of their totalising claims about identity and the past, by reducing culture to the simple recognition of mutually incompatible identities and "traditions", this separation obfuscated the differential distributions of power and dependency that constituted such identities in the first place, and continued to structure everyday life in contemporary Northern Ireland. What Obama's speech makes clear is the ideological implications and political legacy of such obfuscation. Making culture available as a commodity allowed politicians to outsource responsibility for addressing questions concerning legitimate and illegitimate uses of culture to the supposedly dispassionate, non-sectarian mechanism of the market. In lieu of radical movement beyond the nationalist-unionist, Irish-British divide, existing identity positions and established cultural "traditions" could be put to work as generators of profit within an emerging economic model of peace; namely, a neoliberal reform agenda of anti-statism, reduced public subsidy, and promarket activity.[7]

Richard Kirkland's *Literature and Culture in Northern Ireland since 1965: Moments of Danger* (1996) first engaged with this complex convergence of tradition and modernity in his analysis of literary and cultural responses to the 'Troubles'.[8] Drawing upon Antonio Gramsci's famous dictum that crises emerge "in the fact that the old order is dying that the new cannot be born",[9] he argued that the present remains in a perpetual state of suspension between the collapse of the prevailing conditions – identified with nationalist historical paradigms – and the promise of a future that seems unable to fully emerge. Those writers, poets and performance makers producing work in and about the North did so from "within the vacuum of a lived interregnum."[10] Such a concept can be usefully applied to a post-Agreement context in which apparently

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[7] See Nagle, John. 'Potemkin Village: Neo-Liberalism and Peace-Building in Northern Ireland' Ethnopolitics 8, no. 2 (2009): 173–90; Kelly, Brian. 'Neoliberal Belfast: Disaster Ahead?' Irish Marxist Review 1, no. 2 (15 June 2012): 44-59–59; Coulter, Colin. 'Under Which Constitutional Arrangement Would You Still Prefer to Be Unemployed? Neoliberalism, the Peace Process, and the Politics of Class in Northern Ireland'. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 37, no. 9 (2 September 2014): 763–76.

[8] 'Troubles' is here placed in inverted commas to signal that it is a contested term. Many nationalists and republicans argue that the term minimises the severity of the violence and argue that what took place from the late 1960s and 1998 constituted a civil war. The present study adopts 'Troubles' because it is commonly used shorted by people in the North, but acknowledges that, though the conflict was not a 'war' in the conventional sense, its fluctuating intensity renders difficult any such distinctions.

[9] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. Quentin Hoare & Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), p.276.

[10] Richard Kirkland, *Literature and Culture in Northern Ireland Since 1965: Moments of Danger* (London & New York: Longman, 1996), p.7.

'regressive' or 'backward' cultural tendencies live on as "morbid symptoms"[11] of Northern Ireland's (apparently inevitable, but resolutely uneven) accession to capitalist modernity. In January 2013 Loyalist riots erupted over the decision of Belfast City Council to only fly the Union Flag on designated days. News programmes relayed image of angry, young, working-class men occupying the very redeveloped and desegregated streets celebrated in Obama's speech as marking Northern Ireland's successful passage beyond "the hardened attitudes and the bitter prejudices of the past."[12] In March of that year members of the legislative assembly (MLAs) from both nationalist and unionist parties attempted to prevent the opening of a private abortion clinic in Belfast.[13] And not a week after the Presidential visit the Northern Ireland Assembly voted to block the extension of the Same Sex Marriage Bill to Northern Ireland.[14] Together such events could be understood as the strange afterlife of wartime military masculinities and demographic competition: the reduction of politics to a violent and patriarchal 'numbers game'.[15] They seemed to run against a current of change that had seen Belfast reshaped into a thriving, cosmopolitan urban centre and attitudes towards same-sex marriage and abortion shift dramatically towards liberalisation.[16] However, as many of the plays and performances discussed in this thesis make clear, these apparently regressive phenomena have much to do with unevenness of the political and economic consensus that has underwritten the peace.

Scholars have begun to unpack the economic logic behind the Agreement. Ideas of the liberal peace are now being explored in relation to the solidification of capitalism's hegemony in the post-Cold War landscape. Elizabeth Crighton's early intervention argued that the peace process should not be understood as neoliberal because the North "has been protected by statist economic policies from exogenous

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[11] Gramsci, *Op. Cit.*

[12] Obama, *Op. Cit.*

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] See "Northern Ireland 2013", *Irish Political Studies*, 39.3 (2014), pp.393-456.

[15] See Kathryn Conrad, *Locked in the Family Cell: Gender, Sexuality, and Political Agency in Irish National Discourse,* (Madison: Univ of Wisconsin Press, 2004).

[16] According to the 2018 *Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey* 68% of respondents support same sex marriage; 18% strongly agree and 36% agree that transgender people should have the right to change their legal gender (versus 12% who strongly disapprove); and 71% of respondents either strongly agree or agree that women have the right to choose whether or not to have an abortion. ARK, *Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey* (Belfast: ARK, 2018), https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2018/ [retrieved 14/12/19].

pressure for domestic stability."[17] Though she is correct to point out that the region has relied historically on British government subvention and high public sector employment, her argument is incorrect to identify neoliberalism with the implementation of lessaiz-faire policies designed to reduce state involvement. Rather than simply reducing state intervention in the economy to 'set markets free', neoliberalism sought, through active policy intervention, to remould state interventions and individuals to suit a pro-market ethos.[18] This process, as William Davies has cogently argued, involved "the disenchantment of politics by economics".[19] Rather than the state simply withdrawing from the market, political decisions and policy programmes are legitimated in terms aligned with the logic of markets, a logic that becomes the guarantor of acceptable political reality (what Mark Fisher called "capitalist realism").[20] It is a key contention of this thesis that without first apprehending the disappointment and vulnerability prompted by the failures of this new consensus there can be no comprehensive understanding of the reconstruction of gender norms in the post-Agreement period.

Davies's conceptualisation of neoliberalism dovetails with recent criticisms levelled at the liberal paradigm of peace-building in the wake of the 2008 Financial Crisis.[21] It is easy to see the appeal of neoliberal disenchantment in regions, such as Northern Ireland, afflicted by bitter political and cultural divisions. In contrast to the manifold ambiguities of political discourse, quantitative and economic indicators offer policy makers supposedly dispassionate metrics of success. Within the liberal paradigm of peace building, equality of opportunity, the protection of minority groups, and the rollout of democratic constitutional reforms are seen to facilitate the embedding of neoliberal structures: the adoption of anti-*dirigiste* economic policies designed to open various aspects of the economy – such as natural resources, public property assets,

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[17] Elizabeth H. Crighton, "Beyond Neoliberalism: Peacemaking in Northern Ireland", *Social Justice*, 25.4 (1998), pp.75-89 (p.84).

[18] As Quinn Slobodian has argued: "[T]he neoliberal project focused on designing institutions—not to liberate markets but to encase them, to inoculate capitalism against the threat of democracy, to create a framework to contain often-irrational human behavior, and to reorder the world after empire as a space of competing states in which borders fulfil a necessary function." Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge MA & London: Harvard University Press, 2018), p.2.

[19] William Davies, *The Limits of Neoliberalism: Authority, Sovereignty and the Logic of Competition* (London: SAGE, 2014), p.40.

[20] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (London: Zero Books, 2009).

[21] For a concise defence of the liberal paradigm, see Roland Paris, "Saving Liberal Peacebuilding", *Review of International Studies*, 36.2 (2010), pp.337–65. For a responding critical statement, see Neil Cooper, Mandy Turner, and Michael Pugh, "The End of History and the Last Liberal Peacebuilder: A Reply to Roland Paris", *Review of International Studies*, 37.4 (2011), pp.1995–2007.

and tourism – to foreign investment. However, as Mac Ginty and Richmond observe, the liberal model attracts capital in a manner that entrenches, rather than alleviates, existing economic inequalities. This has dire consequences for peace, as formerly warring communities – often located in poorer areas hardest hit by the conflict – compete over unequally distributed resources. Citing examples from East Timor to Cambodia, they warn: "if a peace dividend is not widely shared, then within a very few years there is an extremely strong chance that there will be a recurrence of violence or of authoritarianism."[22] On top of this, the neoliberal model of peace-building can be profoundly anti-democratic. Situating pro-market reform as the legitimising ground of political decision-making separates issues of identity and culture from the material conditions that constituted them. While politicians argue over issues of cultural rights and legal equality, they locate neoliberal policies of open markets, privatisation and fiscal restraint beyond the scope of democratic disputation. Governance policies, in turn, focus less on distributive issues – precisely those forms of inequality that, ironically enough, fuel violently antagonistic group identities – in preference for institution building, state coercion, and security. There is little room for dissent and those that do so are likely to be branded as 'dissident' threats to the peace.

In Northern Ireland it was assumed that the legitimacy of the new devolved institutions would rest upon the capacity of its leaders to deliver financial benefits though such a programme of reforms. Commentary in the 1990s focussed on the challenge of shrugging off what Robert Chote (who would become chairman of the Office of Budget Responsibility under David Cameron) called "a culture of dependency among firms and employees."[23] Following the 1994 IRA ceasefire the *Times*'s influential Tempus investment column suggested that an expanded tourism industry and property market would help the North "to turn itself from a dependent territory to a motivated and entrepreneurial economy."[24] The first task of the new regime would be to attract foreign capital to the region. Questions of maldistribution, particularly in those Catholic, nationalist areas that faced the highest rates of poverty and unemployment, would be secondary to the implementation of business friendly

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[22] Roger Mac Ginty and Oliver Richmond, *The Liberal Peace and Post-War Reconstruction: Myth Or Reality?* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp.3-4.
[23] Robert Chote, "Economics: The Price of Peace in Northern Ireland", *Independent*, 4 September (1994), n.p.
[24] Tempus, "Investing in Northern Ireland's Peace Dividend" *The Times*, 10 September (1994), n.p.

policies that would enable the inflow of international investment. In his 2008 article on the political economy of the peace in Northern Ireland Denis O'Hearn noted this underlying diagnosis:

> The implication is that the lack of economic activity is a result of war, rather than of structural inequalities that preceded or accompanied war, or that conditions have changed during the course of war to such a degree that the marginalized community can now participate more fully in regional economic activities. The end of the Cold War and the rise of 'globalization' are invoked as new opportunities for communities that were marginalized under previous regional economic regimes.[25]

Such an analysis is reflective of how the 2008 Financial Crisis precipitated bleaker assessments of the neoliberal peace. The roll out of public-private partnerships to build infrastructure (including cultural centres such as the Titanic Quarter) and the selling off of public assets had precipitated a 'peace divided' of sorts in the form of a property boom, but the wealth this generated was poorly distributed.[26] The Community Relations Council's 2019 peace monitoring report outlined what one commentator summed up as "a tale of two decades: before 2008 NI outperformed the UK average; since 2008 we have increasingly underperformed."[27] Even before the bubble burst, the average share of household income that came from benefits in Northern Ireland stood at 31 percent in comparison to 19 percent in the Republic and 25 percent in Britain.[28] Between 2002 and 2007 *Invest NI*, the North's regional economic development agency tasked with attracting investment into the region, created only 328 additional jobs, many of which were of poor quality, in return for its almost £1billion expenditure.[29] These figures reflect the failure of neoliberal reforms to provide a viable alternative to North's (Protestant-dominated) manufacturing

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[25] Denis, O'Hearn, "How Has Peace Changed the Northern Irish Political Economy?", *Ethnopolitics*, 7.1 (2008), pp.101–18.

[26] Colin Coulter, "Under Which Constitutional Arrangement Would You Still Prefer to Be Unemployed? Neoliberalism, the Peace Process, and the Politics of Class in Northern Ireland", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 37.9 (2014), pp.763–76. (766).

[27] Alan Meban, "Fifth NI Peace Monitoring Report Shows a Northern Ireland Stuck in Neutral, Sometimes in Reverse", *Slugger O'Toole* (blog) 10 January (2019). https://sluggerotoole.com/2019/01/10/fifth-ni-peace-monitoring-report-shows-a-northern-ireland-stuck-in-neutral-sometimes-in-reverse-nipmr/, [retrieved 11 May 2020]; Marie Grey *et. al.*, *Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report: Number Five* (Belfast: Community Relations Council, 2018).

[28] Daniel Finn, "Irish Politics Since The Crash", *Catalyst Journal*, 1.2 (2017). https://catalyst-journal.com/vol1/no2/irish-politics-finn [retrieved 1/04/2020].

[29] Niall McCracken, "Going to Plan? How Invest NI's Strategy Is Really Working Out", *The Detail*, 5 October (2012). https://www.thedetail.tv/articles/going-to-plan-how-invest-ni-s-strategy-is-really-working-out [retrieved 11/05/20].

economy, which by the 21st century was radically diminished. Far from being anomalous to the norms of Anglo-American capitalism, then, Northern Ireland followed a trajectory similar economic to other former industrial centres.

In a certain sense the question of distribution is everywhere in Northern Irish politics, but what has made the region specific is that the legacies of conflict and colonialism have made the articulation of dissent in terms of a common class interests particularly difficult. Take the issue of employment, for example: working class Protestant discontent at the diminishing availability of quality blue- and white-collar jobs is made all the more acute because unionist political hegemony over the state (and the public sector) has ended. Consequently, competition over scarce resources, particularly in the context of post-crash economic austerity, has commingled with unionist anomie, transforming nascent discontent at the neoliberal peace into a zero-sum game where nationalist gains are equated with unionist losses. Nationalist experiences of the peace are less fraught with declinism: by instituting a series of power-sharing and consensual mechanisms, the Agreement dispensed with colonial relations of domination and inequality at least at the formal level of political decision-making. However, the legacies of anti-nationalist discrimination live on in that unemployment and poverty are higher in working class Catholic neighbourhoods than in their Protestant equivalents.[30] That the activities of 'dissident' Republican groups (those that split off from the Provisional IRA in the 1990s) have been concentrated in acutely impoverished areas of Derry and Belfast indicates, perhaps, capitalism's failure to bind marginalized groups to non-violence.

In this context it is therefore important to understand cultural expression, and the so-called 'culture wars' over national emblems and remembrance practices, as inextricable from the changing political-economic circumstances of the post-Agreement period. The connection between the two is often lacking in liberal commentary concerned with the periodic return of violence to the streets of Northern Ireland's cities. Though it is certainly valid to criticise the persistence of masculinist practices and discourses of cultural identity, it is important to recognise that this persistence also signifies a nascent, if politically mis-organised, consciousness

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[30] In 2013 80 percent of Northern Ireland's most deprived wards were populated by predominantly Catholic people. Steven McCaffery, "Deprivation and Religion in Northern Ireland", *The Detail*, 20 October 2013. https://www.thedetail.tv/articles/deprivation-and-religion-in-northern-ireland.

of atomisation and inequality. Instead, as discussed in the first and second chapters, media commentary on events such as the 2005 Loyalist riots in Belfast, or the 2013 Loyalist flags protest, has treated such expressions of disappointment as aberrant, backward and, above all, irrational. This discourse exemplifies an emergent strand of post-Agreement thinking, one that has internalised what Wendy Brown calls "neoliberal political rationality" as the normative form of reason by which modes of expression are read as political.[31] Within this schema, those who cleave to forms of communal politics deemed antagonistic to neoliberal norms are liable to be dismissed simply as hysterical, inarticulate and lacking in self control. As this thesis shall consistently argue, a recourse to patriarchal gender norms associated with ethno-nationalism has indeed contributed significantly to the inability of many to reckon with the manifold vulnerabilities brought about by deepening conditions of inequality. But the parallel strand of *bourgeois* (neo)liberal analysis is also guilty of dismissing, in equally gendered terms, those whose ethnic-national affiliations are incompatible with the seamless embedding of neoliberal capitalism. It is only by traversing the liberal and ethno-nationalist positions that we can properly understand how the patriarchal discourses that are a common to both inhibit the development of cross-community and class-based struggle.

As this thesis will explore, riots, male suicide, domestic violence, homophobia and alienation are less the inherited afterglow of the 'Troubles' than the price of catching up with the accepted norms of Anglo-American and European governance.[32] Not only has the liberal grammar of equality outlined above allowed for the defence of patriarchy as cultural 'tradition' (particularly in the case of contemporary unionism), but the ethno-sectarian resource competition and uneven economic development accruing from neoliberal reforms has created fertile ground for nostalgia and the re-entrenchment of conservative gender norms. Following Kirkland, Aaron Kelly has emphasised that belief in the "unshakeable ineluctability of multinational capital, corporate re-branding and consumerism" has erased "a whole history of class

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[31] Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Cambridge MA: Zone Books, 2015), pp.115-150.

[32] See "Spike in NI Domestic Violence Figures, *BBC News*, 13 December (2018), https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-46539077 [retrieved 24/12/2019]; Siobhan O'Neill, Corry, C., McFeeters, D., Murphy, S., & Bunting, B., "Suicide in Northern Ireland: An analysis of gender differences in demographic, psychological, and contextual factors", *Crisis: The Journal of Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention,* 37.1, pp.13-20.

struggle, issues of gender, disenfranchisement or dissent".[33] It is therefore important to recover currents of dissent, particularly those artists and playwrights who have been both contemptuous towards the patriarchal ethno-nationalisms of the past and skeptical towards the promise of market-based emancipation, sensing that the passage from one to the other masks deeper continuities of exploitation.

It is worth dwelling upon the Good Friday Agreement as one attempt to narrate Northern Ireland away from its conflicted past. Its opening "Declaration of Support" committed signatories to "never forget those who have died or been injured, and their families" and declared that the best way to honour them would be through "a fresh start, in which we firmly dedicate ourselves to the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust, and to the protection and vindication of the human rights of all."[34] Talk of a "fresh start" relied upon contrasting the sectarian past of unionist dominance over the North with a pluralist, consociational form of governance. Informed by the work of Brendan O'Leary and John McGarry (the former worked as a political advisor to Mo Mowlam, Labour Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in 1997-1998),[35] and adapted from the work of Dutch political scientists Arend Lijphart,[36] consociation was designed to unpick colonial relations of domination through a combination of checks and balances at the level of policy making and the establishment of rights and protections for minority groups. The newly devolved Northern Ireland Assembly required participants to identify as nationalist, unionist or other. Significant legislation passed by the Assembly would have to be approved by mechanisms of parallel consent – a concurrent majority of both nationalist and unionist members of the Assembly (MLAs) – or by weighted majority of 60 percent of MLAs with the support of 40 percent of both designated nationalists and unionists. Positions on the Northern Ireland Executive, which would be able to implement policy concerning education, culture, and aspects of the economy, would be calculated to represent proportionately all those parties elected to the Assembly, including those designated as other (e.g. the Alliance Party and

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[33] Aaron Kelly, "Introduction: The Troubles with the Peace Process: Contemporary Northern Irish Culture", *The Irish Review*, 40/41 (2009), pp.1-17.
[34] Northern Ireland Office, *Op. Cit.*, p.2.
[35] See John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary, *The Northern Ireland Conflict: Consociational Engagements* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
[36] Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

Women's Coalition). The question of Northern Ireland's devolved future would be for the island of Ireland, rather than Britain, to determine by a future referendum: only a majority of people in the island's two jurisdictions would end partition. According to O'Leary, such provisions brought about "the final decolonisation of Ireland" by qualifying British sovereignty over the North and guaranteeing the right of Irish people in both jurisdictions to self-determination.[37]

Significantly, both the Agreement and O'Leary's account of it contain little discussion of economic issues, the former only making brief mention of the need to address "differential unemployment rates between the two communities by targeting objective need".[38] Closer analysis reveals consociation to be an attempt to employ capitalism to respond to the problem of sectarianism. One of the ways the Agreement "qualified" British sovereignty was though the re-establishment of a North-South Ministerial Council, first mooted as part of the failed 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement, to legislate on issues pertaining to the island of Ireland as a whole (including aquaculture, agriculture, transport, environment and tourism). In order to balance elements of co-sovereignty with devolved power in the North, the NSMC and the Assembly designed as "interlocking and interdependent […] so closely inter-related that the success of each depends on that of the other."[39] In a telling passage of his recent analysis of these intergovernmental arrangements O'Leary remarks:

> [E]conomic and sociological developments apparent in the 2000s would have underpinned the NSMC as the potential vanguard of a new constitutional confederal tendency. The Republic's "Celtic Tiger" economy meant that Northern Ireland's ministers and citizens, of whatever background, saw increasing benefits from North–South cooperation.[40]

In other words, the successful development of *economic* interdependence was designed to incentivise the North's politicians to move beyond the issue of sovereignty and

[37] Brendan O'Leary, *A Treatise on Northern Ireland, Volume I: Colonialism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p.131. The notion that capitalism incentivizes peace is an extension of Lijphart's remarks concerning the positive relationship between "how successful governments are in their macroeconomic management (such as economic growth and the control of inflation and unemployment) and the control of violence." Lijphart, *Op. Cit.*, p.xviii.
[38] *Op. Cit.*, p.24.
[39] *Ibid.*, p.3.
[40] Brendan O'Leary, *A Treatise on Northern Ireland, Volume III: Consociation and Confederation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p.210.

towards a confederal future. This conception of consociationalism echoes neoliberal arguments proclaiming the role of integration into globalised markets in reducing inter and intra-state violence.[41] Though O'Leary does hint that the 2008 Financial Crisis has unsettled the economic and social order of the 2000s, he overlooks the irony that capitalism was being expected to overcome the very divisions it created in its colonial form.[42] In doing so he elides the negative social consequences of the equation of consociation and capitalism: the sense of alienation, pessimism and apathy fostered amongst those people marginalised by the new economic order, groups that take centre stage in the plays and performances analysed here.

Understood in these terms, the Agreement marks less a departure than an attempt to legitimise capitalism's hegemony by making it the prior ground of political consensus in Northern Ireland. This elision of political-economic context is particularly apparent in its contradictory treatment of identity, which hinges upon both preserving and sustaining the social and political divisions that fuelled the conflict. The system of designation institutionalises at the level of elite politics the "two communities" as the basis of political antagonism.[43] This has the effect of occluding the complex and shifting political interests internal to each group and the inequalities of class and gender that interpenetrate both. Moreover, even as the Agreement orders people into pre-existing tribal "communities", it also drains them of substance. Bestowing "parity of esteem" upon two diametrically opposed groups effaces the crucible of economic and social exploitation out of which each was forged. If communal identities were understood as arising out of distinctive and historically specific circumstances, "parity" would require the Agreement to elaborate upon questions of social and economic justice. Instead, its equality provisions – notably "the right to equal opportunity in all social and economic activity, regardless of class, creed, disability, gender or ethnicity" – prioritises the management of identity over

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[41] Slobodian remarks how interdependence was central to the "neoliberal imagination". Neoliberalism understood the world economy as interdependent "because industrial nations relied on foreign markets for both raw materials and sales, and fluctuations of supply and demand were felt worldwide." They used this understanding to justify the protection of global markets from the vicissitudes of domestic politics and the threat of protectionism via the establishment of institutions (e.g. the IMF & World Bank) that existed beyond national democratic accountability. See *Globalists*, pp.20-21.

[42] For an account of colonial capitalism in Ireland, see Joe Cleary, *Outrageous Fortune: Capital and Culture in Modern Ireland*, (Cork: Field Day Publications, 2007).

[43] As Colin Graham notes, "'community' has become contemporary Northern Ireland's unimpeachable, unquestionable political unit." Colin Graham, *John Duncan: Bonfires* (Göttingen: Steidl 2008), n.pag.

the transformation of the social and economic circumstances that constitute them.[44] So even as the Agreement treats identity as "the irreducible elemental stuff of life in the North of Ireland",[45] the "two communities" appear as strangely ahistorical and empty categories.

This state of affairs is a continuation of a broader pattern of identity crisis that Maureen E. Ruprecht Fadem sees as a condition of post-partition writing. Her illuminating account foregrounds figures of national fragmentation: divided subjects that embody "the geopolitical vicissitudes of the North, of an exilic, ungrounded identity"; characters who pivot between nostalgia for the "lost figural integrity" of national identity and the desire to escape coercive ethno-nationalist structures.[46] The ideological assumptions that underpin this desire for escape have been teased out by Kirkland. He notes that Northern Ireland's recalcitrant pluralism is represented in the work of writers, including Colin Bateman, Robert McLiam Wilson and Eoin McNamee, in terms of an insurgent individualism that, wittingly and unwittingly, colludes with "the onward march of postmodern capitalism."[47] Both argue that neither a pluralist celebration of diversity, nor contempt for nationalist and unionist orthodoxies, is sufficient to develop politically radical cultural and political formations.

The performances analysed in this thesis do not jettison the potential promise of the Agreement, however. They instead dwell on how the convergence of capitalism and consociation obscures its more radical potentialities. The Agreement's rather technical invocation of legislative "inter-dependence", echoing as it does neoliberal intonements of a global capitalist network, can be read with what Italian feminist scholar Adriana Cavarero calls "bad intentions".[48] Declan Kiberd does some of the work when he argues that the Agreement's citizenship provisions recognise that

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[44] *Op. Cit.*, p.20.
[45] Colin Graham, "Every Passer-By a Culprit? Archive Fever, Photography and Peace in Belfast", *Third Text*, 19.5 (2005), pp.567-580 (p.567).
[46] Maureen E. Ruprecht Fadem, *The Literature of Northern Ireland: Spectral Borderlands* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), n.pag., ebook
[47] Richard Kirkland, *Identity Parades: Northern Irish Culture and Dissident Subjects* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002), p.123.
[48] Bad intentions, here, refers to the repurposing of terms "in a different context that can overwhelm and recodify them, pushing those terms toward unpredictable meanings." Adriana Carvarero & Elizabetta Bertolino, "Beyond Ontology and Sexual Difference: An Interview with the Italian Feminist Philosopher Adriana Cavarero", *Differences*, 19.1 (2008), pp.128-167 (p.137).

"identity is rooted less in the relation between persons and territory than in the relations of persons to one another."[49] The statement "Irish, British, or both"[50] recognises that interdependence is a fundamental condition of social and political life in the North. Because the identity of a community of friends is dependent on a community of enemies, Catholic nationalist and Protestant unionist are intimately bound together. Violence is a disavowal of this primary intimacy; one group cannot simply eradicate its entanglement with another, but must strive to change the quality of their relations in such a way as to promote sustainable co-existence.[51] Interpreted in this way, the Agreement's insistence upon the primacy of relationality can be understood as implying the need to reckon with the complex material conditions of exposure and vulnerability that constitute identities in the first place.

Reading against the grain of its liberal discourse of "equality of opportunity", then, helps us to recognise how interdependence can present a challenge to gendered narratives of national identity that fetishise independence. Both nationalism and unionism have tended to imagine their claims to sovereignty through images of masculine stoicism and self-discipline drawn from their respective historical imaginaries and, as the first chapter of this thesis will explore, even after 1998 politicians in the North conjured with the spirits heroic dead men to legitimate their claims to represent themselves as the true defenders of their respective communities. Recent work, most notably Valente's *The Myth of Manliness in Irish National Culture, 1880-1922*, has combined postcolonial and feminist approaches to explore the political forces that shaped the gendering of British and Irish ethnic imaginaries.[52] Valente argues that the "manly ideal" of British governance determined the shape and form of nationalist representations of independence in the early twentieth century. Interpellated by colonialist ideology as either atavistic or effeminate, savage

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[49] Declan Kiberd, *Irish Classics* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), p.630.
[50] *Op. Cit.*, p.4.
[51] It is important to note that Kiberd is able to level this optimistic account by ignoring the political-economic context informing the Agreement. Without being coupled with a genuinely redistributive politics of gender and class, consociation risks being reduced to the management of separate, if legally equal, identities within the markedly unequal social and economic context of capitalism.
[52] Joseph Valente, *The Myth of Manliness in Irish National Culture, 1880-1922* (Urbana, Chicago & Springfield: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Susan Cannon Harris, *Gender and Modern Irish Drama* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002); Sean Brady, "Why Examine Men, Masculinities and Religion in Northern Ireland?", *Men Masculinities and Religion Change in Twentieth Century Britain*, ed. Lucy Delap & Sue Morgan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp.218-251; Jane McGaughey, *Ulster's Men: Protestant Unionist Masculinities and Militarization in the North of Ireland, 1912-1923* (Montreal; Kingston; London; Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012).

or weak, the supposedly innate inadequacies of Irish men required the equipoise and forbearance of British imperialist masculinity. In their efforts to fashion an Irish identity freed from such stereotypes, figure of the literary revival imbibed a measure of the colonial ideal and enter a "self-defeating cycle" that unwittingly legitimised the gendered terms of the colonist. Brady and McGaughey have identified a similar dynamic in the North, where the stoicism of unionist leaders such as Edward Carson and James Craig, as well as portrayals from the men of the 36th (Ulster) Division who lost their lives at the Battle of the Somme in 1916, were woven into "a modern legend of Ulster Protestant manliness" that is still celebrated and commemorated in Orange Order parades.[53] In both the drama of the literary revival and the Loyalist cultural performances of the post-partition state, the fantasy of unified Irish and Ulster Protestant identities was bodied forth in displays of exemplary masculine control to protect against the threat of effeminising vulnerability. Though the Agreement itself only mentions gender in relation to the concept of "equality of opportunity", its emphasis on fostering political forms co-dependency becomes significant in this context. The lack of absolute control inherent in the concept of interdependency unsettles the historical representation of sovereignty in terms of muscular self-sufficiency and stoicism. Taking up this challenge, performance makers have uncovered the politically disabling nature of absolute independence – whether in the form of possessive individualism or ethno-nationalism – while also affirming the emancipatory potential of wielding one's connectedness with others for social change.

Rather than being of incidental concern to Northern Irish politics and culture, then, a gender studies approach, and a new emphasis on post-Agreement theatre and live art, is required. Such an approach gives us a richer understanding of how performance makers have attempted to challenge the political foreclosures arising out of the Peace Process. To merely dramatise the fragmentation of Ireland's "figural integrity" risks aligning with a capitalist settlement that busily reduces politics to the management of sectarianism and outsources the alleviation of class inequalities to an apparently dispassionate and de-gendered market individualism. Though there have been improvements in the lives of some, those already in a favourable position, for others, particularly women from the North's working-class communities, life has got

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[53] McGaughey, p.100.

harder. Performance makers help us to understand how, far from burying sectarianism and gender oppression, conditions of economic precarity breed nostalgia amongst many men for the sureties of patriarchal ideals. The post-Agreement period also sees them grappling with the difficult challenge of recognizing, even respecting, difference while also affirming a notion a shared interest through which to articulate new political demands.

The answer lay in the development of performance forms that moved beyond identity politics to emphasise those fundamental conditions of dependency and vulnerability denied within both patriarchal nationalism and androcentric individualism. Whether in "Joycean, prismatic perspective" of Owen McCafferty's *Scenes from the Big Picture,*[54] the "beautiful glorious mess" of Stacey Gregg's Brechtian juxtapositions,[55] or the strange temporal junctures brought together by female artists in *LABOUR* live art exhibition, we find work whose optics exposes different lines of interaction and affiliation, demonstrating even the most macho elaborations of independence to be occulted expressions of interdependence. These performances prompt us to sense and imagine alternatives to the way things are in Northern Ireland, alternatives in which a respect for differences in identity is coupled with an effort to redress those hierarchies of race, religion, gender and sexual orientation according to which exposure to violence and precarity is distributed.

This thesis argues that in a context where theatre and performance has increasingly been pressed into underwriting hegemonic narratives of the peace process,[56] and gilding the reputation of Northern Ireland as open for business, a subset of playwrights, live artists, and choreographers has sought to explore how social, political and economic transformation has reconstructed, rather than transcended, those gender norms cultivated to support the conflict. Performance work has critiqued narratives of paramilitary and working-class 'crisis masculinities', exposed the legacies of women's exploitation in the spheres of social reproduction and production for profit, and demonstrated the persistent violence faced by transgender

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[54] Mark Phelan, "Introduction: A day in the life of…" in Owen McCafferty, *Plays 1* (London: Faber, 2013), pp.vii-xx (p.xviii).
[55] Stacey Gregg, Unpublished Interview with Alexander Coupe, 28 March (2018).
[56] Mark Phelan, "*Lost Lives:* Performance, Remembrance, Belfast", *Post-Conflict Performance, Film, and Visual Arts*, ed. Des O'Rawe & Mark Phelan (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp.129-154; Greg McLaughlin & Stephen Baker, *The Propaganda of Peace* (Bristol: Intellect, 2010).

people in Northern Ireland's 'reformed' public spaces, in the name of teasing out the interdependent inequalities of gender and class that subtend the neoliberal peace. The dominant model of conflict transformation posited peace as a movement from exclusivist ethno-nationalist ideologies to a future in which differences of identity are mediated by the common ground of the market. Set alongside those journalists, politicians and performance makers who *have* taken up this narrative of modernisation, this thesis seeks to trace how gender-aware performance work has bodied forth the unfulfilled or overlooked emancipatory potentialities embedded in the Good Friday Agreement, teasing out what Maire Braniff has called its "spirit and promise".[57] Collectively, they encourage us to refuse the normalisation of the present state of affairs in Northern Ireland as natural or inevitable, prompting the question: what could and perhaps should have been, and what might still be?

What follows seeks to redress the marginalisation of gender issues within the existing scholarship in the understanding that, without recourse to gender studies approaches, we cannot properly grasp the politics of post-Agreement performance. In a manoeuvre that reinforces the often marginal and frequently awkward place of feminism within Irish nationalism and Ulster unionism, the few studies on the topic rarely afford gender issues more than a single chapter to supplement the mainstream activity of engaging with the 'proper' politics of the peace process.[58] Part of the issue is a tendency to reduce gender issues to work by female writers. Tom Maguire's illuminating chapter on "Gendering the Troubles" in *Making Theatre in Northern Ireland: Through and Beyond the Troubles* analyses only those plays that challenged cultural constructions of the feminine within Irish nationalist and Ulster unionist discourses. While he attends to the enmeshment of gender difference in colonial and post-colonial representations of the nation, he focusses on the effects of patriarchy on women alone. This is understandable given the that women continue to be underrepresented in political, academic and cultural life in Northern Ireland. Activists during the negotiations leading up to the Agreement rightly sought to

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[57] Maire Braniff, "Progress in Paralysis: Change and Continuity in Post-Agreement Northern Ireland", *Agreement 20* (Manchester: Unpublished Paper Presented at the Agreement20 Conference, 2018), https://sluggerotoole.com/2018/04/09/maire-braniff-the-spirit-promise-of-1998-agreement-has-been-firmly-cast-aside-agreement20/ [retrieved 30/07/19].
[58] See Eva Urban, *Community Politics and the Peace Process in Contemporary Northern Irish Drama* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011) and Tom Maguire, *Making Theatre in Northern Ireland: Through and Beyond the Troubles* (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2006).

address such inequalities. The inclusion of the cross-community Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC) in the negotiations leading towards the Agreement ensured that, against the objections of other parties, the final document included women's right to participation in political life. But not only have such commitments failed to precipitate legislative change in the form of access to abortion or marriage equality, Northern Ireland continues to outstrip its neighbours in levels of domestic and anti-LGBTQ+ violence.[59] Civil society groups such as Alliance for Choice and the Belfast Feminist Network have emerged and organise politically at a grass-roots community level in an effort to prompt legislative change. This is paralleled in theatre studies: Fiona Coleman Coffee's pioneering monograph of women in Northern Irish theatre has uncovered a plurality of voices marginalised within mainstream accounts.[60] All these initiatives constitute a drive to reverse the erasure of women from Northern Irish history, culture and society.

Nevertheless, the assumption that feminism is a 'women's issue' gives only a partial account of precisely why stifling gender norms persist, and how their persistence forecloses the political possibilities available in post-Agreement Northern Ireland. The economic boom of the 1990s and 2000s and the subsequent bust in 2008 has shifted scholarly interest towards those socialist and Marxist currents often subsumed in conventional accounts of the 'Troubles'. Eva Urban's *Community Politics and the Peace Process in Contemporary Northern Irish Drama* (2011) puts forward a preceptive analysis of pre- and post-Agreement theatre in which she identified a dramatic tradition of Brechtian dramaturgy and socialist political analysis, beginning with Patrick Galvin's kaleidoscopic *We Do It For Love* (Lyric Theatre: 1976).[61] Similarly, Connal Parr's *Inventing the Myth: Political Passions and the Ulster Protestant Imagination* (2017) has emphasised the overlooked radical tradition of working-class Protestant writing in the North, which includes the "lost labour culture" of 1970s socialist realism, exemplified in the plays of Sam Thompson and poems of John Hewitt, as well as more recent work by Gary Mitchell and Christina Reid.[62] This resurgence of

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[59] Police Service of Northern Ireland, *Trends in Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland 2004/05–2017/18*, (Belfast: NIPSA, 2018).
[60] Fiona Coleman Coffey, *Political Acts: Women in Northern Irish Theatre, 1921-2012* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2016).
[61] Urban, *Op. Cit.*
[62] Connal Parr, *Inventing the Myth: Political Passions and the Ulster Protestant Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

interest in the left wing currents of Northern Irish cultural history is mirrored in the work of Joe Cleary, whose *Outrageous Fortune: Culture and Capital in Modern Ireland* (2007) provides a necessary assessment of the relations between culture, colonialism and capitalism in Ireland from the nineteenth century to the present day.[63] Such studies share a tendency to peripheralise gender issues as at best a peripheral outcrop from the broader cultural politics, and at worst a revisionist, identitarian imposition upon the deconstructive hybridity of post-colonial analysis. Ruprecht Fadem is rightly wary of the tendency to analyse female Northern Irish writers purely in terms of their assumed gender position. However, her adoption of a "postfeminist model" that "treats their work the way male writers have been read" – that is, as as custodians and tellers of Northern Ireland's political history – reproduces the very reduction of feminism to women for which she criticises others.[64] Her book conceptualises gender studies as a parochial framework that has little or no bearing on the broader history of the province, while affording post-colonial analysis the capacity to provide a general account. Cleary makes explicit the notion of feminism and queer theory's parochiality when he argues that such an approach harbours "the potential for intellectual circus" and involves bourgeois academics leaving unexamined "more complex 'sociological' questions" about how academics and artists alike might "affect change".[65] This form of "factionalization", in excluding other identities in order to shore up its own unity and coherence, reproduces the very disavowal of interdependency that this thesis interprets performance work in post-Agreement Northern Ireland as seeking to challenge.[66]

Feminism and queer theory's concern for the embodied, concrete experiences of dependency necessitates a turn to, rather than flight from, the question of how theatre and performance might "affect change". This thesis takes up recent work that begins with the material and lived conditions of women and men, seeking to build political demands for equality out of those experiences of dependency and vulnerability traditionally coded as "feminine" in western societies.[67] Written in the

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[63] Cleary, *Op. Cit.*
[64] Ruprecht Fadem, *Op. Cit.*
[65] Cleary, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 4-5
[66] Judith Butler, "Merely Cultural", *Social Text*, 52/53 (1997), pp.265-277 (p.267).
[67] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life* (London: Verso, 2004); Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2016); Nancy Fraser & Linda Gordon, "A Genealogy of Dependency: Tracing a Keyword of the U.S. Welfare State", *Signs* 19.2 (1994), pp.309-

shadow of the U.S.'s "war on terror", Judith Butler's *Precarious Life* argues that: "The condition of primary vulnerability, of being given over to the touch of the other, […] signifies a primary helplessness and need, one to which any society must attend."[68] She notes that because identity is dependent upon the warp and self of the relations that constitute it, clear distinctions between self and other are impossible to sustain. However, nationalism and patriarchy are bound together in their mutual refusal of this fundamental condition. The two meet within the politics of the nation state when governments lever vulnerability with ever more violent, muscular assertions of independence. Butler remarks that in the U.S. following the September 11 attacks:

> [A] subject has been instated at the national level, a sovereign and extra-legal subject, a violent and self-centered subject; its actions constitute the building of a subject that seeks to restore and maintain its mastery through the systematic destruction of its multilateral relations, its ties to the international community. It shores itself up, seeks to reconstitute its imagined wholeness, but only at the price of denying its own vulnerability, its dependency, its exposure, where it exploits those very features in others, thereby making those features "other to" itself.[69]

In this analysis, gender is the circuit that connects the lived, embodied experience of crisis, precarity and inequality under capitalism to patriotic nationalism's promise of social protection, group solidarity and autonomy. Dependency is culturally coded as a failure of manliness to redirect resentment at material inequality against supposedly threatening and abject 'others'. Whether in the figure of the soldier or individualist entrepreneur, ideals of masculinity are premised upon a performative denial of dependency that disguises disabling forms of economic and political subjection, a denial that deprives the political sphere of the potential to lever interdependency for collective change. In this way the politics of gender and class are resolutely entangled and interdependent. This is especially true of a society emerging out of conflict where sectarian division is enmeshed in the cultural coding of the 'other side' as unmanly. Gendered in such a way, the invocation of identity crisis does not signal the radical rethinking of its constitutive terms but rather its reorganisation and re-entrenchment. The task of the feminist is to arrest this process by dwelling instead on what the experience of corporeal vulnerability tells us about the differential distribution of

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336; Martha Fineman, *The Vulnerable Subject: Anchoring Equality in the Human Condition,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).
[68] Butler, *Precarious Life*, pp.31-32.
[69] *Ibid.*, p.41

precarity in Northern Irish society. Only then might it be possible to imagine political affiliations and demands, however temporary and fragile, that cut across the sectarian divide. Far from being a 'women's issue' as it is traditionally defined, then, feminism helps us to reject the gender-coded distinction between independence and dependency that obstructs us from reckoning with inequalities of dependency.

In integrating both feminist and socialist frameworks, this thesis builds upon the approach taken by Brian Singleton, as set out in his book *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre* (2011). Exemplary of this is his analysis of the 1991 Abbey Theatre production of Sean O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars*. Addressing the glass and gender politics of the play, he argues that by refusing to present the characters onstage as "folksy stereotypes" director Garry Hynes presented them "as masculinities that were conflicted by multiple imperatives"; that is, their desire to refuse the British stereotype of Irish passivity was tempered by a wariness towards the "class-ridden myth" of sacrificial heroism handed to them by a nationalist elite.[70] Such an interpretation is made available through R.W. Connell's account of how masculinities are both conceived, "not simply in terms of symbolic identity but also as socially relational."[71] Cultural representations and social practices combine to value specific forms of masculinity and exert their influence not only over women, but also those masculinities that, by dint of their marginal class position, fall short of the bourgeois ideal of self-control and self-mastery. The denial of vulnerability identified by Butler as stemming more broadly from the gender coding of dependency as 'feminine' therefore necessitates an analysis that is attentive not only to the effects of patriarchy upon men, but also the complex entanglement of class and gender inequalities.

Precisely because of the corporeal dimensions of this denial, the presence of an actor's body in performance is an important location for thinking radically and analytically about social relationships in a way that moves beyond the dynamic of crisis produced between partriarchal nationalism and androcentric individualism. This thesis locates the particular contribution of performance in its capacity, as a material practice, to manifest its own alternative experienced realities. "The politics

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[70] Brian Singleton, *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p.33.
[71] R.W. Connell, *Masculinities: Second Edition* (London: Polity, 2005), p.8.

of theatre", argues Hans-Thies Lehmann, "is a politics of perception."[72] Through the mutual implication of actors and spectators it can make strange the way in which our relation with others and the world around us is habitually experienced. Though the explicitness of feminist or socialist positions varies between performance-makers, their work is characterised by efforts to encourage audiences to feel those occulted ties of interdependency the Agreement formally recognised, but failed, in practice, to bring into lived reality. As Raymond Williams famously argued in his essay "Base and Superstructure" in his elaboration of Gramsci's concept of hegemony as:

> [T]he central, effective and dominant system of meanings and values, which are not merely abstract but which are organised and lived. […] It is a whole body of practices and expectations; our assignments of energy, our ordinary understanding of the nature of man and of his world. It is a set of meanings and values which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in society, a sense of absolute because experienced reality beyond which it is difficult for most members of society to move, in most areas of their lives.[73]

More than mere manipulation, patriarchal and capitalist oppression shapes the very perception of what passes as reality. This accords with Judith Butler's famous argument that, far from being natural, gender's "appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief."[74] We will encounter plays, parades and political speeches that do the work of 'normalising' the inequalities of gender and class that subtend the peace process. At their best, however, artists have sought to wrest from the world the usually invisible performativity of gender, presenting it as performance in order to render conspicuous the contingent structures of power that shape perception and sustain the performative denial of dependency. Close attention to reception reveals how specific performance events have prompted audiences to question dominant narratives of the post-Agreement period and imagine how things might be otherwise. Together, these small scale events have fed into the broader feminist and socialist currents that have developed in Northern Irish society since 1998.

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[72] Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), p.185.
[73] Raymond Williams, *Culture and Materialism* (London: Verso, 2005 [1980]) p.38.
[74] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory", *Theatre Journal*, 40.4 (1988), pp.519-531 (p.520).

As set out above, reckoning with interdependence operates at three different levels throughout this thesis. Firstly, interdependence refers to the increasing attention given in theatre and performance to the enmeshment of gender and class inequalities. The pieces discussed in this thesis tend to snag the straight line drawn by politicians and (some) cultural elites between the "bad" nationalisms of the past and the "good" future of neoliberal modernity, and subject the discourse of pluralism that mediates this transition to scrutiny. Though the expansion of queer theatre and theatre concerned with the experiences of women in the North reflects the success of those groups in seeking protection of the state "as distinct, recognisable, delineated subjects before the law".[75] Performance makers, particularly those working in the aftermath of the 2008 Financial Crisis, have sought to elaborate a dialectical process of social change in which liberalism's economic prescriptions have ended up undermining the Agreement's attempt to erode the hegemony of patriarchal, and reactionary ideologies. As playwrights and artists have themselves to navigate conditions of increasing scarcity, they experienced first hand how the concept of "equality of opportunity" adopted in the Agreement reduces feminist, anti-racist and queer emancipation to securing an individual's capacity to access to the market. "Rather than seeking to abolish social hierarchy", Arruzza, Battacharya and Fraser argue in *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto*, "aims to 'diversify' it".[76] Class, gender and sectarianism were all implicated in the crises around decommissioning and remembrance that characterised the first decade after the Agreement. Following hard on the heels of the North's deindustrialisation, playwrights such as Gary Mitchell and Owen McCafferty have depicted how the changing relations between the 'two communities and the failure of the 'peace dividend' to materialise outside Northern Ireland's urban centres provoked attempts to restore dominant masculinities, particularly (though not exclusively) within working-class Protestant, loyalist communities. What this thesis calls "the gender politics of performance" refers, on the one hand, to the reactionary effects of these beleaguered demonstrations of masculine dominance. On the other hand, it also traces the development of explicitly feminist and socialist currents within the theatre following the 2008 Financial Crisis. Artists and playwrights began to reflect upon the pitfalls of the entrepreneurial individualism into which they were pushed by conditions of

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[75] Butler, *Precarious Life*, p.25.
[76] Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Battacharya, & Nancy Fraser, *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto* (London: Verso: 2019), p.11.

increasing economic scarcity and underfunding. Where work by Abbie Spallen exhibited skepticism towards the capacity of the liberal grammar of equality to deliver meaningful equality, particularly for women, projects such as the 2012 LABOUR exhibition and plays such as Stacey Gregg's *Shibboleth* (2015) were characterised by a strong reparative ethic and affect. In their hands, performance became a means to model subjectivities, lines of solidarity, and practices of care that, in their often-thwarted, always-tenuous attempts to refuse the gender-coded opposition between dependency and independence, called upon the audience to imagine a transformed Northern Ireland.

The second meaning of interdependence refers to a formal and thematic thread running through many of the case studies discussed in this thesis. Specific plays, political speeches and commemorations stage crisis, grief and trauma precisely to reinforce those ideologies (both neoliberal and ethno-nationalist) that promise to overcome the lived experience of dependency. Other artists have, in turn, appropriated, twisted, transformed or rejected entirely these tendencies. That over twenty years has passed since the signing of the Agreement offers us a vantage point from which we can identify some general patterns of change. Though this span of time has seen a pluralisation of formal strategies and thematic concerns that is reflective of Northern Irish society's increasing diversity, between 1998 and 2016 there was a marked shift away from the male-dominated monologues, domestic dramas, and high-octane thrillers of the 1990s to work that eschewed conventions of plot and character in order to encourage the audience to feel the lived vulnerability of cohabiting Northern Ireland's "narrow ground".[77] Performance makers have entangled different times, places and plots both to uncover those lines of connection and avenues of solidarity obscured by the masculinist fetishisation of mastery, autonomy and independence. These pieces have attempted to move spectators beyond a narrow focus on identity politics to what Judith Butler has called the "struggle for social and political forms that are committed to fostering a sustainable interdependency on egalitarian terms."[78]

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[77] ATQ Stewart, *The Narrow Ground: Aspects of Ulster* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1997).

[78] Judith Butler, "Precarious Life, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Cohabitation", *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 26.2 (2012), pp. 134–51 (p.149).

The third sense of interdependence invoked here is methodological. In order to offer a comprehensive account of the gender politics of performance, this thesis pays close attention to the often antagonistic relations between performance histories and the wider political process by combining sustained treatment of specific productions and exhibitions alongside a broad spectrum analysis of social performativity. The political agency of performances of theatre and live art can only be understood in relation to the dominant system of meaning and values and material conditions that affect the scope of formal and thematic possibilities open to playwrights and range of interpretations available to spectators. This necessitates the analysis of a range of material, including playtexts, performances, reviews, funding documents and practitioner interviews, and an integrated reading of drama and live art alongside parades, commemorations and political speeches that may be deemed non-artistic, but can be made available for analysis as performance phenomena. Consequently, following Bert O. States, performance is understood as a concept with "vague boundaries" that can include the consciously chosen, strategic and culturally transmitted patterning of behaviour in parades, photo-calls and stump speeches as well as work reflexively *about* this process of patterning (i.e. the performing arts).[79] Broadly speaking, artistic performance refers to modes of presentation and conventions of framing that draw out what Williams called "the whole body of practices and expectations" that is incipient in certain human behaviour but usually goes unnoticed; for, as States remarks: "it is the getting of it in to art, and out of its natural, excessive, and unremarkable twice-behavedness in daily life, that constitutes the transformation of art."[80] In this way, theatre companies, artists and playwrights have used the resources of performance to 'make strange' the hegemony of patriarchy and neoliberalism as it is transmitted offstage in media performances, commemorations and street protest, preparing their audiences for further engagement with urgent contemporary issues. Janelle Reinelt has noted that theatre's political efficacy "is not solitary – theatre cannot change the world – but it can and sometimes does work towards change alongside other multiple avenues of public expression."[81] By seeking to understand how the performing arts have fed into, and work in concert with, the counter-hegemonic tendencies that have emerged in

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[79] States is here quoting Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p.34. Bert O. States, "Performance as Metaphor", *Theatre Journal*, pp.65-86 (p.79).
[80] *Ibid.*
[81] Janelle Reinelt, "Performance at the Crossroads of Citizenship", *The Grammar of Politics and Performance*, ed. Shirin M. Rai & Janelle Reinelt (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), pp.34-50 (pp.48-9).

Northern Irish civil society, particularly following the implementation of economic austerity by the Conservative-led UK government, we can understand better its contribution to political debate and social change since the Good Friday Agreement.

Following from this, the thesis is divided into four chapters that are organised around terms and themes that became central to politics at different times in the post-Agreement period and were taken up by performance makers with varied degrees of criticality. The first chapter concerns the proliferation of narratives concerned with the idea the peace process augured a crisis in the dominant conceptions of masculinity cultivated to support the conflict. It was a discourse that developed in response both to the ambiguities of power-sharing and to the revelation that Northern Ireland's deindustrialised economy and increasingly precarious labour market had little to offer those who identities had been forged during the 'Troubles'. This was nothing new: the consolidation of identity against the threat of effeminisation and passivity formed the basis of both Irish Nationalist and Ulster Unionist identities in the early twentieth centuries. Later, amidst the challenges of selling the peace to their respective constituencies, figures such as David Trimble and Gerry Adams legitimised their position as defenders their respective communities by conjuring with the heroes of this bygone era. They did so in the face of anti-Agreement figures (most notably Ian Paisley) who employed the gendered language of shame as a powerful rhetorical strategy with which to stake their representative claims. Against this backdrop of nostalgia and consolidation, playwrights such as Gary Mitchell and Joseph Crilly began to elaborate anti-heroic tales appropriate to the decline of muscular and militarist ethnonationalisms, but their did so in ways that were both revealing and limited. Mitchell's study of Loyalist paramiltiarism in *As the Beast Sleeps* (1998) skilfully identified how rank-and-file resentment at the *embourgeoisement* of political elites, and legitimate suspicion towards the capacity of the peace to deliver on its promises, was rerouted through the nostalgic re-entrenchment of violent and sectarian masculinities. Repetition and self-destruction seemed to be the destiny of these apparently redundant men. Crilly's study contrasts this Loyalist pessimism in a manner that reveals a Nationalist attitude more willing to embrace the emerging liberal pluralist consensus. Centring on a closeted gay Provo, his play *On McQuillan's Hill* elaborates the gradual erosion of patriarchal nationalism, and masculinity's representative status within it, amidst the dirty backwash of what was

an ignoble war. The revisionist force of these revelations augurs a softening of military masculinities and a proliferation of identity positions, but such a celebration is only sustained with the dubious endorsement of the personal over the political and elimination of structural disparities of class as a significant issue. Arising in the middle of this dialectic of crisis, re-entrenchment and reorganisation is Owen McCafferty's *Scenes from the Big Picture* (2003), a prismatic depiction of contemporary Belfast life that engaged issues similar to Mitchell and Crilly but unfolded them in a manner that emphasised the sense of connectedness occulted within patriarchal nationalism and liberal individualism. The play shift signifies a significant departure from theatrical typicality, where the male body is used to exemplify an idea of community, to a theatre of relationality in which corporeal vulnerability and inter-personal entanglement calls upon the audience to foster cross-sectarian solidarity along class lines.

The second chapter takes up the idea of masculinity as a political disabling force in the context of debates around remembrance, reconciliation and truth recovery. Attention to controversies around the performance of remembrance that emerged following the collapse of the Northern Ireland Assembly in 2002 reveals how memory work increasingly revolved around the idea of mastering the past within standardised narratives and performative arrangements. Within such regimes of remembrance, memories of pain and loss that attested to corporeal vulnerability and the interdependence identities were instead transformed into sources of symbolic strength. In what is terms the masculinisation of remembrance, the chapter traces how Loyalist and Republican victims' groups organised parades that invoked the trauma of the troubles precisely in order to call for a defence of strong-armed political leaders and strengthened sectarian bonds. Liberal commentators, meanwhile, reproduced this exploitation and disavowal of physical exposure within a pseudo-psychoanalytic discourse. They dismissed all performances of remembrance *tout court*, decrying their tendency to mass hysteria as contravening the manly equipoise of the liberal intellect as embodied in representative democracy. It is against the backdrop of this debate that playwrights and live artists attempted to place the body centre stage in the recovery and working through of loss, pain and trauma. The chapter demonstrates both the limits and possibilities of the strategic use of corporeal vulnerability as a "site of witness", and reflects on the political necessity

of emphasising how the the body also that singular aspect of memory that is recalcitrant to transformation into standardised and ideological discourses of identity.

Chapter 3 takes the thesis into the era of Financial Crisis, economic recession and austerity finance, and focusses upon its impact on feminist performance makers, their understanding of political agency and the gender politics of the work they produced. As the premise of peace and prosperity failed to materialise and conditions of scarcity that disproportionately affected women took hold, plays and live art pieces emerged that sought to snag, arrest and transform the narrative of modernisation that posited the common ground of the market as liberating women from Northern Ireland's socially conservative traditions. To be a successful playwright or artist under such conditions necessitated a degree of complicity; the adoption of those forms of entrepreneurial subjectivity through which capitalism embeds its logic of inequality and the differential distribution of precarity. Beginning with the work of Abbie Spallen, the chapter consequently explores the ways performance makers negotiated their entanglement in the very economic and political processes they sought to critically mediate. Spallen includes the problem of complicity into her plays; her female characters attempt to glean agency by rejecting conservative gender norms of domesticated femininity, but they do so by appropriating the model of androcentric individualism privileged within contemporary capitalism. For playwrights and their characters, success or survival increasingly involved giving up those bonds of collective solidarity that characterised feminist movements and theatre companies of the past. Implicit in Spallen's work at last, and in her particular praise for the defunct women's theatre company Charabanc, is a sense of the lost, but still resonant, legacy of a socialist feminism, a legacy that would be actively recovered and revived in the form of the collaborative live art exhibition, *LABOUR* (2012). If Spallen's work suggested that neoliberal modernisation was a stitch up for women, then *LABOUR* sought to stitch together the fragmented legacy of a feminist culture of anti-capitalist resistance. Their elaboration of the historical and ongoing instrumentalisation of so-called 'women's work' took the form of a collective exhibition, one which actively sought to lever solidarity between women as a class (particularly within the arts sector) in a manner that resisted the atomisation of capitalism as much as patriarchal nationalism.

The limitations of the economic consensus that underwrote the liberal conception of the peace is also at the heart of the final chapter, which focusses on queer performance. They took as their point of departure the liberal grammar of equality through which the slow legislative advancement of LGBTQ+ equality has been advanced in Northern Ireland, pointing to such top-down changes overlooked the role of economic precarity in exacerbating the persistence of homophobic and transphobic in the region's supposedly safe and desegregated urban centres. The work of TheatreofplucK and Stacey Gregg tackled head on the enlistment on theatre and performance in reconstructing an image of Belfast as safe for leisure, tourism and consumption under the aegis of normalisation. Just as the presence of queer subjects and affiliations have the capacity to unsettle the what passes for normality, so these plays located in the Brechtian concept of estrangement – or *Verfremdungseffekt* – a powerful means to open the habitual and the everyday to scrutiny. TheatreofplucK's production of Emmanuel Darley's *Tuesdays at Tesco's* (2014), and Stacey Gregg's *Shibboleth* (2015) deployed queer and Brechtian theatrical techniques that 'made strange' the processes of exclusion enacted in the pacification and normalisation of Northern Ireland's capital city, revealing how the separation of LGBTQ+ rights from economic policy occluded the experiences of violence that characterised their experiences of the supposedly everyday and normal. Both plays centralised queer subjectivities and practices – in their commitment to living at an angle to the imperatives of 'normalisation' – to help audiences view the everyday as a contested and contradictory terrain in which economic imperatives violently pressure people to conform to established gender norms. At the very least, they call for a healthy skepticism towards the adequacy of liberal political and economic reform as a benchmark of post-Agreement progress.

Taken together, the work reveals a strand of performance making that has dissented from the configurations of crisis and progress that have defined the post-Agreement period and insisted upon interrogating the inequalities of gender and class that undergird the neoliberal peace. Analysis of this work furnishes us with a better understanding of how feminist and socialist currents have remained a powerful critical resource through and beyond the peace process. Not only does the predicament they elaborate call for the extension of the social protection of the state to those minoritised on the basis of their gender and sexuality, but they model in

their very performance forms those practices of care and solidarity that are so lacking in the everyday life in a region where the violence of sectarian conflict has given way to the normalisation of economic hardship.

Chapter 1
Decommissioning
Masculinities: Theatre
and the Uses and
Abuses of Crisis.

On 12 February 2000, a year and a half after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, the critic and journalist Fintan O'Toole wrote an article in the *Irish Times* that began with the question: "is there such thing as an Irish play?"[82] Looking back over the previous two decades, he identified a decline in theatre's confidence in offering up metonymic or metaphorical images of the nation and a shift in conception of Irish national identity amidst two decades of social and political change. From the 1980s onwards "traditional Ireland was becoming alienated, angular and embattled […] Its image in the theatre was no longer John B. Keane's proud, confident, dangerous Bull McCabe, but Sebastian Barry's odd, sad, comic, encircled *Boss Grady's Boys*, imagining themselves as foot-soldiers in Custer's Last Stand." Set on the Cork/Kerry border, it is easy to see why O'Toole thought the play captured the sense that Irishness, or at last its cultural construction as a homogenous identity, was at an end. Barry's play had received its UK premier in Glasgow two years previously in 1998, a month before the agreement was reached in Northern Ireland and a decade following its 1988 premier in Dublin. In its closing lines Josie one of the group of labourers the play follows, declares "Mick, I dreamed I was a girl. I fell asleep on the floor":

> MICK What were you like?
> JOSIE Miserable.
> MICK Much the same then.[83]

O'Toole's reference to this play reveals much of the presumed relationship between theatre, social change and gender emerging in the aftermath of the 'Troubles'. In the Republic of Ireland, the rural hero of the nationalist imaginary had been replaced by the plural, cosmopolitan and urban locales of Celtic Tiger Ireland. This loss of

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[82] Fintan O'Toole, "Play for Ireland", *Irish Times*, 12 Feb (2000), p.63.
[83] Sebastian Barry, *Plays 1* (London: Methuen, 1997), p.47.

hegemonic status is translated as emasculation: the humiliation of those whose macho-masculinities were cultivated to support a homogenous conception of national identity. As O'Toole noted elsewhere, Barry's plays captured the sense that the entire project of using theatre to represent national identities in heterosexual and self-sufficient masculine heroes had "run itself into the barren and blood-soaked ground of sectarian strife in Northern Ireland."[84] Theatre, it seemed, was taking up the Agreement's recognition of the recalcitrant and differential plurality of identities in the North, shifting from models of unity to the "dramatisation of the fragments" and "isolated pieces of a whole story that no one really knows."[85] Men like Josie were left emasculated, dreaming of a time when their particular form of identity was symbolically central to the conflicted national imaginaries of the island.

O'Toole's article typifies the way the Agreement was hailed as a paradigm shift in conceptualisation of Northern Ireland's political and social environment. In essence, he fuses together a revisionist skepticism towards the generalisations of nationalist discourse, those conceptions of romantic Ireland he perceived to have driven the conflict, and the postmodern, pluralist celebration of difference instantiated in Northern Ireland's consociational arrangement. The characteristics of the former are necessarily diffuse and have taken many ideological forms (Marxist, Unionist, liberal and so on), but O'Toole takes his place within the Irish historiographical revolution that R.F. Foster pithily summed up as the "deliberately even-handed determination to give all sides their due."[86] The allegation of revisionists is that a partisan, anti-colonial nationalist historical discourse emphasises continuities of oppression at the expense of recognising historical difference, overwrites the specificities of particular historical periods, and constitutes an Irish people whose sufferings are privileged over those of the island's minority populations (whether that be women, Unionists or Protestants).[87] Terry Eagleton perceptively identified the link between this approach and postmodernism when he accused both of colluding with contemporary capitalism. In contrast to the universalism of nationalism and socialism: "The political language of postmodernity is one of identity, marginality, locality, difference, otherness, diversity, desire. With some important qualifications, revisionism is part of

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[84] O'Toole, "Introduction: A History of True Lies" in Barry, *Plays 1*, pp.vii-xiv (p.viii).
[85] O'Toole, "Play for Ireland".
[86] R.F. Foster, *Paddy and Mr. Punch: Connections in Irish and English History* (London: Penguin, 1995), p.33.
[87] See D. George Boyce & Alan O'Day eds., *The Making of Modern Irish History: Revisionism and the Revisionist Controversy* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1996).

this milieu."[88] The problem, Eagleton argued, was that such an approach left unaddressed those unequal distributions of power and wealth that structure the relations between identities. This elision of class and gender inequalities is certainly a feature of O'Toole's analysis in general, even as he does not go so far as to actively celebrate the "dramatisation of fragments" that he sees as symptomatic of the decline of nationalist narratives of all hues.

On the one hand, O'Toole helpfully identifies how the stalemate in the North, and a weariness towards the zero-sum game of ethno-nationalist conflict, implicated previously dominant categories of masculinity in a manner that threw them into crisis. He locates in Barry's play a morbid symptom of the peace: the way redundancy breeds nostalgia for forms of military masculinity cultivated to support the conflict, thereby leaving the men in a state of suspension between a past that refuses to subside and a pluralist future that has yet to fully arrive. On the other hand, in his analysis we find no inkling that nostalgia, however misguided, constitutes an understandable, skeptical attitude towards the emerging postmodern, liberal status quo's promise of prosperity. Indeed, O'Toole's lack of attention to disabling conditions of economic inequality means he overlooks how feelings of powerlessness were exploited by political leaders in Northern Ireland to reroute a nascent class-based discontent through nationalist fellow feeling. It is precisely the political uses and abuses of fear and vulnerability that are at the heart of the plays discussed in this chapter, all of which were produced and performed in the shaky period immediately following the signing of the Agreement.

This period immediately seemed to be characterised by a re-masculinisation of politics in the face of a peace settlement that seemed to threaten a loss of identity. As Cochrane observes, faced with accusation of capitulation politicians were "more concerned with calming their nervous supporters and preventing splits in their parties that they were about demonstrating they had reached a historic compromise with their former enemies."[89] Between 1998 and 2002 the newly established Northern Ireland Assembly was repeatedly suspended over issues such as the reform

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[88] Terry Eagleton, *Crazy John, The Bishop and Other Essays in Irish Culture* (Cork: Field Day Publications, 1998), p.326.
[89] Feargal Cochrane, *Northern Ireland: The Reluctant Peace* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2013), p.190.

of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the decommissioning of the Provisional IRA's weapons, before collapsing entirely. Within unionism, pressure from the political 'extremes' – Ian Paisley's anti-Agreement Democratic Unionist Party – limited the manoeuvrability of David Trimble, Northern Ireland's First Minister and leader of the Ulster Unionist Party. The regulation of Orange Order marches by the newly formed Parades Commission and the introduction of restrictions on the use of British symbols on government buildings precipitated a sense, particularly amongst working-class Protestant communities, "that the essence of their cultural identity being hollowed out or diluted."[90] Politicians were therefore keen to reassert Protestant unity and historical continuity, which often meant reconsolidating unionism's traditional gender roles. As Raccioppi and O'Sullivan See have noted, the contest between Trimble's liberalism and Paisley's traditionalism took the form of a competition between a 'respectable' and self-restrained *bourgeois* unionist masculinity and a Loyalist masculinity that was "exuberant, tough, working class, impatient, and slightly unruly."[91] Both processed their own political position through the projection of traits considered effeminate upon the other. The crucible of competing claims to a unionist tradition already deeply enmeshed in gendernormativity and masculine supremacism provided little space for masculinity to reform itself in a progressive manner.

Within nationalism, the constitutionalist approach of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) waned in appeal as Sinn Féin moved away from backing armed conflict. Sinn Féin faced considerable criticism from former Provisional IRA figures who regarded the Agreement as both copper-fastening partition and rendering pointless the violence that preceded it. Like their unionist counterparts, figures such as Gerry Adams sought to present the change in circumstances in terms of continuity by conjuring with those leaders, almost always men, who came to define resistance to the British during the 'Troubles'. The masculine traits of assertiveness, stoicism and self-control, read into the lives of those who came before, offered a useful way to bolster against the threat of weakness produced by the Agreement's institutionalisation of political interdependence. On the one hand Sinn

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[90] James White McAuley, *Very British Rebels?: The Culture and Politics of Ulster Loyalism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p.5.
[91] Linda Raccioppi & Katherine O'Sullivan See, "Ulstermen and Loyalist Ladies on Parade: Gendering Unionism in Northern Ireland", *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 2:1 (2000), pp.1-29 (p.20).

Féin did adopt a liberal approach to the inclusion of women in the movement that contrasted sharply with unionism's illiberal turn. In lieu of the formerly radical conceptions of social justice that suffused Republican feminism of the 1980s, gender was treated alongside other identity claims as part of a broader 'Equality Agenda'. On the other hand, the fragile period that followed the instantiation of power-sharing also saw the continuation of male dominance within the party.[92] As one "Derry Woman Scorned" wrote in a 1998 letter to the *Irish News*: "What is being created is another male club for the boys": given the party nominations for the upcoming Assembly election, nationalist women were being asked to ignore "the absence of justice and equality".[93]

In the late 1990s and early 2000s Northern Irish theatre was also in a state of flux. By 1998 the artistic coteries that had defined dramatic responses to the 'Troubles' had, for all practical purposes, ceased to exist. Field Day, with its formidable roster of literary figures,[94] and Charabanc, the theatre group that had carved out a space for female practitioners and perspectives, were no longer making new work.[95] The Donegal born Frank McGuinness, whose plays about the 'Troubles' – *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1985) and *Carthaginians* (1988) – came to define the possibility of cross-cultural understanding, had turned his attention elsewhere. Christina Reid and Anne Devlin, anatomisers of working class women's difficult place within unionism and nationalism, were writing very little. A few local organisations came to dominate the theatrical terrain, the most significant of which to produce new work was the Tinderbox Theatre Company. Founded in 1988 by actor Lalor Roddy, playwright Tim Loane and director Stephen Wright with the intention of presenting "challenging theatre not ordinarily seen in Belfast", the company nurtured local playwrights such as Owen McCafferty, Daragh Carville, Joe Crilly and Tim Loane, and promoted established figures such as Marie Jones and Martin Lynch.[96] However, the decline of the North's internationally recognised

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[92] See Linda Raccioppi & Katherine O'Sullivan See, "Engendering Democratic Transition from Conflict: Women's Inclusion in Northern Ireland's Peace Process", *Comparative Politics*, 38.2 (2006), pp.189-208.

[93] Derry Woman Scorned, 'The Letters', *Irish News*, 10 June (1998) p.10

[94] Field Day included, amongst others, Brian Friel, Stephen Rea, Seamus Deane, Tom Paulin, Seamus Heaney, Thomas Kilroy and Stewart Parker (who passed away prematurely in 1988).

[95] Marie Jones, Carol Scanlan, Eleanor Methven, Maureen Macauley, Martin Lynch and Brenda Winter were all members of Charabanc.

[96] Jane Coyle, "Tinderbox", *Theatre Ireland*, 25, Spring (1991), p.20.

theatre groups resulted in a return to the pattern of native playwrights seeking recognition elsewhere. There was certainly a market for work from and about the region: the national press in Britain and Ireland were both preoccupied with the fragility of the Peace Process and unionist discontent. But such interest was above all rooted in a broader preoccupation with, and market for, ostensibly disaffected masculinities operating within these diverse contexts. Two of the playwrights discussed in this chapter, Gary Mitchell and Owen McCafferty, had breakthrough productions of their plays in Dublin and London – the former at the Abbey Theatre and Royal Court, and the latter at the National Theatre. Both shared an interest in the kind of troubled masculinities that featured prominently in British and Irish drama of the 1990s. The In-Yer-Face theatre of writers such as Mark Ravenhill (*Shopping and Fucking*, 1996) and Sarah Kane (*Blasted*, 1995) traced male anger, violence and despair to the disintegration of the nation's heavy industries, deteriorating job security, and the impact of feminism on patriarchal gender norms.[97] Likewise, in Ireland playwrights such as Tom Murphy (*Conversations on a Homecoming*, 1985) Conor McPherson (*This Lime Tree Bower,* 1995), and Mark O'Rowe (*Howie the Rookie,* 1999) employed the dramatic monologue form to explore the social isolation of working class men at the margins of the country's booming neoliberal economy. In this context, Northern Irish theatre offered British and Irish audiences a way of understanding the Peace Process in terms of a broader, more familiar, crisis of masculinities in the Western imaginary. Conversely, this broader framing of the problem helped Northern writers introduce global shifts in class and gender relations into their analyses of those issues (such as demilitarisation and sectarianism) that were specific to the region. Crucially, international interest in dysfunctional masculinities meant that, despite the gains of the 1980s, Northern Irish theatre remained a male dominated affair.

If the the performance of masculinities in crisis emerged as a central feature of British and Irith theatre in the 1990s, then in the North it featured as an aspect of the failure of political parties to productively share power and articulate demands that fell accross the sectarian divide. Northern playwrights set out to expose and challenge the uses of abuses of crisis in post-Agreement political and social life. Gary Mitchell's *As the Beast Sleeps* and Joseph Crilly's *On McQuillan's Hill* disrupted those models of

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[97] See Aleks Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today* (London: Faber & Faber, 1998).

plot that sought to recuperate experiences of weakness and abjection as symbolic strength. Both plays focussed on the difficult process of decommissioning former paramilitaries who worried the peace constituted defeat. Addressing former members of the Ulster Defence Association and the Provisional IRA respectively, their work depicts the performance of masculinity in crisis as an articulation of the men's powerlessness within the new political dispensation and their skepticism towards its capacity to deliver improvements to their lives beyond the mere cessation of paramilitary violence. With have no jobs, no prestige, and no enemy to defend against, these men turn to ever more unhealthy demonstrations of nostalgia for past certainties that cannot be recovered (if they ever existed), and in doing so find themselves in ever more isolated, lonely and distraught. The power of both plays emanated from their consideration of political violence through the lens of gender, centralising the fear of weakness that undergirds the public expression of Loyalist and Republican revanchism. Nostalgia for a lost sense of unity, strength and independence, both in formal politics and amongst former paramilitaries, was symptomatic of a failure to terms with the traumatic, violent and unheroic reality of the 'Troubles'.

These plays are very much a product of the pessimism that afflicted politics immediately after the Agreement. Neither mourns the passing of the old patriarchal order – indeed, they locate on the failure of the new to emerge precisely in those Loyalist and Republican men who most aggressively mourn their loss of status. But even if this "dramatisation of fragments" befitted a society emerging out of a conflict driven by grand narratives, *As the Beast Sleeps* and *On McQuillan's Hill* signalled a creative impasse brought about by a skepticism towards the potential of theatre and performance to conceptualise alternative political formations. Mitchell in particular rendered politics a hopelessly deceptive and theatricalised realm and was wary of the ability of his own theatre-making to imagine viable alternatives. It is important, therefore, to trace another strand of post-Agreement performance, one that existed in dialogical relation to the work of Mitchell and Crilly. Though Owen McCafferty began his career writing monologue and duologue plays, many of which traced the very crises exemplified in Crilly and Mitchell's tragedies, his shift to the vast ensemble cast of his 2003 play *Scenes from the Big Picture* represents a salutary engagement with the politics of form. This shift signals skepticism towards both the

use of crisis to reconstitute fantasies of wholeness and independence, and the sufficiency of merely dramatising the states of impasse and social fragmentation. Using a series of intertwined plots to recover inter-personal connections denied in the beleaguered attempts of individuals onstage to master and transcend fundamental conditions of dependency. More than merely diagnosing how performances of male trouble hindered the peace process, the play prompted audiences to imagine a situation in which political claims were rooted less in the desire to shore up identities against one another, than in levering the constitutive interdependency of the 'two communities' for political change.

Crisis and Consolidation

Beleaguered, wounded, and abject masculine bodies have historically acquired their status as representative of unionist and nationalist identities as a whole, a mode of representativity that was reconfigured, rather than jettisoned, in post-Agreement political discourse and (in one notable example) political theatre. A remarkable feature of political commentary and speech-making in the post-Agreement period was the preponderance of gendered metaphors. Those seeking to criticise the impotency of those engaged in the new political dispensation often resorted to a gender-coded association of weakness with femininity. When in 2001 David Trimble was narrowly re-elected as First Minister, relying on the votes of the cross-community Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC), Ian Paisley condemned him in in an extraordinary speech at the DUP annual conference. He called the UUP leader "the chief sell-out agent, and a master of deception" and accused him of "grovelling around in the mud begging the party of cross dressers to support his re-election."[98] For Paisley, the dilution of unionist power in government to its emasculation. The UUP's dependence on women seemed to reverse the supposedly 'natural' division between the macho ruler and feminine ruled. We see a similar, if less explicit, invocation of emasculation in writings by anti-Agreement Republicans. In 2003 former IRA member Anthony McIntyre, reflecting on the fortunes of the political settlement, declared that "Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern have played

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[98] Ian Paisley, "Extracts of a Speech by Ian Paisley to DUP Annual Conference, 2001", *CAIN* (2001) https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/dup/ip_2001.htm [retrieved 19/10/16].

handmaiden to the collective vanity of our politicians."[99] Sinn Féin in particular had become part of a political class busy "grooming and preening itself in front of cameras, making ever more meaningful Emily O'Reilley's barb that the only thing that will normally come between a politician and media exposure is 'sudden death'."[100] Politics, it seemed, had become a theatricalised domain defined less by meaningful results than the construction of a presentational artifice and ostentation traditionally assumed to be more 'naturally' the preserve of women. With this preponderance of cross-dressers, preeners, and masters of deception, political leaders seemed to have reduced the truly authentic identities of nationalism and unionism to mere display.

To understand this gender-coding of post-Agreement identity crisis, it is important to note that claims of and about identity have long been deployed to legitimate wider political arguments. The parties and movements that emerged in Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth century were overwhelmingly preoccupied with defining 'the people' and with advancing the political arguments and claims that were articulated with that notion of the people.[101] Both Irish nationalists and unionists used the visual and written media of the day to construct what Benedict Anderson famously called "imagined communities" through which they mediated their divergent political aspirations, and with which they appealed to their respective audiences to constitute themselves as homogenous, distinct collectivities.[102] The notion of a shared identity is what enables individuals to imagine themselves as sharing something (whether nation, religion or ethnicity) in common with those they have never met. Even as it provides the foundations for collective political action, it also serves to obscure those structural inequalities that intersect national or ethic allegiances. Which is not to say that "an imagined community" is simply an immaterial structure; they shape material life, legitimise and delegitimise certain social practices, and provide culturally mediated meanings to make sense of social existence such that belonging becomes a deeply felt and embodied sense of the ways things are. This is precisely why those advocating social change in early twentieth

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[99] Anthony MacIntyre, "I Don't Get Angry Any More", *The Blanket*, April (2003), http://indiamond6.ulib.iupui.edu:81/dontget.html [retrieved 19/10/16].
[100] *Ibid.*
[101] See Richard Bourke, *Peace in Ireland: The War of Ideas* (London Pimlico, 2003).
[102] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1995), p.6.

century Ireland appealed to preexisting identities while subtly reinterpreting the political arguments arising out of those identities.

Modern British unionist and Irish nationalist identities built upon a field of possibilities bequeathed by earlier generations. In Ireland this terrain was already suffused with the gendered and radicalised discourses used to make sense of colonial rule. Late-Victorian ethnological literature and political magazines constructed Irishness as both predisposed "to feel the spell of feminine idiosyncrasy",[103] and also inclined towards outburst of violence (the "effect of despotism, whether political or ecclesiastical".)[104] The ideal of Christian manliness, by contrast, "followed a logic of sublimation" and consisted of "a vigilant, rational self-control – in *strong passions, strongly checked*."[105] Ironically enough, this self-abnegating ideal found its way into the plays of nationalists such as Padraig Pearse and W.B. Yeats as they sought to refashion the supposed emotional excess of Irish "rebellion", as exemplified in the 1916 Easter Rising, into an act that was controlled, voluntary and selfless enough to avoid the shame of the stereotype. On the unionist's side, the manliness of leaders such as Edward Carson and James Craig was portrayed in the print media as representative of a distinctive Ulster Protestant identity in Northern Ireland. Due to their militant anti-Home Rule position and recourse to paramilitary resistance, they occupied an awkward position in the British and Irish imaginary. St John Ervine, the Belfast-born, Protestant writer, even went so far as to declare Carson a "stage Irishman" too "quick-tempered, impulsive, rash in his speech" to lead northern Protestants.[106] Nevertheless, when thousands of unionists signed Ulster's Solemn League and Covenant against Home Rule, headlines declared: "Ulstermen Banded Together as One Man".[107] In contrast to the unmanliness of those deemed disloyal, republican or nationalist, Carson was "Ulster's King-At-Arms": an exemplary figure that represented the Loyalist ideal of chivalry and temporising virtue (figure 1). On both 'sides', then, the manliness of particular populations and leaders was made to stand in for the nation as a whole and the project of national liberation became

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[103] Matthew Arnold, *The Study of Celtic Literature* (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1867), p.108
[104] Goldwin Smith, *Irish History and Irish Character* (Oxford & London: J.H. & Jas Parker, 1861), p.10.
[105] Joseph Valente, *The Myth of Manliness In Irish National Culture, 1880-1922* (Urbana, Chicago & Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2011), p.3.
[106] St. John Ervine, *Sir Edward Carson and the Ulster Movement* (Dublin: Maunsel, 1915), p.49.
[107] Sean Brady, "Why Examine Men, Masculinities and Religion in Northern Ireland?", *Men, Masculinities and Religious Change in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp.218-251 (p.226).

indistinguishable from the masculinist project of self-overcoming. Mastery over the self and others constituted the benchmark of military forms of masculinity that both represented and enacted claims to national (and regional) self-determination.

Historically, then, both femininity and excess have been used in Ireland as metaphors to describe those states of powerlessness that the strong figure of the 'sovereign' military male promises to overcome. The potential for crisis is therefore at the heart of gendered representations of the nation, particularly where the very concept of the nation is contested. As Finlayson argues:

> Identity becomes noticeable because something has disrupted or dislocated it, drawing attention to the fact that it is an identity and not just the way things are. Hence, paradoxically, threat is intrinsic to the possibility of recognising and defining an identity.[108]

In this light discourses of "masculinity in crisis" can be viewed as fundamental to the consolidation of claims over national identity. Where the threat of disempowerment is interpreted as a process of emasculation or feminisation, the reconstruction of men's roles, and those of women too, becomes of central importance.

In such conditions women often become both the guarantors and bearers of national honour. Navigating British cultural constructions of gender and leadership, Irish nationalism became complicit in the gendering of national identity, as exemplified in bifurcated role allocated to the feminine in its national culture. On the one hand Ireland was depicted variously as female: Mother Ireland, the Shan Van Vocht, Cathleen Ní Houlihan, Roisín Dubh, and so on. On the other hand, the Irish Free State that emerged disempowered women in practice. The 1937 constitution relegated women to the role of homemakers tasked with the unpaid biological and cultural reproduction of the nation.[109] The situation in the North was little different. As Leanne McCormick has noted, both nationalist and unionist populations ended up basing "much of their identity upon the maintenance of high moral standards, particularly with regard to female behaviour."[110] As bearers of the cultural and social

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[108] Alan Finlayson, "Loyalist Political Identity after the Peace", *Capital & Class*, 23.3 (1999), pp.47-75 (p.55).

[109] See *Constitution of Ireland* (1937), http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/cons/en, [retrieved 22/10/16].

[110] Leanne McCormick, *Regulating Sexuality: Women in Twentieth-century Northern Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), p.208.

futurity of the nationalist and unionist populations, the fate of the nation was tied to the project of regulating women's behaviour, which was constructed in turn as uniquely vulnerable to external threat and prone to waywardness. The role of both churches in fostering both nationalist and unionist political allegiances and cultural unity in the North has further cemented these gender roles. That religion became a boundary marker for ethnic divisions meant that political elites – ever concerned with the demographic "numbers game" – were less inclined to challenge the church's rigid demarcation of masculine and feminine spheres.[111]

Despite their material advantages over women in such conditions, the real roles available to men have also been limited in important ways. In the unionist-dominated Northern Irish state pre-1972 there developed a "moral economy of loyalty" which discriminated against those who questioned the UUP's administration of the state.[112] The prospect of internal and external enemies weakening unionist hegemony not only reinstalled the dominance of Protestant men, but also drove the development of social practices and institutions that privileged particular cultural ideals of masculinity over others. The Orange Institution played an important role in regulating masculinity by enlisting Protestant men in the task of defending unionist dominance of the nascent Northern Irish state. As a fraternal religious organisation with significant political and commercial links, the Orange Lodges redirected the divergent class interests of working-class Protestant men into the task of demonstrating the unity, integrity and dominance of unionism while simultaneously offering them material advantages over their Catholic neighbours. Their annual marches, most notably those taking place on 12th July to commemorate the Battle of the Boyne, continue to be broadly gendered: the marchers are overwhelmingly male, their audience consisting mostly of women and children. As Todd observes, the dynamic of masculinity at play in such events construct a dynamic of masculine self-overcoming: "The Orangeman is both defender and defended, assertively male but behind the defences possessing a powerless female core."[113] The threat of internal weakness, vulnerability and fragmentation is necessary to justify the need for such

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[111] See Kathryn Conrad, *Locked in the Family Cell: Gender, Sexuality and Political Agency in Irish National Discourse* (Madison & London: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), pp.117-138.

[112] See Christopher J. V. McLaughlin, *Labour and the Politics of Disloyalty in Belfast, 1921-39* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

[113] Jennifer Todd, "The Two Traditions in Unionist Political Culture", *Irish Political Studies*, 2 (1987), pp.1-26 (p.6).

muscular demonstrations of unity. Rather than renegotiating the gender norms imposed upon Ireland by Britain, then, the swirling gender anxieties leading up to, and following, the founding of the two post-partition states served to renegotiate and reestablish temporarily disrupted norms. In the close-quarters of ethno-sectarian competition of the North, the conjuring of crisis and threat was as much about warding off internal disunity (particularly along class lines) as it was to do with protecting against an external enemy.[114]

The 'Troubles' put pressure on such cultural ideals in a number of ways that have tended to be written out in post-Agreement reappraisals of the conflict. As in other parts of Europe and the United States, feminist groups such as emerged in Northern Ireland (for example, the Northern Ireland Women's Rights Movement) to identify and challenge patriarchal values and the legitimacy of male dominance within both nationalist and unionist communities. [115] Political pressure from Westminster to implement equality legislation, and an economic transition from traditionally male-dominated industries such as manufacturing to the services sector, precipitated a dramatic increase in the percentage of women in the Northern Irish labour force.[116] The emergence of a multitude of grass-roots women's groups and, in 1994, the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, signalled the possibility of organising around an identity and a set of political interests that cut across the nationalist-unionist binary. [117] Though women continued to navigate between competing identity discourses riven with limited tropes of femininity, the 'Troubles' also challenged the stereotypes of women as victims and peacemakers. The IRA's women's organisation, the Cumann na mBan, and the women's Ulster Defence Association both directly participated in armed conflict, and women served as members of the RUC, UDR and the British Army. [118] The dominance of men in paramilitary organisations nevertheless persisted; as one IRA volunteer noted: "It still shocks me that I have two

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[114] As Brady argues, the Orange Order, the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Ulster Special Constabulary (or "B-Specials") "served as much to keep hot-headed loyalist men and youths in check, as it did in keeping Catholic men unarmed and in a permanent state of suspicion." *Op. Cit.,* p.230.

[115] See Carmel Roulston, "The Women's Movement in Northern Ireland, 1973-1989", *Science & Society,* 53.2 (1989), pp.219-236.

[116] Rosemary Sales, *Women Divided: Gender, Religion and Politics in Northern Ireland* (London: Routledge, 1997), p.136.

[117] See Eilish Rooney, "Women in Northern Irish Politics: Difference Matters", *Gender, Democracy and Inclusion in Northern Ireland*, ed. Carmel Roulston & Celia Davies (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), pp.24-46.

[118] Dieter Reinsch, "Cumann na mBan & Women in Irish Republican Paramilitary Organisations, 1969-1989", *Estudios irlandeses*, 11 (2016), pp.149-162.

battles to fight—one against the Brits and secondly with the men of my own organisation."[119] Not only did this place male combatants in a position of power over the women of their communities, it also allowed them access to political decision-making and perpetuate androcentric retrospective accounts of the 'Troubles'. As Sara McDowell notes in her study of post-Agreement commemoration: "While women played both implicit and explicit roles in the Northern Ireland Troubles, these roles have not been fully acknowledged on the ground, namely by the male architects of commemoration".[120] It seemed that during the transition from war to peace, the rhetoric of "equality of opportunity" enshrined in the Agreement obfuscated the recuperation of patriarchal power.

While men continued to access communal power through and beyond the Agreement, their embodiment of militarised masculinities was not without its negative consequences. Involvement in the paramilitaries and security forces exposed men to injury, imprisonment and significant psychological trauma. The stoical dispositions they were expected to assume as a part of masculine identity often affected their capacity to deal with such experiences. "Men don't cry", Grounds and Jamieson note in their studies of ex-paramilitaries, "an ex-prisoner identity can stand in the way of men seeking help when they need it, or lead to self-medication for stress with alcohol or drugs."[121] After the Agreement the problem remained that the war weariness and trauma experienced by many was only acknowledged, across a variety of cultural contexts, in such a way as to recuperate the prospect of weakness. The day before the referendum on the Agreement, *Belfast Telegraph* contained a special supplement designed to convince wavering unionist constituents to vote yes. This supplement confronted its readers an image of John Taylor MP (then deputy leader of the UUP) from 1972 (figure 2). Following an IRA attack, he lies bloodied in a hospital bed, eyes closed, a catheter running from his nose. The accompanying strapline, written by the MP, glossed the image:

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[119] Eileen Fairweather, Roisín McDonough & Melanie MacFeydean, *Only the Rivers Run Free: Northern Ireland, the Women's War* (London: Pluto Press, 1984) p.241.
[120] Sara McDowell, "Commemorating 'Dead Men': Gendering the Past and Present in Post-Conflict Northern Ireland", *Gender, Place & Culture*, 15.4 (2008), pp.335-354, (p.350).
[121] Adrian Grounds and Ruth Jamieson, "No Sense of an Ending: Researching the Experience of Imprisonment and Release Among Republican Ex-Prisoners", *Theoretical Criminology*, 7.3 (2003), pp.347-362 (p.350).

People often asked me if that experience influenced me in any way. My reply is No! I am not exceptional. As a Christian I would not allow the IRA to make me intolerant or extreme. As a Unionist I would not let the IRA weaken my resolve that it is best for all the people of Northern ireland [*sic*] – Roman Catholic and Protestant – to remain in the United Kingdom as we have been for 200 years.[122]

Here there is a clear acknowledgement of the scale and severity of the trauma and wounding caused by the conflict. However, such experiences do not prompt a reckoning with weakness and its attendant challenge to fantasies of masculine stoicism; rather, weakness is presented as demanding a rugged, masculinising resistance to invasion. Taylor's rhetorical infusion of religious imagery – with its overtones of Christ-like sacrifice – and political integrity emphasise unionist identity's capacity to endure and transcend the corporeal experience of passive, feminine victimhood. By cannily appropriating the unequivocal rhetoric of Paisley's campaign against the ill-fated 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement – "Ulster Says No" – he could re-enforce the moderate position: say "No!" to Irish nationalism by saying yes to the Agreement.

The image of Taylor's body reveals the problematic contradiction faced by those who claimed to defend their communities but for whom violence was not an option. To adopt the wounded male as an exemplification of the struggle was to run the risk of it becoming a figure of defeat, for vulnerability and passivity. The invocation of 'masculinity in crisis' could become a way to anticipate such accusations by casting the endurance of vulnerability as a sign of ideological strength. This is a strategy more commonly associated with Irish republicanism and the so-called 'myth of martyrdom' – but it is important to acknowledge that, instead of being a sign of backwardness or traditionalism, such sacrificial imagery constituted a powerful rhetorical strategy and was adapted by both sides to suit the changing political climate. They both used the mass media and other cultural resources to circulate exemplary forms of heroic subjectivity that helped buttress their various political arguments.

The twentieth anniversary of the 1981 hunger strikes presented an opportunity for Sinn Féin to legitimise their own pro-Agreement position. Undertaken to resist the

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[122] John Taylor, 'The Day I Nearly Died', *Belfast Telegraph*, Ulster Unionist Voice Advertisement, 21 May (Belfast, 1998) p. 3

removal of political status for paramilitary prisoners, the strikes are often interpreted as marking a turning point in the strategy of republicanism. Gerry Adams's 2003 memoir of the conflict and subsequent peace begins with an account of the strikes to argue that the election of Bobby Sands to the House of Commons laid the groundwork for Sinn Féin's entry into electoral politics.[123] But in 2001 the significance of the strikes for contemporary republicanism was still hotly debated. Speaking at the Conway Mill, IRA volunteer Marian Price observed: "the ultimate irony that a major point of principle of the hunger strikers was their refusal to don a British convict's uniform while today former comrades sit quite comfortably in the mantle of British ministerial office."[124] If Sinn Féin's position within the new dispensation rendered them politically exposed within nationalist communities, then it was imperative that they claimed continuity with iconic figures such as Sands.

The 2001 anniversary also saw the premiere of *The Laughter of Our Children*, a play written by former hunger striker Lawrence McKeown and his fellow ex-IRA member Brian Campbell. Performed at Anharclann na Carraige/ The Theatre on the Rock under the direction of Dubbeljoint Productions' Pam Brighton, it depicted the social changes that occurred around the 1981 strikes as foreshadowing the peace process. Two plots are interwoven: the first is a monologue delivered by a Republican prisoner named Peadar reflecting upon his experience participating in the strike; the second traces the response of his family and their small rural community. Based on McKeown's own participation in 1981, the struggle between Peadar's nascent political convictions and the conservative nationalism of his father is presented as typical of an entire generation of Republican activists and combatants. The actions of a younger generation precipitate a small revolution in the church-dominated social order of the rural community. While the whole family struggles to come to terms Peadar's decision, his mother Mary is convinced by Síle, a colleague at the school in which she works, to join the campaign to elect Bobby Sands to parliament. In a reference the formation of female-led Relatives Action Committees during the strikes, Mary's political activities reveal the conservatism of the local

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[123] See Bourke, *Op. Cit.*, p.149.
[124] Marian Price, "The Legacy of the Hunger Strikes", *The Blanket*, 23 Jan (2001), http://indiamond6.ulib.iupui.edu:81/mprice.html [08/10/2017].

clerical hierarchy. [125] Father Boyle, a parish priest, chastises Síle for her "inappropriate behaviour" in organising protests in the town.[126] Here, then, was a version of the Hunger Strikes that was appropriate to the politics being followed by Sinn Féin after the Agreement. Rather than presenting the events of 1981 as precipitating the Republican movement's decision to pursue *both* violent and non-violent means ("with a ballot paper in this hand an an Armalite in the other", in the words of Danny Morrison), Campbell and McKeown use the Hunger Strikes to legitimize Sinn Féin's turn from revolutionary Republicanism to a liberal, pluralist and constitutionalist nationalism.[127]

Even as it appealed to more progressive nationalist constituencies, however, the play retained a starkly gendered division of political labour. Despite acknowledging the involvement of women in the movement, McKeown and Campbell's play makes no reference to the women in Armagh prison who joined their male counterparts in 1981. Mary's role in the struggle is aligned with her status as a mother. As she declares: "I bore [Peadar] for nine months, gave birth to him and reared him and if he's a criminal then I'm one too" (27). Peadar's solitary recollections of pain and doubt, by contrast, attain a symbolic resonance that allows them to transcend such material concerns. This was facilitated by a set design that drew associations between his self-emaciation and Christ-like sacrifice. As Malachi O'Doherty remarked in his review: "the blanket man stands before a big bronze image of the Lark of Freedom, as drawn by Bobby Sands. It looks like a halo, or a holy medal or the gong of Twentieth Century Fox." [128] Peadar's final speech recoups the emasculating aspects of self-emaciation in terms of symbolic strength. He declares that the prison:

> [N]ever became the 'Breaker's Yard' the British had intended it to be. We didn't let them. That's why we were on hunger strike in 1981. That's why we continued the struggle in later years. That's why the struggle still goes on. (51)

[125] See Christina Loughran, "Armagh and Feminist Strategy: Campaigns around Republican Women Prisoners in Armagh Jail", *Feminist Review*, 21.1 (1986), pp.59-79.

[126] Brian Campbell & Lawrence McKeown, *The Laugher of Our Children* (unpublished performance script courtesy of the author, 2001) p.34. All further references to this edition will be cited parenthetically in the text.

[127] Richard English, *Armed Struggle: A History of the IRA* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) pp.224-5.

[128] Malachi O'Doherty, "The Hunger Strike 20 Years On", *Belfast Telegraph*, 4 May (2001), p.1.

The resonances with the contemporary political situation are clear. Invoking a logic of martyrdom that embraces failure as a necessary, dialectical, step towards national renewal, the experience of transcending weakness is aligned with the compromise of the Agreement. The message for the broadly republican audience of the Theatre on the Rock was that involvement with the institutions of partition was as yet another ordeal to be endured by the truly strong in spirit.

Taylor's article and *The Laughter of Our Children* demonstrate how the political fragility of the period immediately following the signing of the Agreement provided fertile ground for discourses of 'masculinity in crisis'. As Fintan Walsh has argued, "when masculinity is repeatedly articulated through troubled positions, the endurance of subjection, or gender trouble, works to secure identity"[129] At a time when detractors coded power-sharing as effeminate, ostentatious, and superficial, those who advocated to the peace drew upon the heroic acts of self-sacrifice that ghosted the histories of their respective traditions to legitimise themselves as the 'true' defenders of nationalism and unionism. The success of Sinn Féin and Paisley's DUP between 1998 and 2003 indicated that the electorate rewarded those who could articulate their political positions in terms of continuity, a task to which the rhetoric of stoical endurance was well suited because of its deep associations with the founding of the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland.

The discourse of 'masculinity in crisis' has its consequences. As Judith Butler notes, figured in this way the nation "seeks to reconstitute its imagined wholeness, but only at the price of denying its own vulnerability, its dependency, its exposure".[130] Not only did the example of crisis embodied in *The Laughter of Our Children* marginalise the experiences of female combatants, it also minimised the trauma and wounding exacted on the bodies of men. To depict such violence onstage would have been to render aspects of the stoic, invulnerable warrior ideal unsustainable. The play therefore represented a failure to recognise both the pressure the 'Troubles' put on traditional gender norms and the Agreement's challenge to fantasies of mastery and independence. Other playwrights, however, sought to unpick the sanitisation involved in such performances of male trouble. In his review of the play Ian Hill

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[129] Fintan Walsh, *Male Trouble: Masculinity and the Performance of Crisis* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p.10.
[130] Butler, *Precarious Life*, p.41.

remarked: "Theatre goers and political analysts who have the time will compare this republican hagiography with Gary Mitchell's warts and all depiction of Protestant paramilitaries in *As The Beast Sleeps*, running simultaneously at the Lyric Theatre, and benefit by the comparison."[131] It is to this play that the chapter now turns.

As the Beast Sleeps: Crisis as Self-Entrapment

Produced in Dublin, London and Belfast, Gary Mitchell's remarkable success had much to do with the political vulnerabilities of the period immediately following the ratification of the Agreement and the prominence given to stories of Loyalist disaffection in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The peace marked the culmination of the slow collapse pre-'Troubles' state's "ethno-gender regime".[132] Prior to the introduction of direct rule in 1972 Stormont developed as a one-party state whose official and unofficial institutions – particularly the RUC and the Orange Order – and socially conservative ideology privileged Protestant men at the expense of both women and Catholics. The Agreement initiated the regulation of such institutions under the guise of the Parades Commission, which sought to re-route Orange Order marches that passed through Catholic areas, and the Independent Commission on Policing, which pursued reform of the RUC. While most nationalists perceived the new arrangement as improving their position in the state, many unionists felt, as one Protestant church grouping put it, "everything solid melting into air".[133] This is reflected in the fact that Northern Ireland's Catholic population overwhelmingly voted in favour of the Agreement, whereas only around 57% of Protestants did the same.[134] There was a pervasive sense that nationalists and republicans, long alienated from the state, had developed independent cultural resources through which they built their movements both at home and abroad. *The Laughter of Our Children* is emblematic of theatre's role in preparing them for peace. By contrast, as one critic in the *Sunday Times* noted: "unionism may not have surrendered an inch of territory, but

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[131] Ian Hill, "Affecting Performances in Focused Hunger Striking Play", *Belfast News Letter*, 9 May (2001), p.12.

[132] Linda Racioppi & Katherine O'Sullivan See, "`This we Will Maintain': Gender, Ethno-Nationalism and the Politics of Unionism in Northern Ireland", *Nations and Nationalism* 7.1, 2001, pp.93-112.

[133] James W. McAuley, "Unionism's Last Stand? Contemporary Unionist Politics and Identity in Northern Ireland", *Global Review of Ethnopolitics*, 3.1 (2003), p.60-74 (p.65).

[134] Bernadette Hayes & Ian MacAllister, "Who Coted for Peace? Public Support for the 1998 Northern Ireland Agreement", *Irish Political Studies*, 16.1 (2000), pp.73-93.

it long ago ceded the cultural arena to nationalist Ireland."[135] In this context, Mitchell's critical representations of Loyalist working-class experience seemed to represent "an uncertain unionism examining itself in the creative arena as never before."[136]

Born in the sprawling Rathcoole estate in north Belfast, a stronghold of the paramilitary Ulster Defence Association, Mitchell's plays of the late 1990s and 2000s achieved particular success in Dublin and London because they depicted a working-class, Loyalist milieu that had rarely been depicted onstage. Although he had some initial exposure through radio dramas such as *The World, the Flesh and the Devil* (1991), which won the BBC Radio 4 Young Playwrights award, *Dividing Force* (BBC NI, 1995) and *Drumcree* (BBC Radio 4, 1996), he came to international prominence when his play about UDA paramilitaries, *In a Little World of Our Own.* Produced by the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, it won the 1997 *Irish Times* Irish Theatre Award for best new play before transferring to the Donmar Warehouse in London. In 1998 he was appointed the writer-in-residence at the National Theatre. His depictions of the macho paramilitary world of the UDA suited a theatrical market already attuned to depictions of fraught masculinity, a preoccupation much remarked upon by writers, such as Alex Sierz. Historicising the "In-Yer-Face theatre" of the 1990s, he wrote:

> With its images of violent men and rude girls, it stemmed from two decades of growing feminist sensibility; in its ready acceptance of street slang and exuberant bad language, it reflected the importance of 'yoof' culture; in its obsession with laddish behaviour, it mirrored the crisis of masculinity; and in turning its back on the state-of-the-nation and the issue play, it suggested a crisis of the liberal imagination.[137]

In Britain Anthony Neilson (*Penetrator*, 1993), Sarah Kane (*Blasted*, 1995), and Mark Ravenhill (*Mojo*, 1995) foregrounded such themes. Irish playwrights such as, Conor McPherson (*Rum and Vodka*, 1994; *The Weir*, 1995) and Mark O'Rowe (*Howie the Rookie*, 1999) depicted marginalised masculinities in monologue form. Though the shrinking world of Mitchell's Loyalist paramilitaries may seem idiosyncratic, their particular frustrations could be comprehended as part of an archipelagic crisis, both

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[135] Mick Heaney, "Paying his Dues to the Union", *Sunday Times*, 17 Feb (2002), p.18.
[136] *Ibid.*
[137] Aleks Sierz, "Still in-yer-face?: Towards a critique and a summation", *New Theatre Quarterly*, 18.1 (2002), pp.17-24 (p.20).

in the gender order that sustained the dominance of certain masculine practices, and in the capacity of said practices to theatrically represent the broader state of British and Irish identities.

This lens was crucial in a context where Loyalists were "generally viewed as a 'dysfunctional' and ethno-sectarian abnormality dispossessed of meaningful value and positive intent."[138] The bitter and violent feuding that erupted between pro- and anti-peace factions of the UDA and Ulster Volunteer Force after the signing of the Agreement intensified the negative view of Loyalism. But the view that such groups were 'beyond the pale' simplified the complex class constitution of Loyalism within the broader unionist tradition, a history that is important for its influence on Mitchell's life and work.

Jennifer Todd distinguishes two strands of identity within unionism: Ulster Loyalists, who privilege an "imagined community" of northern Protestants over secondary and conditional identification with Britishness, and the Ulster British tradition, which prioritises affiliation with Britain as a liberal pluralist state.[139] After the dissolution of Stormont in 1972, the division between these "two traditions" emerged along class lines. The UDA's founding in the early 1970s was motivated in part by the perception that the middle-class establishment of the UUP and the Westminster government had abandoned working-class Protestant communities to republican violence. They were instrumental in organising the 1974 Ulster Worker's Council strike against the Sunningdale Agreement, an early attempt at power-sharing with liberal unionists broadly favoured. This flexing of working-class Protestant muscle convinced many within the UDA to consider a political path. In 1978 some members set up the New Ulster Political Research Group (NUPRG) which, in contrast to the UDA's earlier positions, produced policy documents that advocated the establishment of power-sharing in Northern Ireland. Their 1987 document *Common Ground* was notable for rooting the uncertainty of northern Protestants in the decline of Britain's "vast economic empire" and advocating for the federalisation of the

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[138] Peter Shirlow, *The End of Ulster Loyalism?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p.1.
[139] Jennifer Todd, *Op. Cit.*, p.3; p.11.

United Kingdom.[140] The intensification of sectarian violence from the UDA did not prevent the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP), the organisation's political wing, from pursuing such thinking in the peace talks that got underway in the 1990s. Indeed, Loyalism's concern for prisoner release and rehabilitation and the regeneration of deprived urban communities tallied with Sinn Féin; both parties were invited for their links with paramilitary groups. The UDP consistently highlighted the shared social concerns of the UK's working-classes, arguing that unionism needed to: "consider throwing in its lot with those who would democratise the UK state, destroying the power of the Establishment to deny the people of Northern Ireland their rights."[141]

The UDP's commitment to a political solution within the UDA was not sustained after the Agreement, however, as voters turned to the more 'respectable' DUP which was not tainted by overt links to the violence of the 'Troubles'. But their thinking lingered on in Gary Mitchell's work. On the one hand, the playwright has been careful to distance himself from the UDA:

> Once I was of a certain age I was very enthusiastic about joining an organisation to protect my community. But my dad and uncles had all been members of paramilitary organisations, and they left when it became more criminal.[142]

On the other hand, like the UDP, he interpreted the criminality and sectarianism as a symptom of the scant resources available to working-class communities: "They're down on their luck, they're squeezed, they've no money, they've no food, they're dying, and they're looking at the same people in the same streets to have everything."[143] Poverty, this comment suggests, only exacerbated the appeal of organisations, like the UDA, that offered men a way to participate in a fantasy of heroic masculinity and accrue a semblance of prestige. In Northern Ireland, as elsewhere, the failure of policy makers to address such conditions provided fertile ground for the reconstruction of patriarchal gender norms.

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[140] Ulster Political Research Group, "Common Sense: Northern Ireland - An Agreed Process", *CAIN* (Belfast: Cain, 1987/93), https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/commonsense.htm [retrieved 23/1/17].

[141] Quoted in James McAuley, "The Ulster Loyalist Political Parties: Towards a New Respectability", *Études irlandaises*, 22.2 (1997), pp.117-131 (p.126).

[142] Fionola Meredith, "A Man of Loyalty and Principles", *Irish Times*, 2 May (2009), https://www.irishtimes.com/news/a-man-of-loyalty-and-principles-1.758270 [retrieved 23/1/17].

[143] Quoted in Connal Parr, *Inventing the Myth*, p.195.

As the Beast Sleeps, originally written in 1994, first produced for the Abbey Theatre's Peacock stage in June 1998 and subsequently performed at Belfast's Lyric Theatre (May, 2001) and the Tricycle Theatre in London (September, 2001), is a perfect illustration of this consideration of sectarian violence through the prism of gender and class. Set in the aftermath of the 1994 Loyalist ceasefires, the play's ten scenes centre the dilemma facing Kyle, the former leader of a UDA unit, as the organisation's leaders attempt to present themselves as having moved away from violence. Mitchell divides the play across two settings, each representing an aspect of Kyle's life that is undergoing profound change. The first is a domestic setting: the front room that he and his wife Sandra are in the process of redecorating, a clear metaphor for the task of rebuilding after the long conflict. The second is the local paramilitary club: a space that is being transformed into a legitimate business for the purpose of raising funds for Alec, the besuited public face of Loyalist politics. Revolving between home and club, Blaithin Sheerin's set emphasised the creeping sense of entrapment both settings represent for Kyle. His role diminished within the local UDA (and the financial support it provided), he finds himself effectively unemployed. He has to borrow funds from Sandra's mother and relies on help from Freddie, another former member of the UDA, to complete the task. In the third scene of the play the trio return to the local club. Where before he and Freddie were welcomed as heroes and regaled with free beer, they are regarded by the new manager, Jack, as a threat to its refurbished image, a situation compounded when an offended Freddie smashes up the bar with a pool cue. After this event Kyle is brought into the club by Larry, Alec's enforcer of the new regime. Not only does he have to bargain for access to the club, but, owing to his financial situation, he is forced to head up a new 'punishment squad' designed to keep wayward members in line. Freddie and Sandra are disgusted, and shame him in explicitly gendered terms:

> FREDDIE   Did you get down on your knees and beg?
> SANDRA   Did you suck some dick?[144]

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[144] Gary Mitchell, *As the Beast Sleeps* (London: Nick Hern, 2001), p.61. All subsequent references to this edition will be cited parenthetically in the text.

When the club is subsequently robbed by two masked figures, Kyle is asked to question his friend, an interrogation that turns into a violent beating. In the final scene of the play he returns home and is confronted by Sandra, who admits that she was Freddie's accomplice. Kyle ends the play in a state of abject emascuation: he has failed as a 'breadwinner' for his family, a defender of his community, and tied to an organisation that, while outwardly declaring its peaceful intentions, continues to use violence behind the scenes.

This final, pessimistic conclusion seems unavoidable given the prevailing social conditions. Without a job, he faces emasculation in the eyes of Sandra, who, in her gender-based shaming of her husband, is depicted as being complicit in dominant masculine behaviour: "He sits there day after day and he sees it just like we do and he does nothing" (55). But the only organisation in which his masculinity is of value is now regarded by his family and friends as shamefully compromised. As Freddie declares of Larry: "Him and his mates were our heroes Kyle. They were going to protect us. Look at him – I can't believe I used to look up to such a small man" (83). Like Kyle, Freddie experiences the decline of the UDA's supposed role in defending Ulster from external threat as a loss of material and symbolic status, and his questions this loss in terms of masculinity. The problem is that this skepticism towards Loyalism's new public face contains a kernel of truth. The play depicts UDA's strict, military hierarchy as particularly amenable to the new political dispensation. Alec and Jack regard hyper-masculine individuals like Kyle and Freddie as useful, if only to do the dirty work of implementation. As Larry explains: "Talking is for us and for the future. Not for these boys" (21). The cultivation of militarised masculinities is less a thing of the past than a tool with which the peace can be implemented in a way that benefits an emerging Loyalist elite, the members of which have privileged access to forms of identity that incorporate 'feminine' attributes such as dialogue and compromise. This hierarchy also translates into material inequalities, as Alec busily siphons off funds from the now-legitimate UDA club to fund the "serious suits, serious style, serious accommodation and serious transportation" to launder his organisation's reputation (76). This stands in stark contrast to the predicament of the rank-and-file, as Kyle exasperatedly observes: "Things have been going bad for us, with Freddie, with everybody, ever since this fucking process started and we were told to stop going what we do and all the money

stopped coming in because of it." (62). Freddie is correct, then, to doubt the capacity of these new leaders to "protect" his interests. But having spent so long within the paramilitary practices of masculine dominance, he lacks the interpretive framework of class exploitation to properly organise this information. Instead he resorts to familiar feats of self-sacrifice and endurance as a means of recovering his masculine identity and status as a 'true' defender of Ulster, in contrast to those he perceives to have been emasculated.

Jennifer Cornell has remarked that Freddie's predicament risked confirming pre-existing assumptions that certain Loyalists were 'beyond the pale' of supposedly reasonable, liberal unionism.[145] However, such an interpretation overlooks Mitchell's emphasis on how his revanchism arises out of the exaggerated claim to potency that Loyalist culture has historically attached to masculinity, and is a response, however misguided, to the sense of powerlessness that attended the waning of the Protestant controlled Northern Irish state. As Larry declares to Kyle in Scene four of the play: "We're the Ulster Defence Association. We exist solely to defend Ulster. […] Ulster's not under attack at the minute. So, there's nothing for us to defend" (49). The problem remains that the rigid military system in which those like Freddie formed their identity has not changed. Not only do they remain expendable instruments of the hierarchy, but that hierarchy lack sufficient motivation or optimism to change the situation. In a particularly revealing scene Larry discusses with Alec the difficulty of undoing the process of socialisation on which the UDA relied during the conflict. He angrily refers to "Jamesy", a loyalist foot-soldier that he recruited:

> Every faltering fucking step. I got him books, I persuaded him to join me, us, in our campaign. […] I talked to him night after night. Drink after drink. I turned him from a boy to a man. (77)

When Larry has to change Jamey's mind, he finds the task impossible; like Larry the boy is bought into the punishment room to have sense beaten into him. In this exchange Mitchell makes clear the link between initiation into the UDA and the construction of masculinity. But this process of socialisation is also cruelly depersonalising. Alec, distanced from the day-to-day of keeping the peace in the

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[145] Jennifer Cornell, "Walking with Beasts: Gary Mitchell and the Representation of Ulster Loyalism", *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, 29.2 (2003), pp.27–34.

organisation contemptuously asks: "[w]ho the fuck is this Jamesy character?" (77); to him he is just another of the "eejits wearing masks" (76) rather than someone with a name, a history, need and desires. When frustrated Larry decides to leave the organisation, Alec declares that his right-hand-man "can't be replaced", to which Larry responds: "Yes I can" (77). He is, of course, correct, because within the hierarchy of political Loyalism the working class male body is always an exchangeable means to an end. As Stephen Howe has noted, the conciliatory position espoused by the unionists during the peace process meant that "some influential ex-gunmen came to feel that "respectable" Unionist politicians had manipulated them by first inciting their violence, then indignantly disclaiming it."[146] It is this hypocrisy that lies at the heart of the play's tragic conclusion. Occurring immediately prior to Freddie's savage onstage beating, the scene stresses that it is less Loyalism itself that is at fault than the military structure through which it constructs, and exploits, the bodies of working-class people such as Freddie. This is not, as Maguire suggests, the presentation of Loyalism as "false consciousness";[147] indeed Mitchell has positioned himself as pro-union and dismisses the crypto-nationalism of "sell out" playwrights.[148] The worst case scenario of *As the Beast Sleeps* served as a warning to the likes of Gary McMichael, the leader of the UDP who attended the Dublin premier of the play.[149] The lasting reform of violent masculinity cannot be achieved through the very hierarchical, militarist structures used to cultivate such violence in the first place. The UDP must offer something more than merely replicating the elitist manipulation of mainstream unionist parties.

In this context Freddie's beating at the hands of his former comrades is an exemplary display of 'masculinity in crisis' that, without the compensation of ideological transcendence, can only be regarded as a tragic failure of care, social support and education. Reviews were not entirely unsympathetic to his plight. In her account of Patrick O'Kane's performance, Jocelyn Clarke observed how "his body contort[ed] with the strain of trying to find words to describe his frustration."[150] With no

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[146] Stephen Howe, "Mad Dogs and Ulstermen: The Crisis of Loyalism (part one)", *opendemocracy.org*, 27 September (2005), https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/loyalism_2876jsp/ [retrieved 24/1/17].
[147] Tom Maguire, *Making Theatre in Northern Ireland*, p.155.
[148] Veronica Lee, :From the Heart of Unionism", *Daily Telegraph*, 11 April (2000), p.26.
[149] Louise East observed that Gary McMichael was a "guest of note" at the premier in Dublin. "Compelling Theatre", *Irish Times*, 13 June (1998), p.61.
[150] Jocelyn Clarke, "Opening Night", *Sunday Tribune Magazine*, 14 June (1998), p. 2.

language in which to account for his experience of dehumanisation, he is left only with the valorisation of physical feats of masculine endurance. But his every attempt to phobically ward off those 'feminine' states of dependency and conciliation he has been taught to despise places him in ever more extreme states duress. The performance of 'masculinity in crisis', therefore, becomes a form of self-entrapment that forecloses the possibility that he might achieve different modalities of Loyalist identity expression. In the 1998 production, Kyle carried O'Kane's broken body off stage in an act of tenderness that resembled a pièta: the image of Christ in the arms of the Virgin Mary common in Catholic iconography. Unlike *The Laughter of Our Children* however, the futility of his self-wounding undermines any ideological recuperation of the warrior ideal. It is precisely because he entertains the idea of 'strength in spirit' that he reaches such an impasse. The moment instead becomes one of fraternal tenderness and care - a glimpse, perhaps of the possibility of embracing a different kind of homosocial relation within working-class Loyalism.

Ultimately, *As the Beast Sleeps* raises the important question of what form of social and political change is required to move beyond the self-entrapment of masculinity in crisis. Certainly the claustrophobic setting of the 1998 production mitigated a sense of the broader social conditions of Northern Ireland. The political economy of the peace only arises briefly in Kyle's remarks on his family's strained financial situation. However, when the the play was adapted for BBC Northern Ireland in 2002 under the direction of Harry Bradbeer, it included scenes that offered a broader context.[151] Kyle, Freddie and other members of the UDA find themselves in a job centre and inquire about the possibility of non-paramilitary employment. The clerk tells Kyle that he lacks the qualifications to apply for most of the jobs on offer, to which he responds: "No jobs for bank robbers, no?" Their dim employment prospects mirror trends in the Northern Irish economy at the time. Between 1999 and 2002 job losses in the private sector stood at 2,500.[152] Though Catholics were twice as likely to be jobless compared to their Protestant neighbours,[153] there was also a steeper reduction in Protestant employees, a situation that fuelled trite speculation of a future in which

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[151] Gary Mitchell, *As the Beast Sleeps*, dir. Harry Bradbeer, BBC2, 3 Feb, 22.00 (2002), 80 mins, http://bobnational.net/record/329344 [Retrieved 01/04/2016].

[152] Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, *Monitoring Report No. 13: A Profile of the Northern Ireland Workforce* (Belfast: ECNI, 2012), https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/othelem/organ/equality/ecmonitor03no13.pdf, p.1, [retrieved 24/1/17].

[153] "Catholics Twice as Likely to be Jobless", *Belfast News Letter*, 21 Feb. (2003), p.12.

they no longer dominated the workforce. While these anxieties are certainly present in the film, the additional scene was designed to clarify the point that former members of the UDA lacked the economic prospects that would allow them to acquire alternative modalities of masculine identity. A peace process that does not compass these broader problems, but instead prioritises managed and reduced violence (in the case of the UDA, through violence), is liable to push those such as Kyle and Freddie into ever more desperate attempts to reassert their manliness. Such attempts to achieve the autonomy so prized within dominant constructions of ethno-sectarian identity disguise real and disabling forms of economic subjection and foreclose the possibility of acquiring any form of inter-personal solidarity and mutual care. Without the political formation within Loyalism to articulate such an alternative, Kyle and Freddie are left, like Boss O'Grady's Boys, in a no-man's land of futile abjection, protest and crisis.

In the final analysis, it is important to note that this pessimistic conclusion risks of running into a dead end. Why does Mitchell not use theatre to model alternative subjectivities? The answer lies in the fact that, throughout *As the Beast Sleeps*, Mitchell singles out representative politics as an inherently deceptive for its theatricality. In the second scene of the play Larry relates to Alec a former comrade's technique for extracting confession from those he interrogated:

> Richie always said that the real damage was done in their imagination. Nothing we could show them or threaten them with could hurt them as much as just sitting behind them, doing nothing. They would do it to themselves. (17)

The ability of political leaders to manipulate their subordinates relied upon a theatrical trick: the conjuring of non-existent threats. It is precisely this technique that leads those, such as Freddie, to abide by paranoid fantasies that: "Everything's going to blow up […] if we wait on the taigs doing it, we won't be ready" (82). Mitchell has consistently linked this skepticism towards the theatre to the economic, rather than cultural, power held by unionists in the pre-'Troubles' state: "In the Protestant community, the arts were perceived as middle class, Catholic or homosexual. The manly thing for a Protestant was to learn to plumb, or work with

steel or wood and use your muscle and strength."[154] Mitchell suggests his status as a playwright runs the risk being viewed as an effeminate traitor to his background. Indeed, in 2005 he was forced to move his family out of Rathcoole after the local UDA took exception at his critique of their tactics, and his success in Dublin. However, he is also at pains to present his own work as a counter to theatrical mystification. His theatre is driven by a "loyalty to the truth",[155] a commitment that, according to Richard Rankin Russell, took the form of an "aesthetic loyalism" that depicted the "realistic conditions among working-class Protestants in the province."[156] By emphasising the economic as well as political dimensions of revanichist Loyalism, Mitchell certaily took an interpretative stance towards 'reality', but by adopting a discourse of "truth" he attempted to assuage the emasculation associated with playwriting. This helps to explain the macho terms he used to defend his career against the UDA's objections: "if they think their actions will create impotency in my work, they are sadly mistaken."[157] Mitchell struggled to escape the very snare of masculinity his plays critiqued, a struggle that limited his ability to move beyond hard-boiled description to avow the transformative power of performance.

In Mitchell's hands, the realist thriller could demystify the limitations of stage-managed manipulation as a political strategy. It could also shatter the illusion that the performance of masculinity in crisis – with its dynamic of self-overcoming and self-sovereignty – addressed the real and debilitating economic problems afflicting working-class Protestants. The power of the play, both in London and Dublin, emanated from its critique of the masculinist reaction to those economic woes that set working-class Protestants apart from the middle-class mainstream of unionism. Despite its pessimism, *As the Beast Sleeps* was received by reviewers as provoking a rethinking of Loyalist recalcitrance beyond the very stereotypes to which Cornell worried the play conformed. Mitchel Heaney noted in his review of the BBC adaptation of the play that Mitchell's "angry men […] are as fired by a sense of

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[154] Patrick Marmion, "A Prod in the Right Direction", *Evening Standard*, 6 April (2000), p.52.

[155] Fiachra Gibbons, "Truth and Nail", *Guardian*, 10 April (2000), https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2000/apr/10/artsfeatures.northernireland [retrieved 1/1/20].

[156] Richard Rankin Russell, "'Loyal to the Truth': Gary Mitchell's Aesthetic Loyalism in *As the Beast Sleeps* and *The Force of Change*", *Modern Drama* 48.1 (2005), pp. 186-201.

[157] Quoted in Parr, *Op. Cit.*, p.186.

disenfranchisement as by resentment and hatred toward their Catholic neighbours. The effect is more resonant - and more chilling - than the psychotic loyalist caricatures that inhabit more nationalist-inclined films".[158] Likewise, one reviewer in Dublin saw *As the Beast Sleeps* as challenging the "horrifyingly simplistic" assumption that Loyalists "should be saved from themselves and made to see sense".[159] The limitations of the play instead lay in the restraints Mitchell placed on performance's capacity to bring into lived experience alternative political possibilities: those, like Alec, that wish to enact transformation not only do so with the worst of intentions, but find those intentions take on a malign life of their own. Even as he was acutely aware of the conflicting demands placed upon men such as Freddie, Mitchell's "loyalty to the truth" risked reducing theatre to the simple reproduction of to the way things are. This limits the capacity of theatre to push the male trouble of working-class Protestants in an alternative direction, and provides no place or modality in or through which masculinity can transform itself. Though Mitchell's work questioned the political and economic assumptions underwriting the peace process, by reducing his work to merely elaborating the compromised nature of grand narratives, it threatened to collude with the very status quo that it set out to dismantle.

Revising Republican Masculinities

The gendered inflection of identity crisis precipitated by the Agreement was expressed in a different form in the work of Joseph Crilly, whose play *On McQuillan's Hill* (Lyric Theatre, 2000) bears comparison with *As the Beast Sleeps* for its treatment of Republican paramilitary masculinities. Born in Derrymacash in rural mid-Ulster, like Mitchell, his work focussed on the locality of the community from which he wrote. The two plays of his produced in the North after the Agreement, *Second-Hand Thunder* (Lyric Theatre, 1998) and *On McQuillan's Hill* dealt, respectively, with local Protestant and Catholic communities. Both depicted the how personal and political issues were inextricably linked in the villages that dotted the southern shore of Lough Neagh, an area of north Armagh known during the 'Troubles' as the "murder triangle" for the intensity of tit-for-tat sectarian killings.[160] It was a part of the region where, according

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[158] Mick Heaney, *Op. Cit.*, p.18.
[159] Bruce Arnold, "Theatre of Politics and Grim Reality", *Irish Independent*, 13 June (1998), p. 12.
[160] See Denis Faul & Raymond Murray, *The Triangle of Death: Sectarian Assassinations in the Portadown-Moy-Dungannon Area*, April (The Authors, 1975).

to former Provisional IRA member Eamonn Collins, Republicanism gave "a political legitimacy to the age-old pastime of spying on one's neighbours, turning neighbourhood vendettas into noble struggles."[161] Likewise, Crilly's plays focussed on revelations of state penetration, informants, coverups and corruption, returning their audiences to the inseparability of political conviction and unseemly personal motivation. Though he lamented "the fact that the artificial state still exists, and the difference between people is still based on the fact that the artificial state still exists",[162] as a constitutional nationalist, Crilly's focus on the disingenuous, complex and compromised reflected the kind of anti-idealist ethic found in Mitchell's work.

Unlike Mitchell, however, *On McQuillan's Hill* depicted Northern Ireland's Catholic, nationalist communities embracing a more liberal and pluralist conception of community. Set against the backdrop of the republican prisoner releases engineered in the Agreement,[163] it depicted old IRA comrades facing up to the realities of the 'dirty war'. The thriller is structured around the revelation of secrets, both political and personal, hidden in the name of unity during the conflict. Convictions crumble in the face of state penetration, informers and internecine violence; the dignity of political violence is undercut by the unseemly motivations of those who joined the movement. This shift from the general to the particular, from the totalising to the socially complex, mirrors that which takes place in Mitchell's plays. But whereas Kyle and Freddie have nowhere to go, Crilly's play embraces this complexity as a celebration of those minorities within the North's Catholic community that the movement has long overlooked, a shift that parallels Sinn Féin's institutional acceptance of LGBTQ+ and women's rights in the 1990s and early 2000s. In 1996 they were the first party in Ireland to produce a specific document advocating LGBT equality, and in 2001 the party set up Equality Section, headed by former Secretary General Lucilita Bhreatnach, whose first task was to collate information on women's political demands within the party.[164] However, if Crilly's play represents a new configuration of nationalist politics, it is a configuration that takes on an intriguingly anti-political and class-blind form. By situating respect for personal identity as an antidote to totalising nationalist perspectives, Crilly avoids engaging with the broader

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[161] Eamonn Collins & Mick McGovern, *Killing Rage* (London: Granta, 1997), p.3.
[162] Joseph Crilly, Unpublished Interview with Alexander Coupe, 25 January (2016).
[163] See Cochrane, *Op. Cit.*, p.200.
[164] See Agnes Maillot, *New Sinn Féin: Irish Republicanism in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp.116-7.

social structures in a manner that reduces the task of redressing inequality to the mere celebration and management of difference.

Crilly's liberal even-handedness is evidenced in that the play that preceded *On McQuillan's Hill* set out to critique rural Unionism. *Second-Hand Thunder,* a tightly scripted, melodramatic thriller which won the 1998 Stewart Parker Award for new playwriting, depicted the family of "Big Mark" Abraham landowner, esteemed member of the local Orange Order and a man whose violent sectarianism also extends to sexual violence. When Edith, a newly arrived Protestant teacher from the Republic, threatens to challenge the segregation between Protestant and Catholic children in the local community, he rapes her in a chilling offstage scene. The rest of the play traces the downfall of "Big Mark". In the second act, set twenty years after the first, we meet Bobby Abraham, who we quickly learn is Edith and Mark's child. He and his partner Bernie McCrystal, the daughter of local Catholic lawyer Vincy McCrystal, slowly discover that the house they occupy was the scene of Edith's murder. In the local community Mark is revered as a martyr of the conflict. When the local Orange march is redirected away from the town's Catholic district, it is his face that graces the Lodge banner at the subsequent protests. But at the end of Act Two Bobby learns that Mark killed Edith following a row after which he committed suicide out of guilt. The final act, however, confounds both tales of Mark's death. Set ten years after Edith's rape, it reveals that it was Vincy who murdered both Mark and Edith in a dispute over land. Less a tale of the Protestant Ascendency's 'last stand', or a celebration of Catholic emancipation after long struggle, the play depicts the shift in power between unionists and nationalists as a unglamorous struggle between middle-class elites over property ownership. Mark's demise, which Crilly describes in one stage directions as an "unimpressive […] unsubstantial way to die",[165] only attains its symbolic weight as redeeming the beleaguered masculinity of Ulster after his other two sons, Malcolm and Alex, report it to the local community as an act of terrorism. What *Second-Hand Thunder* did most effectively was use the ignoble conditions of war to undercut the pretensions of those that would narrate the violence in heroic terms. At a time when the Agreement was being busily interpreted by unionist and republican political representatives as vindicating their actions during the conflict, Crilly muddied the waters of political purity by returning his

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[165] Joseph Crilly, *Second-Hand Thunder* (Belfast: Tinderbox Theatre Company, 1998), p.86.

audiences to how political struggle was used to legitimise unseemly personal, sexual and economic motivations. In the contest of the Good Friday Agreement, unionism was reduced to keeping up appearances, recycling tired narratives of terrorist threat that disavowed the dirty backwash of its misogynist past.

Crilly's second play, *On McQuillan's Hill*, followed a similar structure of coverup and revelation. Commissioned by the Belfast-based Tinderbox Theatre Company in the context of the mass release of former-paramilitary prisoners in 2000,[166] the play staged the return of one Republican prisoner, Fra Maline, as a moment in which the movement as a whole could take stock of those traumas, betrayals and secrets it kept hidden during the conflict to maintain its ideological integrity. Imprisoned for his part in a botched IRA operation in which he got shot, Fra is welcomed with a party at the local hall of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, a dreary space that has seen better days (figure 3). It is about to be turned over to a private developer, none other than Loretta, Fra's estranged sister, returned from self-imposed exile in London. These two homecomings set up the unwinding of a series of revelations that both shatter and reconstitute each character's understanding of the Maline family's past. Upon returning home Fra rekindles his homosexual relationship with Dessie, a married Protestant man and boss at the local factory. Though they think this relationship a secret, as the play unfolds it emerges that the village was rife with rumours. In the second act he confronts his old unit commander Ray McCullion about rumours circulating that he was shot by his own side. It emerges that the local IRA wanted to murder Fra because he was sharing secrets with his Protestant partner, who had connections with the RUC. While these facts are emerging Loretta spills her own secrets. She reveals that Theresa, Fra's adopted daughter, is in fact her child, following an affair with Ray. An aggressive, macho womaniser, Ray spends the first act of the play seducing Theresa, both unaware of their family ties. In the scene following Fra's outing Loretta recounts the real circumstances of her daughter's birth. Psychologically abused by her parents, and unable to face the stigma of bearing a child out of wedlock, Loretta told Fra that Theresa was the result of a staged incestuous encounter with her father, a lie that allowed her to blackmail him into financially supporting her life in London. As Fra walks off stage to reconcile with

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[166] "Maze Empties as Terrorist Prisoners Walk Free", *Guardian*, 28 July (2000), https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2000/jul/28/northernireland [retrieved 3/3/17].

Dessie while Loretta and Theresa banish Ray, the play pushes at the implications of such revelations. The Malines come to represent a militarised republicanism transformed; its social conservatism and celebration of traditional gender roles shattered by a history of patriarchal violence and homophobia. This new dispensation is less a question of concerted political action than a product of each character's decision to renew their personal commitments to one another.

If in *Second-Hand Thunder* politics was seen as a process of keeping up appearances, then its resolution in *On McQuillan's Hill* was to step outside of totalising accounts of the past and the monolithic identities they support to settle differences at a neighbourly level. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the fascinating character of Fra, played in the 2000 production by Niall Cusack. Negative associations between republicanism and homosexuality have long been imbricated in colonial and anti-colonial discourses of identity in Ireland. Sexual difference was anathema to an Irish cultural nationalism intent on escaping the gendered relation between masculine coloniser and feminine colonised. As Kathryn Conrad has noted, this involved disavowing homosexuality as a manifestation of 'effeminate' masculinity. Not only did "both the British colonial powers and the Irish nationalists [use] the same language of 'masculinity'", but "both wrote homosexuality as a kind of foreign 'pollution'."[167] When in 1916 the British apprehended republican patriot Roger Casement for attempting to smuggle weapons into Ireland, they discredited his political stance by publishing a series of 'black diaries' purporting to detail his engagement in homosexual activity.[168] Conrad also notes that Casement's defenders within the nationalist movement were anxious to deny his sexuality as their opponents. On the surface, Crilly's gay IRA man seems to reproduce such anxieties. Cusack played Fra as at once self-consciously butch and needy. He entered the stage by drunkenly toasting a faded portrait of Robert Emmett and his encounters with Dessie are at once domineering and acutely vulnerable. Throughout the play other characters question his dedication to republicanism as an anxiety-ridden cover for his

[167] Kathryn Conrad, "Queer Treasons: Homosexuality and Irish National Identity", *Cultural Studies* 15.1 (1 January 2001), pp.124–37 (p.127).
[168] There has been much academic debate over the authenticity of these diaries. Though many believe them to be a forgery, the gay-right activist and Unionist councillor Jeffrey Dudgeon wrote an academic study that claimed the diaries as an authentic historical document. See Jeffrey Dudgeon, *Roger Casement: The Black Diaries – with a Study of his Background, Sexuality and Irish Political Life* (Belfast: Belfast Press, 2002).

attraction to men. Ray remarks how he overheard one encounter between the two lovers: "I stood outside there listenin' to you tellin' Dessie Rigg how you were such a big man in the 'Ra and him whistlin' on your flute and blowin' your horn."[169] Such comments depict Fra's adoption of warrior masculinity as both a cover for an internal fear of weakness and a means of attracting other men. Likewise, reviewers also saw his homosexuality as discrediting his republican convictions. Writing in the *Irish Times*, David Nowlan deemed Fra "a caricature of a psychopathic republican killer" and Ian Hill's *Belfast News Letter* review referred to him as "an incompetent sadistic homosexual Provo".[170] Such interpretations understood Fra's erotic alterity as redolent of republicanism's farcical obsession with demonstrations of manliness, thus reducing its ideological claims to a form of psycho-sexual pathology. However, these readings overlooked the nuances of Fra's character. When towards the end of the play Dessie accuses him of being in the IRA only to impress him, he weeps and insists: "I was committed. I am committed" (94). It is a moment that reveals the extent of Fra's (perhaps naive) trust in both his lover and the Republican cause: unlike those around him he does not see his sexuality, or his relationship with a Protestant, as incompatible with his political commitments. Crilly suggests that it is Republicanism that needs to change to accommodate those such as Fra, rather than the other way round. As it currently stands, it is only by freeing himself of his associations with the moment that he is able to pursue his relationship with Dessie. Crilly contrasts this to the violent and womanising Ray, a man whose unreconstructed masculinity represents the need for Republicanism to change. Ultimately Crilly uses Fra to depict how reckoning with, rather than mythologisation of, the ignominious 'reality' of the conflict was a necessary precursor to the development of alternative, non-violent modalities of masculine identity.

A comparison between *On McQuillan's Hill* and *As the Beast Sleeps* speaks to important points of divergence and convergence between post-Agreement nationalist and unionism. Crilly's play demonstrates the capacity to imagine the possibility of liberalising a socially conservative nationalist culture that is comparatively absent from Mitchell's treatment of Loyalism. Characters are forced to confront the internal plurality of their community, a plurality denied within the male-dominated, residual

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[169] Joseph Crilly, *On McQuillan's Hill* (Belfast: Tinderbox Theatre Company, 2000), p.85.
[170] David Nowlan, "Limbo of Murder and Madness", *Irish Times*. 12 February (2000), p.4; Ian Hill, "Play Not Quite Over the Hill", *Belfast News Letter*, 12 February (2000), p.29.

forms of patriarchal Republicanism. The play ends with an image of what this might be like: with three generations women on the stage – Loretta, Theresa and Mrs Tymelly, the house-keeper of the Hibs Hall – each of whom has been victimised in some way by the men in the community:

> MRS TYMELLY The light is coming up. It's very late… or is it early?
>
> *Loretta closes her eyes and rocks while stroking Theresa's hair in a very tender and maternal way.*
>
> MRS TYMELLY I supposed it's early.
> (110)

It is important to note that Crilly was himself an exile. That he left Northern Ireland for London in the 1980s only to periodically return to his birthplace can be seen in this image of reunion. Together they represent the possibility that the peace would allow those, like Crilly, who spurned the conservatism of their communities to contribute to social change. As the author notes: "these people really need something to trail them into some twenty-first century idea of real morality, as opposed to some Church delivered reality."[171] Perhaps it is Loretta that best encapsulates this process of catching up. By buying the local hall, the former home of the local branch of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, a nationalist fraternal organisation not unlike the unionist Orange Order, she represents in metonymic fashion the hope that the peace would bring about, through social mobility and liberalisation, the advancement of equality for women and LGBTQ+ people within the community.

On McQuillan's Hill therefore shares with *As the Beast Sleeps* a robust critique of what Seamus Deane has identified as nationalist discourse's "totalizing ambition."[172] He argues that "central to the nationalist position were the claims that (*a*) Ireland was a culturally distinct nation; (*b*) it had been mutilated by British colonialism; and (*c*) it could nevertheless rediscover its lost features and thereby recognise once more its true identity."[173] Just as in *The Laughter of Our Children*, invoking a logic of male martyrdom that embraces failure as a necessary, dialectical, step towards national

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[171] Crilly, Interview with the Author (2016).
[172] Seamus Deane, *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing Since 1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.146.
[173] *Ibid.*, p.53.

renewal allowed republicans to anticipate accusations of weakness by casting their participation in the institutions of partition as another ordeal to be endured in pursuit of the higher ideal. As Deane argues, such a narrative "depends upon the exclusion from literary history of the dynamics of historical change and particularity, and the actualities of historical atrocity."[174] For Crilly, the theatre offered a way to attest to overlooked complexity, plurality and particularity of experience. Above all, if Romantic Ireland was to be laid to rest, the play suggested, then Northern nationalists needed to move beyond the male-dominated narratives of recovery and redemption that obscured the republicanism's collusion in patterns of gender-based violence and exclusion, a shift epitomised in the movement from masculine iconicity to female solidarity staged in *On McQuillan's Hill*. Peace becomes a question of turning towards a neighbourly respect for both plurality and the individual complexity on the basis of a universalised principle of equality. As Crilly notes: "personal politics and certainly sexual politics and emotional politics are far more important than the actual politics."[175]

Both Mitchell and Crilly's plays, then, staged a crisis in the representivity and social dominance of masculinity within both Loyalism and Republicanism that followed the Agreement in 1998. They did so in a way that attempted to move beyond the historical role of the performance of crisis in reconstituting the unity and integrity of patriarchal ethno-nationalisms in Northern Ireland. Given that Ulster unionism and Irish nationalism used images of embattled and stoical masculine agents to reconstitute the identities on which they based their claims to sovereignty, it made sense to turn towards those experiences of subjection, trauma and marginalisation that challenged such totalising narratives. Rather than expanding male trouble into a metaphor for the nation as a whole, they depicted formerly dominant forms of masculinity confined to ever shrinking spheres of influence and ever-weaker claims to representation. This, then, was their version of decommissioning: bereft of their status within their respective communities, former paramilitaries were left with little choice but to undertake the difficult work of rebuilding long-neglected personal relationships. Overt political commitments and formal politics featured in this schema only as a theatrical farce, or cynical manipulation, that inhibited progress.

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[174] *Ibid.*, p.115.
[175] Crilly, Interview with the Author (2016).

Overall, such theatrical responses to the peace emphasised a shift from a national perspective premised upon unity and exemplarity to the non-totalisable, particular, and local; in short, O'Toole's "isolated pieces of a whole story that no one really knows".[176]

The skepticism evident in such plays would seem to work against the optimism that greeted the signing of the Agreement, but, in the final analysis, their staging of crisis aligned with a liberal revisionist interpretation of its terms that heralded consociation as shifting politics in the North from ends-orientated idealism to the means of sharing power and co-habitation with others.[177] In this interpretation, those who signed up to it recognised the recalcitrant differences of identity denied within the totalising historical and political grand narratives that drove the conflict in the first place. Crilly and Mitchell's plays shared with this work an empirical attention to the detail and complexity overlooked by those who privileged the nation as a category of socio-political analysis. For many reviewers their localism represented the liberation of difference from the constraints of patriarchal nationalism's hierarchies of identity. Mitchell's work was interpreted variously as "not conform[ing] to any of the received versions of 'Irishness'"[178] and demonstrating the need for "intellectual rationalism" to combat the "religious tenets" of both sides.[179] Crilly's arrival was set alongside Mitchell's as part of "a new wave of openly political Irish theatre" that was effective precisely because of its microcosmic focus on the entanglement of the political with "engaging family wrangles."[180] Here, it seemed, was a theatre suited to an understanding of peace as requiring the recognition and promotion of difference as means of challenging male-dominated and exclusivist narratives of the conflict.

By presenting the personal aspects of the political as an antidote to compromised grand narratives, however, these plays remained agnostic about theatre's role in framing alternatives. Indeed, the "dramatization of fragments" risked obviating structural transformation in favour of the mere celebration of difference. By

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[176] O'Toole, "Play for Ireland" (2000).

[177] For this line of argument, see Arthur Aughey, *The Politics of Northern Ireland: Beyond the Belfast Agreement* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp.25-41.

[178] Jane Coyle, "Another Ireland", *Irish Times*, 23 March (1999), p.12.

[179] Emer O'Kelly, "Review: *As the Beast Sleeps*", *Sunday Independent*, 14 June (1998), p.15.

[180] Kate Bassett, "Here Comes Another Great Irish Playwright", *Telegraph*, 13 June (1998), https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/4714408/Here-comes-another-great-Irish-playwright.html, [retrieved 13/4/17].

depicting all forms of collective action as monolithic and homogenising, Mitchell and Crilly's skeptical turn to the particular effaced the possibility of addressing inequalities of gender and class. This predicament mirrored the contemporary political situation. Though the Agreement was premised upon establishing the interdependence of identities in Northern Ireland as the basis of political claims, in practice politicians continued to treat the 'two communities' as culturally separate. As outlined in the first section of this chapter, the inability or unwillingness of politicians to lever fundamental connectedness of the 'two communities' for political change was rooted in the fetishisation of sovereign masculinity. This meant that notions of equality tended to be reduced to the management of the nationalist-unionist parity, rather than questioning its constitutive terms. Progress beyond sectarian antagonism towards a genuinely redistributive politics of gender and class was as elusive as the so-called 'peace dividend'. As Aaron Kelly cogently explained:

> Irish Nationalism and Unionism are in fact shared attempts to occlude the full historical and social complexity of this island, which entails a consideration of class conflicts, popular radicalisms, struggles for women's rights, the dialectics of urbanity, and so on. The deployment of culture to shore up a 'Two Traditions' paradigm of Northern society ultimately frustrates the establishment of a properly constituted public space, given that it seeks to portion that society [...] in terms of private, sectarian communities.[181]

Such a predicament challenged playwrights operating in Northern Ireland: how could they avoid homogenisation while affirming a notion of shared interest in which to frame and articulate political demands? And how could they respect difference and plurality while also modelling the possibility of collective narratives of resistance? In the words of Terry Eagleton: "you can be challengingly heterodox, breaking with the dreary grand narratives of the great majority of the Irish people, while being, politically speaking, as welcome to the Establishment as it is possible to be."[182]

Moving Beyond Crisis: Owen McCafferty and the Politics of Form

The Belfast-born playwright Owen McCafferty stands out for his attempt to navigate this impasse. Though he shared with his contemporaries an interest in 'masculinities in crisis' and the personal aspects of the political, he is unique for his sustained

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[181] Aaron Kelly, "Geopolitical Eclipse", *Third Text*, 19.5 (2005), pp.545-553 (p.548).
[182] Terry Eagleton, "Postmodern Punch", *Irish Studies Review* 2.6 (1994) pp.2–3 (p.3).

engagement with theatrical form. Like Mitchell and Crilly, he pays close attention to locality, proximity and vernacular experience: most of his plays are set in the area around the Ormeau Road in South Belfast where he grew up and his characters speak with a heightened Belfast accent that draws out its incipient poeticality. Though traditionally a mixed area of Belfast, during the 'Troubles' the Ormeau Road was segregated between Catholic and Protestant areas, and in the 1990s was the site for frequent clashes over the local Orange Order parade. But McCafferty's theatre is dedicated to questioning the integrity of this divide, whether that be through the shared accent of his characters (what actor Patrick O'Kane described as "an Ormeau Road dialect"[183]) or, as well shall see later on, in the irrevocably entangled aspects of their daily lives. Indeed, unlike many of his contemporaries his characters are rarely active participants in the conflict and tend not to be identified in terms of their religious or political background. As he declared in a 2005 interview: "The trouble with any play associated with Ireland is that audiences immediately expect it to be about the sectarian divide, but really those problems are superficial."[184] At first glance such a statement would seem to reflect precisely the same depoliticising tendencies outlined above, where theatre celebrates of difference at the expense of forming collective narratives of resistance. His early monologues and duologues were not without their pessimism: just as in Mitchell and Crilly's plays, they focussed on how the performance of masculinity in crisis represented a political dead-end even if, as in *As the Beast Sleeps*, it was also a contestation of subordination. However, in his 2003 masterpiece *Scenes from the Big Picture* he changed strategy and adopted a large ensemble cast. This shift signifies an important departure from typicality, where the beleaguered, lonely men onstage reflected the fate of community politics as a whole, to a theatre of relationality which emphasised those fundamental conditions of vulnerability and interdependence denied by the construction of masculinity within patriarchal nationalism and androcentric individualism. The play suggested that only by seeking to lever, rather than overcome, these ties of interdependency would life be improved for the working-class inhabitants of Northern Ireland.

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[183] See Marie Louise Muir, "Quietly - Owen McCafferty and Patrick O'Kane", *BBC Arts Extra* (Belfast: BBC NI, 2012),
 https://soundcloud.com/abbeytheatre/owen-mccafferty-and-patrick [13/4/17].
[184] Fiona Maddocks, 'It's the Way He Tells Them', *London Evening Standard*, 4 February (2004) p.29.

McCafferty's work prior to *Scenes* is interesting precisely because it conformed with the prevailing tendencies of Irish theatre at the time and, as such, gives us a better understanding of the significance of *Scenes* as a working through of the problems inherent in Crilly and Mitchell's work. Just as in the North feminist political activism challenged prevailing gender norms, so under the leadership of President Mary Robinson the Republic underwent a period of liberalisation that saw the inclusion of voices previously marginalised in Irish society. The patriarchal image of the nation began to change as homosexuality was decriminalised and divorce legalised. But the economic transformations that attended such important legislative achievements had significant problems. The Celtic Tiger economy was premised upon expanding the financial services sector by attracting foreign capital with a laissez-faire tax regime. The fruits of these reforms were therefore unevenly distributed, with working class people losing out. Theatre in the 1990s concentrated upon the underside of this transformation in a proliferation of monologue plays – from Mark O'Rowe's *Howie the Rookie* to Conor McPherson's *This Lime Tree Bower* – that placed centre stage those working-class and criminal men who felt themselves socially marginalised. As Singleton has argued, these plays were politically ambivalent. Speaking unchallenged in front of a largely passive audience enabled these men to contest the emasculation they experienced socially, but it also allowed them to reconstruct in the theatre space the sense of mastery they felt wider society had denied them.[185] Much like Freddie in Mitchell's play, a nascent awareness of structural injustice, figured as crisis, provided a performative route back to ever stronger assertions of male dominance.

The struggle of men to come to terms with their powerlessness in political affirming ways was given a Northern inflection in McCafferty's own monologue play *The Waiting List* (Old Museum Arts Centre, 1994). It dealt more directly with the playwright's own experiences, focusing in particular on the effect of the trauma and disenchantment arising out of his experiences of the 'Troubles'. Commissioned by Points Fields Theatre Company and performance months before the 1994 paramilitary ceasefires, it was one of four monologues comprising *Angels With Split Voices*, a production designed to explore identity and place in contemporary Northern Ireland. Performing on an empty stage containing nothing but the frame of

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[185] Brian Singleton, *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp.70-95.

a pram, the narrator traces his life from childhood through adolescent flirtations with republicanism and communism to a present in which he concludes that his "whole life is hemmed in".[186] This domestic setting locates the possibility of peace in the shift away from violent masculinities and the organised social relations that sustain them but, like Crilly and Mitchell's plays, implies that this shift results in considerable disorientation and disenchantment. The play depicts how sectarianism creeps into the narrator's personal life through the inculcation and exploitation of phobic fears of weakness and effeminacy. Though innocent at first, those definitions of manliness produced in playground fights and football matches are revealed to be enmeshed in broader narratives of community. The narrator recalls a homosexual encounter with a friend. This results in the accusation that he is "a fruit and a fenian", a moment that precipitates the realisation that: "i'm a taig and they're orangemen" (9). The expectation that the male body should conform to and exemplify broader ideological narratives of community comes at the cost of narrowing both political and erotic possibilities. Not only is the narrator progressively alienated from those from the 'other side' with whom he used to play, but, when he attempts a relationship with a Protestant woman, he is also told: "put your country before your dick" (10). Subsequently, he learns to fight, takes up gaelic football, and joins the republican movement, before leaving at the urging of his father. Taking another turn, he goes to university and is exposed to philosophy, socialism and feminism: "socrates plato aristotle heidegger sartre epistemology phenomenology metaphysics logic – nationalist loyalists – bollocks – communists – shoulder to shoulder with your fellow man – or woman – sorry person" (13). But reality bites: he becomes a tiler because "philosopher's don't earn much readies" (15), a job that throws him back into the monotonous, male-only environment of south Belfast. In the closing lines he reflects upon his current status; a married man "pushing the kids round these streets in the sherman tank" thinking to himself, "what a waste" (16). Here, the narrator adopts a critical attitude towards the relational construction of dominant masculinities in Northern Ireland by re-enacting the formative encounters of his life. In retrospect, the definitions of masculinity put forward by Republicanism and revolutionary socialism are depicted as either narrowing the modalities of identity available to him or simplifying the social complexity in which he is immersed. As in *On McQuillan's*

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[186] Owen McCafferty, *Plays One* (London: Faber, 2013), p.16. All further references to this edition will be cited parenthetically in the text.

Hill, the only alternative seems to be a domesticated masculine identity that retreats entirely from the political, leaving the narrator trapped in a cycle of social immobility. By setting up a binary between politics – a 'masculine' domain characterised by the false promise of mastery and agency – and life – a domain characterised by effeminising domestication and dependency – McCafferty forecloses the possibility of structural change.

In spite of these limitations, *The Waiting List* gives us a glimpse of the themes that McCafferty would carry through into later work: the gap between political idealism and phenomenological experience; the role of dominant masculinities in preventing radical forms of collective resistance; and the failure of contemporary politics in the North to address class and gender inequalities. But if men and women were to truly stand "shoulder to shoulder" he would need to find novel forms of theatrical expression. Indeed, progress of McCafferty's work demonstrates how innovations in theatrical form, gender and the task of imagining new social and political formations were intertwined in post-Agreement Northern Ireland. First performed by the Druid Theatre Company in Galway, *Shoot the Crow* (1997) was a realist play focussing on the thwarted aspirations of four Belfast tilers. Though the 'Troubles' did not explicitly feature its concern for the difficulties men had in communicating their deeper feelings reflected a period in which peace negotiations were fraught and ongoing. When the aptly named Socrates encourages his workmates to reflect on their impoverished conditions - "if yer not aware of yer own life it means that ye haven't really participated in the shit that happens t'ye" - they tell him to "focus on the real world" (36). To share inner vulnerabilities, "emotional shit", is deemed a dangerous, effeminising imposition "cause once ya start giving it the verbals yer napper goes" (53). But the reduction of life to mere survival leads only to further entrapment: "shit keeps coming round again an again" (50). Working-class masculine identities based on stoicism and self-sufficiency prevent them from exploiting their connectedness with one another for collective action. The role of masculinity in perpetuating social fragmentation was taken up again in *Mojo Mickeybo*, a rapid-fire two-hander first performed in 1998 at Dublin's Andrew Lanes Theatre. Like *The Waiting List* it is a tale of lost innocence: the murder of Mickeybo's father precipitates the sundering of their cross-community friendship by ethno-sectarian division. A physically demanding piece of theatre, the actors' gestures and demeanours change as the boys

learn to perform hegemonic masculinity: "smokin fegs and talkin the talk of men" (149).

If conventional realism, multi-rolling and monologue allowed allowed McCafferty to present the performance of masculinity as a form of political self-entrapment, by 2003, there was a sense that such forms were limited. Given that of his major concerns was to elaborate how politicised definitions of masculinity prevented men from reckoning with the complexity of their lives, working with forms that presented particular stories of Belfast life as representative of broader concerns risked simplifying, rather than elaborating, complexity. The fraught question of scale informed what is his most accomplished play, *Scenes From the Big Picture*, in which he placed twenty-one characters onstage:

> Whereas *Mojo-Mickeybo* evokes a whole community, in *Scenes from the Big Picture* you actually see them on stage. Scale in a small place has an impact in its own right. The play is linked in a way to *Mojo-Mickeybo* and *The Waiting List* where you see lives criss-crossing, but in style it's different. I wanted to tell as many stories on stage as I could in one go.[187]

Such a large cast, enabled by the generous funding of the National Theatre in London, allowed McCafferty to depict a Belfast community unified not within a totalising ideological narrative of community, but through their unmanageable and often unrealised interdependence. The play's expanded theatrical form sought to supersede those modes of representation that used typicality to homogenise the diversity and complexity of life in order to frame the possibility of developing alternative political affiliations.

In *Scenes* characters develop through their encounters rather than in isolation, and through the network of these encounters a form of community emerges. Peter Gill, who directed the 2003 production when it premiered at the National Theatre's Cottesloe stage, was careful to emphasise both the particularity and diversity of those onstage. The play began with the entire cast onstage in tableau, establishing that the stories depicted were constitutive of a sense of belonging (figure 4). Indeed, the 21 actors were seated in the front two rows of the audience as if observing their location

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[187] Quoted in David Grant, "Owen McCafferty", *Dictionary of National Biography: British and Irish Dramatists Since World War II*, ed. John Bull (London: Thomas Gale, 2005), pp. 151-157 (p. 157).

within the complex network of stories unfolding onstage. The play then disperses this sense of wholeness into a collage of scenes derived from various Irish theatrical forms. McCafferty includes a pub drama in the mould of Tom Murphy's *Conversations on a Homecoming*; a Gary Mitchell-esque thriller following a drug dealer's unsuccessful attempt to avoid a punishment beating; a work-play set in an abattoir that draws on material from *Shoot the Crow*; and finally two Beckettian elements – a bickering but affectionate husband and wife (Sammy and Betty Lennon) drawn from *Happy Days* (1961) and an old man, Frank Coin, who wends his way through the background of several scenes. Across these scenes what emerges is a sense of the obscured unity in diversity, as characters are revealed to depend upon one another in oblique and unforeseen ways. As one reviewer remarked: "the scene-changing scenes between scenes are almost the most evocative parts of the whole play".[188] David Grant calls this interweaving a form of "chaos theory": a drawing together of thematic associations, ironies and juxtapositions through bodily proximity where "one character's actions can be seen reflected in another's."[189] No single event, or person, or action can therefore be distinguished from the warp and weft of the relations that constitute it.

Just as in McCafferty's earlier work, the religious and political background of each character is never revealed. This allows the play to exploit the disjunction between what the audience's prismatic perspective, and the way characters respond to their enmeshment in the lives of others. All are, in one way or another, struggling to get along in a city overshadowed not only by conflict, but also the precarity caused by the city's changing economic relations. With the local abattoir about to close, the young have few choices except to move abroad for work and study. One strand of the plot concerns the relationship between Bobbie Torbett and his son Bop. An alcoholic, Bobbie laments that his entire life has been spent either working in the abattoir or drinking in the local pub. Worrying that his son will be driven to similar circumstances, he hopes to get him a job behind the bar:

> he needs work – he's looking for a job in that fuckin kip across the way – can i tell
> you this – no good sayin to him he won't listen – i don't want him over there –

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[188] Philip Fischer, "Scenes from the Big Picture", *British Theatre Guide*, April (2003), http://www.britishtheatreguide.info/reviews/scenesfrom-rev [retrieved 29/06/16].
[189] Grant, *Op. Cit.*, p.157.

you see – it does somethin to ya – i worked there all my days – start out as a kid –
then workin there – talkin with men all the time – shoutin and slabberin – it
hardens ya – i was the hardest man in that place – what use has it done me –
none – only i'm minus a wife now
(337-8)

Like the men in *Shoot the Crow* he feels trapped by the subjectivity demanded of his
job. In order to survive in this male dominated environment he has had to be a
swaggerer, chest puffed out, giving "not an inch" to those men around him. He
struggles to kindle a meaningful relationship with his son and is unable to come to
terms with his reliance on others. McCafferty uses Bobbie's rare moment of self-
reflection to reveal the extent to which the public expression of masculinity revolves
around a barely-suppressed fear of weakness, a fear that haunts many of the play's
male characters: the more they deny their dependency on others, the less able they
are to form the bonds of solidarity and mutual support they so desperately need.

McCafferty stresses that changing this predicament is particularly difficult in the
shadow of the 'Troubles' and the manifold failures of the First Northern Ireland
Executive. By the time *Scenes* reached the National Theatre in April 2003, the
Assembly had been dissolved for a year. The play's premier coincided with the
passing of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2003, which sought to implement final
reforms to the Royal Ulster Constabulary, now renamed the Police Service of
Northern Ireland. But suspicion persisted in Catholic areas towards a force that had
been the arm of Unionist state. Sinn Fein only endorsed the new force in 2007. This
is reflected in *Scenes*, where the state is conspicuous in its absence from the daily lives
of those onstage. Vigilantism persists both in paramilitary violence - one character
Robbie Mullin is shot in the kneecaps for dealing drugs - and as a form of self-
protection. Rather than phoning the "peelers" Sammy Lennon, the elderly
proprietor of a local shop whose windows were smashed by bored local teenagers,
decides to acquire a wooden club (280). McCafferty depicts Belfast as a place where
the violent masculinity cultivated during the 'Troubles' lives on as a response to
disabling forms of gender and economic inequality. For Bobbie Torbett, hardness
offers a minimum of protection against debilitating economic conditions even as it
reproduces social alienation. Faced with the threat of paramilitary attack, Robbie
Mullin similarly projects his sense of vulnerability outwards by physically and
psychologically abusing his girlfriend Connie. In one of the play's shortest scenes we

see him brutally beating her (315), a truly shocking moment and a reminder that for women the cessation of the conflict has meant, not peace and security, but a continuation of violence, insecurity and discrimination. In emphasising the similarities between Robbie, Bobbie and Sammy's actions, McCafferty shows how gender relations penetrate both economic and cultural forms of violence. As the threat of weakness is displaced onto others, the cycle continues, reverberating across the play's interlinking scenes.

Perhaps working out a way of living with, rather than overcoming, weakness is precisely the point. As the first section of this chapter traced, fantasies of absolute mastery, independence and self-sufficiency remained central to both unionist and nationalist definitions of collective identity even after the peace. The positing of national subjects - masculine figures who stoically resist the incursions of their enemies - served to ward off the Agreement's 'effeminising' logic of interdependence. These masculine types were subject to a robust liberal critique in the work of Crilly and Mitchell. However, their turn to the personal as an antidote to dominant representations of the nation also fetishised independence in a manner that was politically disabling. In *Scenes* McCafferty depicts Belfast as a chaotic and fragmented place, but each fragment is brought together by a sense of what Judith Butler has called "the unmanageability of dependency".[190] The play confronts spectators with a community that is united neither on the basis of ethnic ties nor as a collection of distinct and autonomous individuals: those onstage are alike only in their physical dependence on one another, and so share a condition that cannot be understood without a recognition of difference. Combined with the play's elaboration of male fragility and reactionary violence, the play's form challenges spectators to move beyond the gender-coded distinction between independence and dependency and consider how political demands might be based on avowing, rather than simply denying, these fundamental conditions.

This is of course a complicated process. *Scenes* remains attentive of the need to morally adjudge ties of dependency in terms of their fundamental inequalities. Robert Tantich noted in his review that those onstage seemed to "have as much

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[190] Judith Butler, "Precarious Life, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Cohabitation", *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 26.2 (2012), pp.134-151.

control over their lives as the lumps of meat in the abattoir where some of them do work."[191] McCafferty's previous plays had often depicted formal politics in the background. In *Closing Time* (2002), also produced for the Cottesloe stage of the National Theatre, he depicted the ambivalent attitude of those for whom the 'peace dividend' remained elusive: "belfast's changing isn't it - the keep sayin it's changin - so it must be fuckin changin - this place is changin - places down the road are fucking kips" (179). The material advantages arising out of the peace, and the influx of foreign direct investment to the centre of Belfast, had not extended to the working class areas of south Belfast in which McCafferty's characters lived. Likewise in *Scenes* economic changes register as an impersonal force over which those onstage have little control. In the fifth scene McCafferty's Beckettian flaneur, Frank Coin, ties his shoes while the radio plays:

> and the political talks continue although all parties involved have agreed they have reached an impasse - and finally - on the business front he euro has again dropped against the pound and dollar

> *Frank turns off the radio*
> (240)

The combination of sectarian impasse and economic language is no accident, for even as the crisis at Stormont rolled on Northern Ireland was being busily integrated into the norms of global capitalism. As foreign investment flooded into Belfast and the city's property and services sectors expanded, businesses such as the beleaguered abattoir disappeared. It was all well and good to celebrate these changes as inaugurated a cosmopolitan and pluralist transformation, but a sense of powerlessness persisted in those areas where the 'peace dividend' remained elusive. The experience of dependency, the play suggests, is therefore riven with ambivalence. As Butler notes:

> We might think that interdependency is a happy or promising notion, but it is often the condition for territorial wars and forms of state violence. Indeed, I am not sure that we have yet been able to think about the unmanageability of dependency at the level of politics—to what fear, panic, repulsion, violence, and domination it can lead. It is true that I am trying to struggle toward an affirmation of interdependency in what I have offered here, but I am trying to

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[191] Robert Tanitch, "Scenes from the Big Picture", *Morning Star*, 24 April (2003), p. 9.

underscore just how difficult it is to struggle for social and political forms that are committed to fostering a sustainable interdependency on egalitarian terms.[192]

Scenes therefore begged the question: how could theatre help to foster "a sustainable interdependency [founded on] egalitarian terms" in post-Agreement Northern Ireland? The first step was to depict how a recourse to masculine hardness foreclosed the possibility of establishing the lines of co-operation and affiliation needed to address the unequal distribution of vulnerability in Northern Irish society. The second step was to model an alternative. Paul Taylor remarked in his review, the play itself seemed to offer a working model of collective and co-operative action: "The show presents a community, and the production brilliantly reinforces this by its own communal procedures."[193] When not acting, the cast members leapt up to effect the scene changes, their tightly choreographed actions accompanied by the sound of pneumatic drills and hammers. Working together to reconstruct the claustrophobic spaces in which their characters were trapped, this group of Northern Irish actors embodied the possibility of transformation, if only there was the collective will and solidarity to achieve it. As another reviewer declared: "This play makes you even more determined to make some changes in our lives today", changes that would involve taking weakness and dependency as a basis on which to address the entrenched inequalities that McCafferty so ably describes.[194]

Conclusion: beyond the "dramatisation of fragments"

Scenes marked an important departure from McCafferty's earlier plays and the work of this contemporaries. *The Waiting List, As the Beast Sleeps* and *On McQuillan's Hill* registered the sense of powerlessness that attended the the peace process in Northern Ireland. They depicted men who struggled to come to terms with their diminished roles at a time of intense social and political change. Characterised by male anger, frustration and atomisation, these plays struggled to re-imagine possibilities beyond the mere "dramatisation of fragments". Others, meanwhile, exploited this sense of crisis to justify the need for strong-armed, stoical and masculine leadership, a form of political representation that failed to come to terms with a key lesson of the

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[192] Butler, "The Ethics of Cohabitation", p.149.
[193] Paul Taylor, "A Colourful Slice of Belfast life", *The Independent,* 22 April (2003) p.15.
[194] Tom Unterrainer, "Review of '*Scenes from the Big Picture*", *Socialist Review*, 274, May (2003), http://socialistreview.org.uk/274/swimming-against-tide [retrieved 5/07/16].

'Troubles': that since both 'sides' were intimately bound together in a process of mutual differentiation, they had to learn to co-exist and come to terms with the very limits of their desire for mastery. *Scenes* attempted to stage this process by establishing interdependence as an aesthetic form, exposing the gap between the subjective performance of masculinity in crisis and the social bond of vulnerability that such a performance failed to properly grasp. Just as in Mitchell's work, the play remained attentive to the relationship between the failures of liberalism and the reconstruction of violent masculinities (as emblematised in the success of the DUP, which would become the largest party of unionism later that year). Amidst conditions of economic insecurity, those onstage reached for the models of strong-armed, masculine subjectivity long cultivated in nationalist and unionist cultures. To celebrate, as Crilly did, the Agreement's recognition of social plurality as an antidote to 'backward', socially conservative identities risked overlooking the persistence of real and debilitating inequalities. But in elaborating the constitutive role of dependency, the play suggested that coming to terms being out of control was a necessary precondition to developing a genuinely redistributive, post-sectarian politics of gender and class.

Collectively, the plays in this chapter make clear that the new political dispensation and the legacy of the 'Troubles' put pressure on cultural legitimation of patriarchal power in Northern Ireland. The public expression of sectarianism in Ireland has frequently been supported by misogyny. Both Irish nationalists and Ulster unionists have used femininity and emasculation as metaphors for states of powerlessness, in contrast to the stoicism and forbearance of the military male, a figure used to represent the quest for political independence. Because of this cultural history, power-sharing was met with male gender anxieties. In ending unionist hegemony and placing limits on the capacity of one of the "two communities" to claim absolute control over the other, the new political dispensation threatened to delegitimize those modes of ethno-nationalist representation that valorised masculine fantasies of mastery over the difficult work of learning to coexist on egalitarian terms. Gary Mitchell and Joseph Crilly dramatised the effect of this crisis of legitimation on men whose military masculinities were formerly afforded symbolic centrality within the warrior myths of their respective traditions. Both depicted how the political changes implicated masculinities, provoking concomitant practices of reconstruction (as in

Freddie's heroic fantasies) and renegotiation (as in Fra and Dessie's relationship). This process of reconstruction and renegotiation reflected the trajectory of the peace process at the time, where the renewal of sectarian binaries seemed to inhibit the development of alternative affiliations. Only McCafferty, however, used theatre to imagine a way out of this stasis. *Scenes from the Big Picture*, his "more or less perfect play",[195] showed that, despite the promises of military masculinities, none escaped conditions of powerlessness. His play suggested that any emancipatory politics should seek not to master, but to transform conditions of dependency in a more egalitarian direction. Though the liberal celebration of plurality was an important stepping-stone, only structural change would diminish the appeal of violence and bring about a truly 'post-conflict' society. This would require not just cross-community solidarity, but also a post-masculinist politics based on the universal extension of social protection to all, regardless of gender, religion or ethnicity.

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[195] Alastair Macauley, "*Scenes from the Big Picture*", *Financial Times*, 14 April (2003), http://www.petergill7.co.uk/works/reviews/scenes_03/ft.shtml, [retrieved 5/07/16].

Illustrations
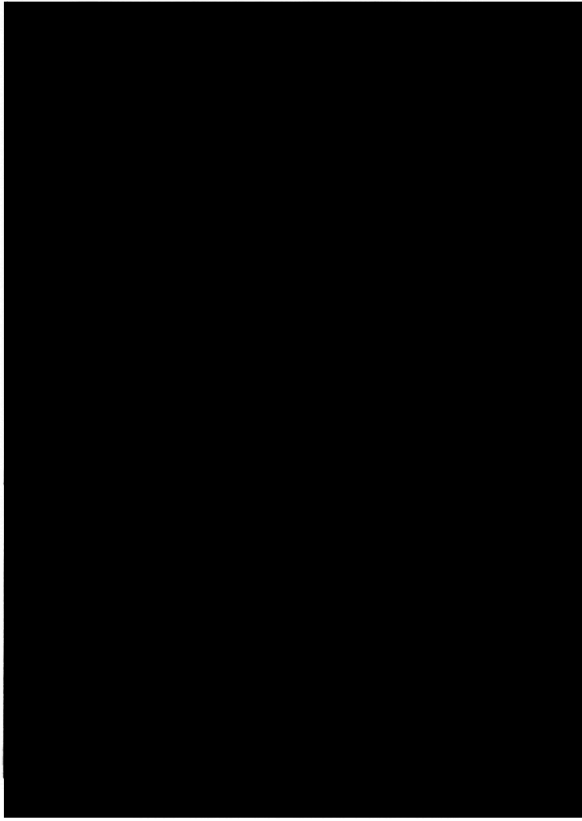
(Figure 1) Punch Magazine, "The Ulster King-At-Arms", *Punch Magazine*, 5 June (1914), https://www.punch.co.uk/image/I0000SVdxGLudDd8 [retrieved, 5/1/2020].

(Figure 2) John Taylor lying in hospital in 1972 *Belfast Telegraph*, Ulster Unionist Voice Advertisement, 21 May (1998) p. 3.
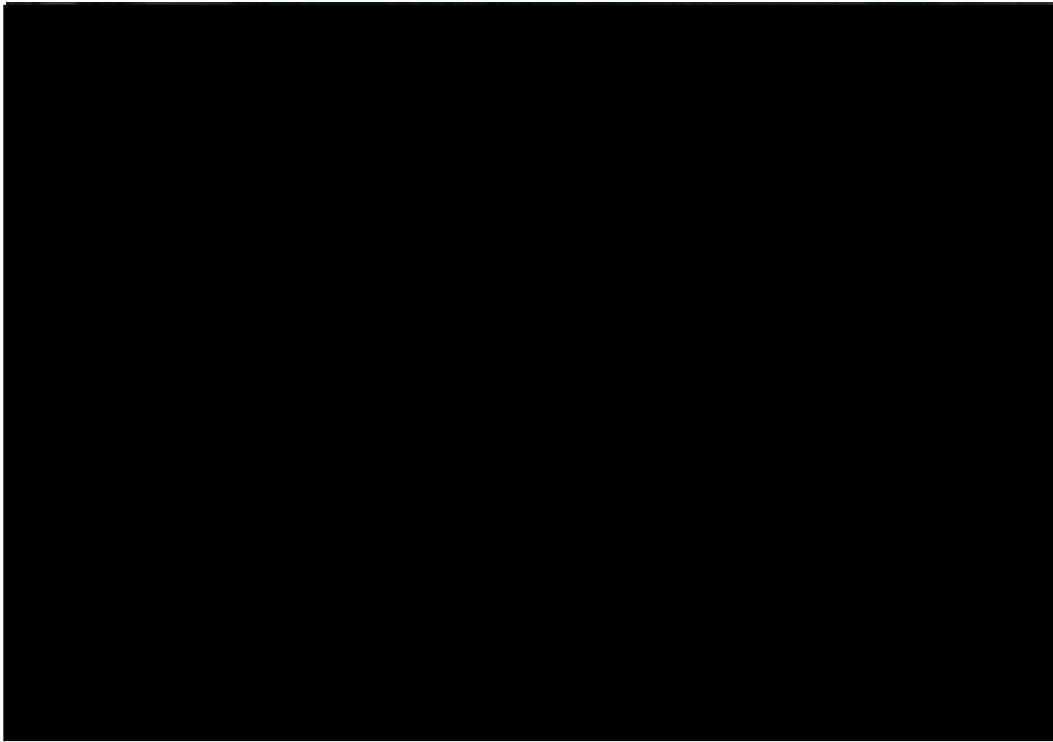
(Figure 3) Fra, Ray and Theresa in On McQuillan's Hill (Lyric Theatre, Belfast, 1998).
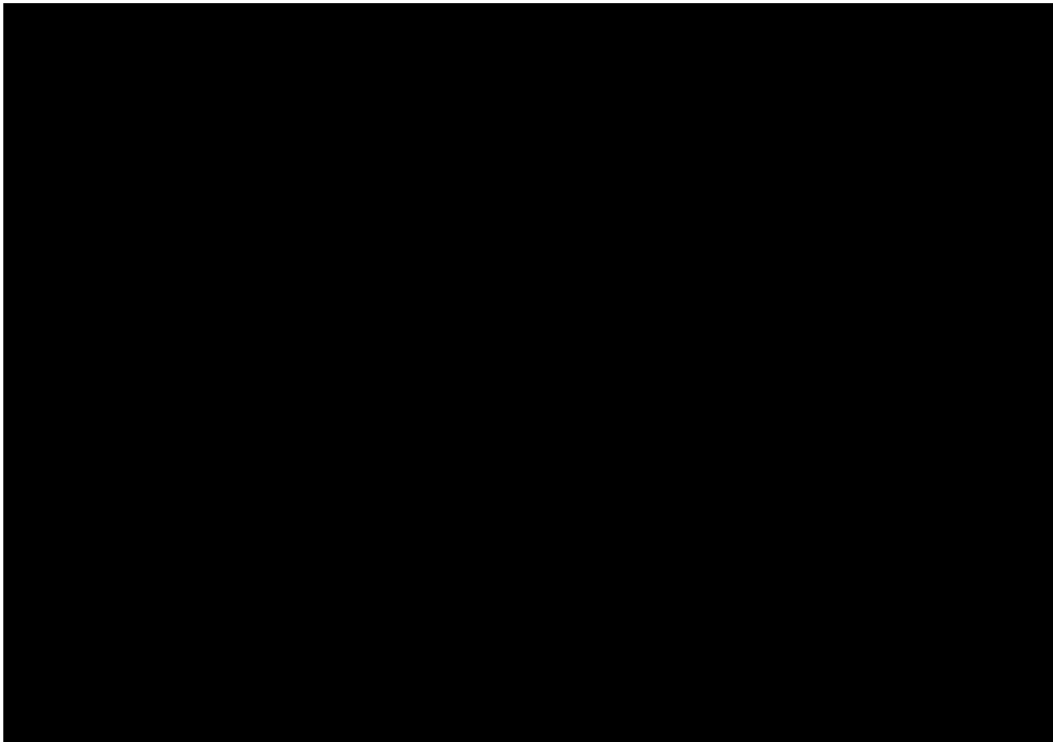
(Figure 4) The opening tableau of *Scenes from the Big Picture* (National Theatre, London, 2003).

Chapter 2
Performing and Reforming Remembrance: Gender, Memory and the Witnessing Body.

"The truth cries out, the truth cries out/ How do we still that urgent shout?" asks Danny in couplets that form the refrain of Dave Duggan's play *AH6905* (2005).[196] The voices of those who died in the Northern Irish Troubles intrude into Danny's narrative as he awaits "[t]ruth recovery", a surgical examination and removal of the malignant past from his body (83). His flesh represents a Northern Ireland that cannot forget the traumatic past, the dead of which haunt the present causing "spasm[s] of pain" (85). The divisive burden of this past, and its repetition, must be broken. But, as Danny's refrain indicates, the question remains: how and for whom is one to work through such memories?

In 2003 the Northern Ireland Assembly was dissolved following the acrimonious "Stormontgate" scandal. Sinn Fein's head of administration, Denis Donaldson, was arrested and charged with spying on behalf of the IRA, though it subsequently emerged that he was in fact a double agent working for the British security forces. Not only did the events bring into question Sinn Féin's attempts to distance themselves from the physical force tradition, but it seemed that, despite the peace, the violence of the past was present at the very heart of the North's democratic institutions. This was not, of course, a one sided problem, as evidenced by the persistence of Loyalist feuding and the shift towards the anti-Agreement DUP by the unionist electorate. However, the scandal and its fallout prompted a renewed interest in the difficulties of addressing the violence of the 'Troubles' when the past was used to bolster divisive political claims and monolithic conceptions of identity. Writing in early 2005, Fintan O'Toole criticised the peace process as "an exercise in forgetting what had happened and moving on" and declared that the "long moderate tradition

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[196] Dave Duggan, "AH6905", *Plays in a Peace Process* (Derry/Londonderry: Guildhall Press, 2008), p.85. All further references to this edition will be cited parenthetically in the text.

of forgetting the past has become a barrier to peace."[197] Such a statement strikes at the heart of the problem of memory in post-Agreement Northern Ireland: those well-meaning liberals who declare the past dead and buried leave it open to forces that would use it to reinforce divisive and one-sided narratives of belonging in the present.

Problems arise when testimony is appropriated in ways that elide the differences between particular memories, defined by Aleida Assmann as those that are "bound to a specific stance and are thus limited to one perspective […] neither exchangeable nor transferable", and ideological narratives of identity and belonging formed when "embodied, implicit, heterogeneous and fuzzy bottom-up memory is transformed into an explicit, homogenous and institutionalized top-down memory."[198] Though these forms of memory affect one another – the particular is negotiated in relation to the collective – neither can be entirely assimilated to the other. As Guy Beiner has noted, "the notion of 'collective [memory]' misleadingly suggests a homogeneity, which is rarely, if ever, the case in practice."[199] Bottom up particular memories and collective memory exist in a state dialectical negotiation.

The period after 2003 saw an intensification of political performances of remembrance, including annual nationalist and unionist parades, which used particular experiences of loss and pain to produce ideological narratives of community. On the one hand, what Duggan identified as the injunction to speak of the past increasingly became entangled with collective practices of commemoration that deployed the perceived incontestability of loss to circulate sectarian interpretations of the past and sustain exclusionary conceptions of belonging. On the other hand, those who fell within O'Toole's "moderate tradition" used the controversies arising out of victims parades to call for the depoliticisation of the past in favour of projecting an image of Northern Ireland as 'post-conflict' and open for business. Under such conditions, personal testimonies, when not ignored in the name

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[197] Fintan O'Toole, "What the IRA is Really Fighting for", *Irish Times*, 11 January (2005), p.14.

[198] Aleida Assmann, "Memory, Individual and Collective", *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*, ed. Robert E. Goodman & Charles Tilly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp.210-224 (p 213, p 216).

[199] Guy Beiner, "Making Sense of Memory: Coming to Terms with Conceptionalisation of Historical Remembrance", *Remembering 1916: The Easter Rising, the Somme and the Politics of Memory in Ireland*, ed. Richard S. Grayson & Fearghal McGarry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp.13-23 (p.17).

of maintaining public order, risked being inscribed within ethno-nationalist ideologies that homogenised the diverse experiences of those who experienced the conflict.

The influence of gender norms on the political uses of loss was central to these emerging tensions around the appropriation of memory. Sara McDowell has begun to explore how women's diverse roles, both within and beyond the paramilitary organisations, has not been reflected in the organised remembrance of the conflict. Because men remain the "architects of commemoration", their narratives have received more prominence than those of their female counterparts.[200] This chapter contends that implications of this one-sidedness extends further than the question of equal representation and the reproduction of traditional gender roles in the post-Agreement period: the masculinisation of remembrance promotes a damaging understanding of the relationship between identity and embodied experiences of vulnerability, loss and pain, one that inhibits the transformation of the past into a resource for healing, understanding and empathy.

In *Undoing Gender* Judith Butler outlines an important critique of the relationship between gender, identity and the experience of corporeal vulnerability. She points to an ambivalence at the heart of embodied life: that "[a]lthough we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle are never quite our own."[201] Our capacity to master ourselves and others is matched by our exposure to the violence of those around us. Though this vulnerability is often experienced in a purely negative manner, it also attests to the way identity is irrevocably entangled in the warp and weft of the relations that constitute it. The process of mourning pain and loss takes on this ambivalence. As elaborated in the work of Gary Mitchell and Owen McCafferty, though the violent experience of being "undone by each other"[202] can provoke a better understanding of the very limits of self-mastery, the gender-coding of powerlessness as effeminate and shameful prompts instead frantic attempts to shore up, and retreat behind, sectarian stockades. Thus, in societies emerging out

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[200] Sara McDowell, "Commemorating Dead "Men": Gendering the Past and Present in Post-Conflict Northern Ireland", *Gender, Place & Culture* 15.4 (2008), pp.335–54 (p.350).
[201] Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (London: Routledge, 2004), p.21.
[202] *Ibid.*, p.19

of conflict, particular experiences of wounding can become implicated in those political projects that claim to defend a given community from another, more often than not by invoking what Iris Marion Young calls "the gendered logic of the masculine role of protector".[203] Men are cast as defenders of those within a given polity that are most vulnerable, a gendered division of labour that places women and children in a state of unequal dependency. As this chapter shall outline, in this patriarchal logic male custodians of the unionist and nationalist past have used the performance of remembrance to allegorise particular experiences of vulnerability as traps from which their respective ideologies promise escape and out of which the ideal community will be restored.

The masculinisation of remembrance within gendered discourses of the nation has three important and interlinked consequences. The first is that it produces hierarchies of victimhood. On the one hand, various groups have select particular accounts of loss and pain to disguise their political motivations.[204] At a time when Sinn Fein and the DUP were in the ascendency and taking votes of their "moderate" counterparts, politicians used individual testimonies and victims' advocacy to present themselves as strong-armed custodians of their respective communities. This meant prioritising only those accounts of the past that could sustain utopian images of future freedom and reinforced homogenous conceptions of national culture. Secondly, far from attesting to the trauma of conflict, the use of memory to bolster specific identity claims involved mis-remembering the past. As Sara Ahmed has observed, "the transformation of the wound into an identity cuts the wound off from a history of 'getting hurt' or injured. It turns the wound into something that simply 'is' rather than something that has happened in time and space."[205] The wounded body is made representative of group identity, rather than the bearer of a complex, situated and particular experience of pain. During the Troubles William F. Kelleher analysed how the everyday encoding of the Other as friend or foe was conducted through a reciprocal process of reading and performing. Through the everyday reading of gestures, accent, location in the space, and participation in social rituals, bodies came

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[203] Iris Marion Young, "The Logic of Masculinist Protection: Reflections on the Current Security State", *Signs*, 29.1 (2003), pp.1–25.

[204] Sarah Jankowitz, *The Order of Victimhood: Violence, Hierarchy and Building Peace in Northern Ireland* (Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018)

[205] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (London: Duke University Press), p.32.

to be read as representative of group identity: Catholic/ nationalist or Protestant/ unionist.[206] Perversely, then, the allegorisation of particular experiences of wounding within ethno-nationalist narratives risks reproducing the very homogenisation of difference that drove the conflict in the first place. Finally, by invoking vulnerability to justify male custodianship over a given community, masculinised remembrance disavows the fact that vulnerability attests to the intimacy of antagonistic identities. This disavowal inhibits the development of a form of empathy that opens up, rather than reinforces, sectarian group affiliations. It is only by levering people's physical dependency on, and vulnerability to, one another that respect for diversity and the need for fellow feeling can be combined, because, paradoxically, such a common condition is experienced separately.

Despite the dangers posed by the transformation of trauma into discourse, work exploring truth and reconciliation in Northern Ireland has largely focussed on coming to terms with the past through storytelling alone.[207] The state's official methods of gathering personal testimony, from Coroner's inquests to the proposed Northern Ireland Oral History Archive, rely heavily on audio recording and transcription and therefore tend to privilege language over physical expression, mind over body.[208] This elision is understandable in a region where difference has too often been forcibly written on the body through the racialising social practices identified by Kelleher. The establishment of the Northern Ireland Assembly, a forum for verbal rather than physical dispute, was rightly seen as a central achievement of the peace process. However, attention to the victims' parades that occurred during the period between 2003 and 2007 that the Assembly was dissolved reveals how the inscription of vulnerability within ethno-nationalist narratives of self-overcoming combined with a "moderate" tendency to treat the performance of memory as irrational and threatening to marginalise the role of embodied expression in conjuring empathy. Responding to these often-divisive public performances of

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[206] William F. Kelleher, *The Troubles in Ballybogoin: Memory and Identity in Northern Ireland*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), p.80.
[207] See Healing Through Remembering, *Ethical Principles – Storytelling and Narrative Work: relating to the Conflict in and about Northern Ireland* (Belfast: Healing Through Remembering, 2009); Graham Dawson, "Life Stories, Trauma and the Politics of Memory in the Irish Peace Process," *Memory Ireland: The Famine and the Troubles* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2014), pp.195-214; Kirk Simpson, *Truth Recovery in Northern Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p.58-76.
[208] Northern Ireland Office, *The Stormont House Agreement* (London: Northern Ireland Office, 2014), p. 5.

memory, liberal commentators in the media deployed what Simpson calls a "facile, pseudo-psychoanalytic and political rhetoric of 'closure' [that] is often used as a substitute for meaningful debate."[209] Even as they criticised macho displays of victimhood, these discourses relied upon a gender-coded privileging of bourgeois rationality, control and self-mastery over forms of embodied expression whose emotionality supposedly threatened public order. In order to formulate an ethical approach to the staging and witnessing of pain and loss, we must therefore understand how the performing body is more than merely a symptom of an absence of proper linguistic expression.

Under certain conditions, theatre and performance can lend themselves to the work of developing forms of remembrance and witnessing that are not premised upon the salvific restoration of an ideal community, or the liberal management of difference, both of which posit memory as something to be mastered through the (re)establishment of a pre-determined, gender-coded and normative order. Scholars including Marvin Carlson and Rebecca Schneider write of theatre as syncopating past and present: events are repeated or recalled in imaginative configurations that, though different thanks to shifts in context, are ghosted by repetition.[210] That is, theatre provides an aesthetic form for processes of remembrance, reenactment and memorialisation that are never quite the same; this repetition with difference allows often-divisive memories to be contested and transformed. Stephanie Lehner has argued that, in the context of Northern Ireland, "such a re-remembering could initiate the constitution of a new beginning, which is neither founded on a politics of forgetting nor replicates the terms and divisions that marked the past."[211] However, it is important to note that theatre and performance does not *necessarily* lend itself to progressive or reconciliatory reconfigurations of past events. Within what Michael Kirby calls "matrixed" performance – where actors and participants perform in a structure provided by fictional characters, the dramatic model of plot, or metaphoric

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[209] Simpson, *Op. Cit.*, p.100.
[210] Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003); Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Enactment* (London & New York: Routledge, 2011).
[211] Stephanie Lehner, "Transformative Aestehtics: Between Remembrance and Reconciliation in Contemporary Northern Irish Theatre", *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 23.3 (2003), pp.278-290 (p.281).

signification – memories of pain and loss can be readily deployed to stand in for, and support, ideological narratives of community.[212]

What becomes apparent in the post-Agreement period is that performance makers increasingly dispensed with such structures, breaking with fictional frames in moments of "unmatrixed" performance that emphasise the 'reality' of the encounter between actor and spectator. Hans-Thies Lehmann argues that this emphasis of physicality is a defining feature of what he calls "postdramatic theatre"; that is, (mostly experimental) theatre since the 1960s that has dispensed with the dramatic model of characterisation, plot and fictionality to question conventions of acting and spectatorship. He argues: "The physical body, whose gestic vocabulary in the eighteenth century could still be read and interpreted virtually like a text, in postdramatic theatre has become its own reality which does not 'tell' this or that emotion but through its presence manifests itself as the site of inscription of collective history."[213] In this conception of the postdramatic the performing body is both a repository of cultural memory and also confronts spectators with the alterity and particularity of sense experience. Or as Lehmann puts it: "physical presence remains the point of theatre where the disappearance, the fading of all signification occurs".[214] The effect of this disturbance is of course no less 'real' than any other form of enactment, but by placing the body, and embodied experience, centre stage these performances conspire to unravel the appearance of art as separate from everyday life, and that witnessing the performance of remembrance is a passive exercise. The disruption of "matrixed" performance emphasises both how the body bears witness to that aspect of pain and loss that resists discourse and is not reducible to ideological narratives of community, and also how corporeal exposure is a source of empathy through which spectators come to understand the pain of the 'other' in relation to their own.

These formal developments coincided with an influx of funding for initiatives that aimed to employ the arts to achieve reconciliation. The Arts Council of Northern

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[212] Michael Kirby, "On Acting and Not-Acting", *The Drama Review: TDR*, 16.1 (1972), pp.3-15.

[213] Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trn. Karen-Jürs Munby (London & New York: Routledge, 2006), p.96.

[214]*Ibid.*, p.97.

Ireland invested an estimated £17.7million in the community arts between 2001 and 2005, and from 1995 the Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB) provided funding for initiatives focussed on reconciliatory outcomes ranging from cultural exchange, to economic development, to fostering greater understanding between hostile communities.[215] However, with the failure of devolution in 2002 came a shift in policy emphasis away from social inclusion and towards social cohesion. For example, as the SEUPB's various programmes developed – PEACE I (1995-2000), PEACE II (2000-2007), PEACE III (2007-2013), PEACE IV (2013-2020) – they increasingly began to fund work that sought to encourage cooperation between "both sides" by bringing together participants from both nationalist and unionist areas. Venues including the Playhouse Theatre in Derry, where two of this chapter's case studies were produced, became centres of such activity. Indeed, their financial sustainability was tied progressively to producing work on reconciliation and remembrance. This top-down change in cultural policy had a disciplinary effect upon the arts. The plays produced in the early post-Agreement period, such as those by Crilly and Mitchell analysed in the previous chapter, focussed on barriers to conflict transformation that were internal to each of the "two communities". But funders were already wary of supporting forms of single identity drama that asserted difference at a grass-roots level. For example, the ACNI withdrew their £2000 funding package for *Forced Upon Us* (1999), produced at by Dubbeljoint and JustUs Community Theatre at Amharclann na Carraige/The Rock Theatre in west Belfast, because it gave a staunchly Republican account of the actions of the RUC during the conflict; this was despite the fact that the play was motivated, in part, by a desire to challenge the stigma imposed upon that community from outside.[216] By 2004, in order to acquire stable funding arts managers would have to produce work that accorded with a policy agenda that emphasised the idea that Northern Ireland was moving on from the past. Theatre director Paula McFetridge remarked that, amongst other things, this shift augured "the end of single community drama" and the promotion of projects designed to bring people together.[217] Ideological pressure

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[215] See Matt Jennings, "Playing Your Role: Identity and Community-Based Performance in Contemporary Northern Ireland", *About Performance*, 9 (2009), pp.103-125.

[216] For an account of this controversy, see Maguire, *Making Theatre in Northern Ireland* (2006), pp.162-8.

[217] Quoted in Tim Miles, "Fighting the Peace: Counter-Narrative, Violence and the Work of Gary Mitchell", *Performing Violence in Contemporary Ireland*, ed. Lisa Fitzpatrick (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2010), ebook, n.pag.

exerted trough the prevailing funding regime made it more difficult to produce work that complicated the notion that the 'Troubles' was a thing of the past, particularly those, such as Mitchell, that explored the relationship between the social iniquities of the post-Agreement settlement and the persistence of sectarian violence. As McFetridge's comments suggest, there was a danger that overly optimistic treatments of the present would take precedence over an honest accounting of the complex emotional, political and juridical legacies of the past. The cultural performances, live art interventions and plays discussed in this chapter both confirm this tendency by revealing the way simplified accounts of the 'Troubles' were exploited to legitimise particular political agendas, and also affirm the ability of performance makers to take a more nuanced and ethical approach.

By analysing the representation of truth, reconciliation and remembrance in Sandra Johnston's live art piece *Composure* (2004), Daragh Carville's play *Family Plot* (2005), and Duggan's *AH6905* (2005) alongside the non-fictional testimonies of Theatre of Witness, this chapter will outline the ways in which performance makers have placed the body centre stage in the working through of the troubling memories. It explores both how remembrance can be performed in order to imagine a form of co-existence that diverges from the homogenising, top-town conceptions of community put forward in masculinised remembrance practices. By unravelling the dramatic model of plot, characterisation and metaphor, productions have deployed memories of pain and loss in a way that affirms vulnerability as a common condition that is nonetheless experienced separately through modalities of class, gender and nationality.[218] In the productions under discussion, the concomitant commonality and particularity of carnal experience allows those present onstage to transmit memories that can only be partially shared by the audience of secondary witnesses, and that can never therefore be reduced to sectarian or state-sponsored regimes of remembrance.

Masculine Regimes of remembrance: Re-enacting the Past in Parades and Commemorations

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[218] See Judith Butler, *Precarious Life* (Verso: London, 2004), p.27.

Before embarking on an analysis of the plays and live art pieces in this chapter, it is important first to establish the competing discourses concerned with defining the proper manner in which to remember and bear witness to the pain of the 'Troubles'. Northern Ireland's tradition of commemoratory performance, as epitomised in the annual parades marking important dates in nationalist and unionist history (from the Twelfth and the Battle of the Boyne, to the Easter Rising of 1916), necessitates a detailed exploration of the specific challenges posed by remembering the past after the Agreement. The difficulty in avoiding the re-inscription of divisive narratives in such a context is exemplified in discussion around the process of creating a shared memorial to those who died in the conflict. In 1999 the *Cost of the Troubles Study* observed that the establishment of a monument would be "premature" because "tensions still exist, and the talks process has not arrived at any settlement or conclusion."[219] A decade later, the Consultative Group on the Past (CGP) reached a near-identical conclusion:

> The Group does not believe that a shared memorial can be agreed at this time. It remains a contentious issue for many and poses many challenging issues around which we could not see any consensus. Who should the memorial commemorate? Should it have names inscribed and if so, whose names? What should the form of wording be? What form should the memorial itself take?[220]

Both reports suggested that the creation of a memorial implied knowledge of the ideological shape of society before such a society had been achieved. This reflects an worry that to give concrete form to an idea of 'settlement' or 'consensus' risks simplifying the difficult process of coming to terms with the past by reifying an idea of community in the present. Defining reconciliation clearly may offer security and consolation, but in a context where the legitimacy of the state is contested, it also risks excluding those whose conceptions of past and future differ from the officially sanctioned narrative. The CGP recognised that to getting people around the table to discuss the very prospect of reconciliation at all required constructive ambiguity as to the specific political and social configuration of a future shared society. In order to be

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[219] The Cost of the Troubles Study, *The Cost of the Troubles Study: Final Report* (Belfast: The Cost of the Troubles Study, 1999), p.42.

[220] The Consultative Group on the Past, *Report of the Consultative Group on the Past* (Belfast: The Consultative Group on the Past, 2009), p.104

as inclusive as possible, the precise form of consensus and the attendant interpretations of the past on which it is based should be open to dispute.

Consequently the idea of a "living memorial museum", a space "that can evolve" through the exchange of "living active memories", has emerged in the 2009 report as an alternative to static monuments.[221] Emphasising process rather than product, it is a model of remembrance that exemplifies the developing understanding of collective memory as being negotiated from the bottom up out of a plurality of accounts of the past. Lurking in this definition of the "living memorial museum" is a privileging of performance over writing. As Diana Taylor has observed, whereas an unchanging script or historical chronicle attempts to preserve the past as a supposedly "stable signifier", performance returns history and memory to the body by placing emphasis on the *process* of giving form to the past in ephemeral and non-reproducible acts of (verbal or gestural) expression.[222] It is therefore the focus on action and iterability implicit in the idea of "living active memories" that, it was hoped, would hold true to the transitionality of conflict transformation in a way that, rather than glibly relying on a notion of closure, would encourage an inclusive, open and epistemologically vulnerable process of remembering, interpreting and reinterpreting the past.

Nevertheless, to address the context of post-Agreement Northern Ireland is to be confronted by the role that ideological scripts (and proscriptions) play in circumscribing the promise inherent in performance's supposed refusal of stasis. Innovations such as the "living memorial museum" were developed in response to controversial remembrance practices that directed the psychological and physical experience of loss against perceived others - the British state, republicans, loyalists, traitors, sell-outs &c. - to consolidate ethnonationalist ideas of belonging. However, the emergence in such practices of a politics of victimhood must be understood as responding to a peace process in which the British state and Northern Irish parties – particularly the UUP and SDLP Executive of 1998-2002 - had failed to deliver either a society-wide truth telling mechanism or the reduction of inequality promised in the

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[221] Healing Through Remembering, *The Report of the Healing Through Remembering Project* (Belfast: Healing Through Remembering, 2002), p.vi; see also *Cost of the Troubles*, p.103.
[222] Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2003), pp.19-20.

mantra of the "peace dividend".[223] Indeed, these issues were tied together: the failure to deliver a marked improvement in socio-economic circumstances fuelled the notion that the 'other side' were being favoured in the allocation of the significant resources allocated for public inquiries. This fed into the already-acute sense of decline that afflicted a unionist population whose hegemony within the province had ended. Many felt the funding of an expensive investigation into Bloody Sunday, the killing in 1972 of fourteen unarmed civilians by soldiers of the British Army, for example, epitomised a British state intent on ignoring and forgetting Northern Protestants.[224] This zero-sum logic was to play out in the streets of Belfast and Dublin in the fraught, but carefully stage-managed, terrain of performed remembrance.

Both Republican and Loyalist commemoration has traditionally privileged certain roles in the conflict over others. Often the deceased, male paramilitary figure dominates the commemorative landscape in contrast to the relative absence of female combatants. In his recent survey of political murals from both 'sides', Bill Rolston has noted "the relative absence of women from the walls of Belfast", though Republican murals, expressing as they do political concerns that fall beyond a narrow militaristic focus, fare better than their Loyalist equivalents. [225] Niall Gilmartin's work with female ex-combatants from various Republican paramilitaries has uncovered a deep frustration at this absence of recognition, as one respondent put it: "sure you'd think it was only men who fought the war."[226] In practical terms, this imbalance has arisen in a situation where male ex-combatants have tended to become custodians of the collective memory of their respective communities and have taken decisions over the who, what and why of memorialisation.[227] In socio-symbolic terms, the re-establishment of male custodianship within practices of commemoration reconstitutes the binary between feminine passivity and masculine

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[223] See Colin Coulter, "Under Which Constitutional Arrangement Would you Still Prefer to be Unemployed? Neoliberalism, the Peace Process, and the Politics of Class in Northern Ireland", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 37.9 (2014), pp.763-776.

[224] See Kirk Simpson, *Unionist Voices and the Politics of Remembering the Past in Northern Ireland* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp.83-4.

[225] Bill Rolston, "Women on the Walls: Representations of Women in Political Murals in Northern Ireland", *Crime, Media, Culture* 14.3 (2018), pp.365–89 (p.78).

[226] Niall Gilmartin, *Female Combatants after Armed Struggle: Lost in Transition* (London: Routledge, 2018), n.pag., ebook.

[227] Fidelma Ashe, "Gendering War and Peace: Militarized Masculinities in Northern Ireland", *Men and Masculinities* 15.3 (2012), pp.230–48.

strength, between women and children as victims and men as defenders of the community, that war in fact put under pressure.

This gender dynamic was in evidence when in 2005 the politics of victimhood and public commemoration became a topic of intense public debate. Susan McKay devoted an article in the *Field Day Review* to a year in which the anti-Agreement Paisley emerged as the "undisputed leader of unionism", [228] violence erupted following the re-routing of an Orange Order parade at Whiterock in Belfast, and Love Ulster, a campaign advocating on behalf of Protestant victims of the IRA, was established by Loyalist activist Willie Frazer.[229] They produced written material and organised parades in Belfast and Dublin that, in the words of Susan McKay, "narrated the Troubles as if it was one long IRA onslaught."[230] In 2007 Sinn Féin organised their own March for Truth in Belfast, an event which mirrored those organised by Love Ulster in that it focussed primarily upon Catholic victims of collusion. Just as with their Loyalist competitors, the remembrance parade was widely criticised, this time for ignoring both Protestant victims of IRA violence and obfuscating Sinn Féin's advocacy of amnesty for Republican ex-paramilitaries.

Janelle Reinelt has argued that performance paradigms have much to offer the study of Northern Irish politics, particularly non-theatrical performances such as parades, because they can look beyond the metaphor of culture-as-text to analyse "the texture of the voice, the kinesthetics and proxemics of the bodies, the unscientific feel of the interaction."[231] It is only possible to reconstruct gender dynamics of the tit-for-tat victims' parades that emerged after 2005 by applying such techniques because the masculinisation of remembrance manifested less in explicit, spoken misogyny than in the blending of vulnerability and militaristic displays of strength. In his analysis of "male trouble" across a range of performance context, Fintan Walsh convincingly

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[228]Susan McKay, "'You Can Make Your Wee Film. But No Cameras: Unionism in 2005", *Field Day Review*, 2 (2006), pp.154-167 (p.165).
[229] Ironically it would later be alleged that Willie Frazer helped supply weapons to the Loyalist paramilitary group, Ulster Resistance. See Ivan Little, "Willie Frazer 'supplied weapons used in 70 Loyalist murders", *Belfast Telegraph*, 8 October (2019), https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/willie-frazer-supplied-weapons-used-in-70-loyalist-murders-38571178.html [retrieved 8/10/19].
[230] McKay, *Bear In Mind These Dead* (London: Faber, 2008), p. 299.
[231] Janelle Reinelt, "Witnessing Change: Public Life and Performance in These Times", *Irish Theatre International*, 1.1 (2008), pp.5-21 (p.11).

argues that the performance of victimhood can serve to reinforce "phallocentric representational strategies" in the very elaboration of their supposed dissolution.[232] Rather than tarrying with the sociality entailed by corporeal vulnerability, performers conjure with the threat of harm to "build up an image of the male body as an inviolable vessel with male subjectivity as capable of controlling the psychic intrusions of its traumatic and abject others".[233] In such circumstances, it is attachment to memories of pain and loss serve to bolster, rather than degrade, the coherency, sovereignty and strength of identity, a process of reconstitution that is often linked to the realisation of (the performer's) manhood. This is a dynamic first hinted at by Wendy Brown in her book *Manhood and Politics.* She observed that "Western political man has regarded his body as a trap, a weapon, an instrument, a foundation, a curse upon the mind"; it is through the intellectual mastery of the corporeal realm, coded as feminine, that masculine political authority is justified and established.[234] By courting controversy and (in one extreme case) causing physical violence, Love Ulster and the March for Truth set the stage for the recalibration of memories of loss, pain, embodied vulnerability as demonstrations of national manhood.

Love Ulster was launched in a re-enactment of one the most famous events during the 'golden age' of unionist resistance to Home Rule in Ireland. In April 1914 members of the Ulster Unionist Council smuggled weapons into the port town of Larne to supply the Ulster Volunteer Force, a paramilitary body raised to resist the incorporation of Ireland's Protestants into an independent Ireland. In 2005 the Love Ulster campaign symbolically landed in Larne by boat. Instead of weapons, participants unloaded 200,000 copies of a special issue of the *Shankill Mirror* that declared: "Ulster At Crisis Point".[235] Comprising members of Protestant victims' groups, the Orange Order and Loyalist activists, the event immediately courted controversy for being attended by members of existing paramilitary groups. The newspaper itself traced specific cases of IRA murder replete, from the 1978 Le Mon restaurant bombing to the 1993 Shankill Road bombing, with gruesome images of

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[232] Fintan Walsh, *Male Trouble*, p.144.
[233] *Ibid.,* p.145.
[234] Wendy Brown, *Manhood and Politics: A Feminist Reading of Political Theory* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1988), p.180.
[235] Anonymous, "We Are All Victims", *Shankill Mirror* [Special Ulster Edition], 19 August (2005), p.3.

the victims' bodies and lurid, detailed accounts of the tragic events. The paper's editorial line, however, enfolded these particular events within a broader narrative of Ulster Protestant decline. "Their lives must not be in vain" they declared, "it is in their memory and for their children that we must act now. Whilst we may disagree over many points, we must all agree that they did not die for what is now on offer to our community!"[236] Here particular accounts of pain and trauma were interspersed with a gendered narrative of Ulster Protestant decline. Articles decrying a "lack of knowledge concerning the many achievements of the Ulstermen around the world" inflected these memories of loss in order to serve a specific political agenda.[237] With information circulating that the IRA was about to decommission its weapons as a precursor to enabling Sinn Féin to enter power-sharing, Loyalists wished to warn the DUP and UUP against granting concessions to their political enemies. For all Love Ulster's elaboration of victimhood, such events were enfolded in what was, ultimately, a performance of martial strength. Amidst the presence of former paramilitary men, the wounded and broken bodies of those killed by the IRA were conjured only in order to serve Love Ulster's claim that they were the true custodians of Ulster Protestantism's symbolic body politic.

To organise, as Love Ulster did in 2006, a unionist march along O'Connell Street – the very epicentre of the Irish nationalist tradition in Dublin, the site of the General Post Office where those who took part in the 1916 Easter Rising were headquartered - was to test in precarious circumstances the stoicism of those bodies that would represent this besieged and resilient social corpus. As the presence of "six loyalist flute bands" (all-male) at the event made clear, the stories of the victims who took part were to be understood only as tallying with a broader collective memory, sustained in Orange parades each summer, of Protestant sacrifice in the face of a hostile Irish enemy.[238] Perhaps in keeping with this narrative, the attendance of Republican counter-protesters prevented the march from actually taking place. The confrontation did, however, produce images of the besieged bereaved that could be interpreted by sympathetic journalists as examples the Republic's "rabid intolerance"

[236] *Ibid.*
[237] Tim Anderson, "Unashamedly Patriotic", *Shiankill Mirror*, p.15.
[238] Alison Morris, "Fraser Praises Gardaí", *Daily Mirror* [Eire Edition], 23 February (2006), p.23.

towards "the memory of those who were killed by terrorists".[239] The interplay of personal and collective in this particular performance (or non-performance) of remembrance meant those that questioned the decision to march with Orangemen in such a symbolic location were liable to be dismissed as disrespectful. For those who took part, such an event provided a demonstration of communal solidarity and masculinist protection in which the vulnerability felt in the particular experience of loss and pain could be given an ordered political meaning.

The August 2007 March for Truth adopted a similar condensation of private grief and politicised strategies of performing collective memory. Organised by Sinn Féin, victims' groups marched alongside Republican flute bands that were named after famous members of Republican paramilitary groups. Another group of men carried replica weapons and wore balaclavas to mimic the attire of members of the Provisional IRA.[240] The event predictably provoked consternation from members of the Northern Ireland Assembly and a special motion was brought before Stormont to condemn the presence of paramilitary figures. Crucially, during the debate, Sinn Féin representatives defended such figures as "street theatre". SDLP MLA Alban Maginness retorted both by condemning the DUP for the "[s]electivity at the heart of the motion" – these same MLAs had failed to condemn the Love Ulster march in Dublin – and declaring that the march was "triumphalist and intimidatory and, in effect, it perverted rather than discovered the truth."[241] The debate, then, was less about the veracity of the stories told by the various victims' groups than the motives behind organising them into the collective form of a march. Evidence of 'bad' motives could be found not by assessing the truth of claims of collusion, but by studying the kinaesthetic arrangements that constituted, in Reinelt's words, the "unscientific feel of the interaction".[242] McGinness and others took offence in particular at the transformation of the supposedly "shared space" of Belfast city centre into a display of Republican strength. Those whose testimonies and embodied

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[239] Editorial, "Enemies of the State, Shameful Day of Dublin Violence Exposes Intolerance and Bigotry", *Irish Examiner*, 27 February (2006), p.1.
[240] See "Replica Guns at March Condemned", *BBC News*, 4 September (2007), http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/6977173.stm [retrieved 14/10/17].
[241] Quoted in Northern Ireland Assembly, *Private Members' Business: Republican Parade*, 25 September (2007), http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/victims/docs/nia/debate/2007-09-25_nia_debate.pdf [retrieved, 18/2/2017].
[242] *Op. Cit.*

experiences which might have complicated, or otherwise disrupted, this ideologically informed performance "matrix" were excluded from the march. As with the Love Ulster march, then, it was the obfuscation of vulnerability through the arrangement of participants that produced a one-sided staging of 'Troubles' memory.

Even as events such as Love Ulster and the March for Truth elided the particularity of embodied memory, liberal advocates of the peace process have been no less keen to discursively circumscribe the plurality of perspectives involved in the performance of remembrance. However insightful skepticism towards the hierarchalisation of victimhood was, such objections also supported another, no less contestable, attempt to enforce what McLaughlin and Baker have called a "social order and pacified domesticity". [243] In this rendering of the past, the public performance of remembrance worked against the task of representing Belfast (and elsewhere) as pacified site through which Northern Ireland could attract the international inward investment that constituted Northern Ireland's peace dividend. When in Dublin the Republican counter-protest against Love Ulster escalated into violence, Irish newspapers were quick to understand the meaning of their actions in economic terms. Journalists in the liberal-conservative *Irish Examiner* decried the "mindless vandalism and destruction".[244] Writing in the *Irish Times* Mark Brennock lamented how the unrest threatened the image of a city that "was seen as a safe place to live, to work and invest".[245] Another declared: "So there goes another €10 million down the political drain."[246] Understood as aberrant to Celtic Tiger Ireland's progress away from postcoloniality to credit-fuelled prosperity, such grievances represented the negation of what one commentator called "rational democratic organisations".[247] Rationality, as we shall see, was represented as a specifically bourgeois rationality that emanated from an alienated relationship with the body, interpreted as the locus of effeminising emotionality and a lack of proper self-control.

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[243] Patrick McLaughlin and Stephen Baker, *The Propaganda of Peace* (Bristol: Intellect, 2010), p.13.
[244] Harry McGee, "Fanning the Flames of Hate", *Irish Examiner*, 27 February (2006), p.13.
[245] Mark Bannock, "Signs of Planning for Trouble", *Irish Times*, 27 February (2006), p.14.
[246] Jim Dougal, "Time We Learned to Deal with the Past", *Irish Times*, 28 February (2006), p.16.
[247] Tim O'Halloran, "Marchers, Rioters and McDowell Share the Shame", *Irish Examiner*, 6 March 2006, n.pag.

Suspicion towards the public performance of remembrance such as Love Ulster and the March for Truth was rooted in the frequency of public order issues arising out of parading in the North and, from 2005 onwards, controversies around such events seemed to be intensifying. In September of that year, major riots erupted in Belfast when the annual Whiterock Orange Order parade was re-routed by the Parades Commission, a non-partisan organisation set up to minimise the provocation caused by nationalist and unionist marches. For many commentators writing in the print media, the violence seemed to confirm the need to take collective performances of remembrance off the streets entirely. This response exemplifies the development of a pseudo-psychoanalytic discourse that sought to cast *all* such demonstrations as somatic symptoms of an improperly controlled collective trauma.

Coverage in the print media described the events in terms that invoked trauma's capacity to overwhelm temporal and linguistic boundaries. The riots were a "Flashback to the worst days of war" or symptomatic of "a society left breached by history".[248] Time seemed to be out of joint, with the violence of the Troubles repeated in the streets. Such repetition was symptomatic of a past improperly assimilated into language. It was "the last resort of the chronically inarticulate", according to David McKittrick, who witnessed the riot with "[a]n appalling sense of déja-vu."[249] McKittrick did hazard a diagnosis: the failure to incorporate working class Protestants into the liberal-democratic order by delivering to them a peace dividend. This language is strikingly Freudian and in particular recalls Freud's famous essay, "Remembering, Repeating, Working Through". In it he observed that a victim of trauma "does not *remember* anything of what he has forgotten, but *acts it out*. He reproduces it not as a memory but as an action."[250] In this schema, survivors compulsively repeat the past in the present instead of properly integrating it into memory. The ameliorative abstraction of memory in narrative, for Freud, takes precedence over the compulsive re-enactments of the "motor sphere".[251] In writings that address collective remembrance, Freud's model of the individual psyche is

[248] Gerry Moriarty, "Flashback to the Worst Days of 'War'", *Irish Times,* 13 September (2005), p.14; Max Hastings, "A Society Left Breached by History", *Guardian*, 15 September (2005), p.33.
[249] David McKittrick, "Violence in Belfast: How a Banned March Revived the Troubles", *Independent,* 14 September (2005), p.4.
[250] Sigmund Freud, "Remembering, Repeating, Working Through", *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Freud*, ed. James Strachey, Vol. 12 (London: Hogarth Press, 1958), p.150.
[251] *Ibid.*, p.153.

simply scaled up to posit the crowd as lacking in the proper custodianship needed to contain the violence of the past.[252]

Max Hastings, writing in the *Guardian*, made clear the gender dynamics of such an accusation. His account of the riots employed a pseudo-Freudian language of hysteria the terms of which reflect the longer history of British anti-Irish stereotypes. He argued that the riots were a symptom of the Protestant working class's "rejection of rational politics" (specifically, their move away from the centrist Ulster Unionist Party).[253] Describing Ian Paisley's malign influence over the rioters he echoed those notions of racial effeminacy and atavism used to justify colonial rule in Ireland:

> Then we came to perceive "the Doctor" as frightening and dangerous. I remember once seeing Phelim O'Neill, a Stormont minister of the old country gentleman stamp, wring his hands after an outbreak of rioting. He said: "If we go on like this, Ulster will end up as a dunghill, with Ian Paisley crowing on top and Bernadette Devlin scratching at the bottom." Devlin, once heroine of the Derry barricades, is now almost forgotten. Yet never in O'Neill's nightmares did he anticipate Paisley becoming unionism's elected standard-bearer.[254]

The elision of Devlin, the Catholic, republican and socialist activist, and Paisley is significant. Just as the British have tended to elide the diverse identities of Northern Ireland's population, so Hastings deemed both figures alike in their distance from the proper (British) norms of political subjectivity. Paisley, depicted as a malignant therapist, seemed dangerous because his exaggerated, evangelical style appealed to the crowd by intensifying their emotions, and did so in a way that threatened the controlling influence of state power. For Hastings, the riots were a symptom of the absence of bourgeois masculinity. The cold, detached and restrained mind of "old

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[252] In a rudimentary fashion, they in fact follow some of Freud's own logic, particularly his expansion, in "Group Psychology", of his model of desire and prohibition at the level of the subject into a psychology of the mass. See Freud, "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego", *Standard Edition,* Vol. 18 (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), p.79. For a critique of Freud's conception of the mass as defined by "heightened suggestibility, a contagion and a hypnotic effect" see Lisa Blackman & Valerie Walkerdine, *Mass Hysteria: Critical Psychology and Media Studies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p.35 Deleuze and Gauttari famously pick up this managerialist tendency in Freud's scaling of the personal and familial into the collective: "The tone may be that of the scandalized psychoanalyst, the psychoanalyst-as-cop: those who do not bow to the imperialism of Oedipus are dangerous deviants, leftists who ought to be handed over to social and police repression." Gilles Deleuze & Félix Gauttari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trn. Hurley, Seem & Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p.108.
[253] Hastings, *Op. Cit.*
[254] *Ibid.*

country gentlemen" (Eton educated, of course) was needed to regulate the suggestible *corpus* of the working-class masses. If Northern Irish society was to transcend such moments of madness, it needed to safely contain remembrance within the ordered narrative of post-Cold War capitalist development, no less than that of "modern history" where "economics [was] achieving what politics [had] not".[255]

While it is perhaps no surprise that a conservative British historian should level such an analysis, Hastings's proclamations reflected McLaughlin and Baker's broader point about the post-Agreement paradigm of social order and domesticity. In this model, the performance of remembrance was to be carefully hidden from public view lest it affect Northern Ireland's fragile political arrangements, and impact its integration into the norms of global capitalism. Hastings was representative of a broader *bourgeois* discourse that legitimised the custodianship of state representatives, and the prevailing neoliberal order through production of "socially abject" subjects.[256] Though the political expressions of these Loyalist groups (refracted as they were through a sense of grievance that was rooted in the decline of unionist supremacy) were inadequate to the task of articulating the political-economic bases of their discontent, they also expressed, in a confected manner, the failure of the Peace Process to deliver to working class communities the much vaunted improvement in their economic prospects. By dismissing such events as products of the psychological deficiencies of the individuals that took part in them, *bourgeois* discourse was able to mystify the failure of capitalism to transform sectarian violence and the persistent role of economic maldistribution in fuelling sectarian paranoia. Dismissing such somatic expressions of anger and alienation as aberrant allowed commentators to protect Belfast's modernising image as a safe, post-conflict city: rather than being symptoms of the failure of capitalist 'progress', controversial public performances of remembrance could be dismissed as regressive, backward and barbaric; a return to the 'bad old days' of the 'Troubles'.

The controversies surrounding Love Ulster and the March for Truth helps to explain why the embodied aspect of remembrance has been overlooked in favour of linguistic

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[255] *Ibid.*
[256] See Imogen Tyler, *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance to Neoliberal Britain* (London: Zed Books, 2013).

forms of remembrance such as storytelling and oral history projects. In post-conflict Northern Ireland, problematic bodies, especially in public spaces, are to be managed in order that the peace and attendant democratic institutions be maintained. Those losses that countermand simplistic notions of "moving on", problematise the apolitical, benign status of the past as cultural heritage, or fall outside nationalist or unionist martyrologies, are liable to be excluded both from public displays of bodies in parades and from state sponsored reconciliation initiatives. In aligning the process of working through the past with the project of protecting identity and maintaining social order, ethno-nationalist and liberal discourses disregard the diversity and particularity of memory. Not only does this prevent each victim of the 'Troubles' being treated equally, but it forecloses the possibility of understanding how occluded intimacy of pain, loss and vulnerability could disrupt those masculinist conceptions of identity (as self-sufficient and sovereign) that prevailed in Northern Ireland.

Challenging the Talking Cure: Gender and Metaphor in Carville's *Family Plot*

Drama produced in the years immediately following the Agreement tended to address contemporary issues such as demilitarisation and engagement in the new political dispensation. For playwrights such as Mitchell, Crilly, and McCafferty critiquing the zero sum logic of militarism and patriarchy was the most pressing issue at a time of extreme political and social vulnerability. Following the emergence in public spaces of a divisive politics of victimhood, practitioners began to focus on whether theatre might offer a vehicle to model ethical modes of witness and remembrance. For playwrights such as Daragh Carville and Dave Duggan, theatre's ability to reflect upon the problem of remembrance in metaphors and stage images offered a way of addressing the problematic of constructing a framework of truth recovery that could encompass the plurality of claims over the past. As Duggan has noted:

> The challenge is, how do we remember in such a way as to build a positive future? There are forty-three sides to every conflict, I don't buy the 'two tribes' model of the conflict. […] should we have truth recovery and if so, how?[257]

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[257] Quoted in Eva Urban, *Community Politics and the Peace Process in Contemporary Northern Irish Drama* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), p.222.

The process of bearing witness to pain and loss should challenge pre-established frameworks of understanding that feed the divisive politics of victimhood and the use of stage metaphor and allegory provides a useful way to distance audiences from sectarian signifiers. Such techniques may even open up understandings of the past beyond the "two tribes" model of the conflict that has been embedded both in the post-Agreement institutions, and (as we have seen) in bottom-up remembrance practices. Colin Graham argues that this model "accepts that 'identity' – or rather 'identities' in the shape of two 'communities' – was the irreducible elemental stuff of life in the North of Ireland".[258] This has the effect not only of ignoring the role of the British state as a protagonist in the conflict, but also reduces nationalist and unionist ideological aspirations to questions of cultural 'heritage'. Rather than being a dynamic process through which such concepts can be called into question, remembrance is reduced merely to recognising the historical harm experienced by this or that 'community'. However, the distancing effect of stage metaphor and allegory also risks imposing a different, and equally homogenising, framework on the conflict. As we shall see with *Family Plot*, Daragh Carville's treatment of the overlooked issue of gender-based violence during the 'Troubles', the imposition of a family-as-nation model of plot in fact reproduced the simplifications of the 'two tribes' model, and served to take up experiences of corporeal vulnerability in a manner that dampened the political claims that might arise out of such experiences.

Daragh Carville's tragi-comic *Family Plot*, staged at the Queen's Drama Centre in Belfast in the aftermath of the Whiterock riots, is a play that, in usefully critiquing some of the prevalent assumptions around the issues of remembrance and reconciliation, also reveals the limited capacity of stage metaphor to mediate the complex relationship between individual and collective memories. Its guiding metaphor of family-as-nation challenges the notion that talk alone can resolve the legacy of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Three generations of the same family, trapped in a life-after-death purgatory, attempt to work through the past in order to reach an afterlife. Stuart Marshall's sparse, green and grey set established a

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[258] Colin Graham, "'Every Passer-by a Culprit?': Archive Fever, Photography and the Peace in Belfast", *Third Text*, 19.5 (2005), pp.567–80 (p.567).

Beckettian tone, with each character sporting shabby pyjamas, grey, corpse-like makeup and dirty hair (figure 1). Frank, a failed father, constantly reminds his fellow sufferers that: "We have to talk", "[w]e have to stick together" because "[w]e're family, aren't we? Flesh and blood."[259] However, in the first act, every attempt to remember turns into verbal repetitions that the participants are "*powerless to stop*" (20, 32, 42). In a move redolent of the collapse of the devolved institutions, discussion only serves to re-enact well-rehearsed stories of grievance, infidelity and violence. This tendency to repeat the past verbatim results in the belated traumatisation of the next generation. Emer, Frank's daughter, arrives in purgatory at the end of the first act to affirm that those onstage are indeed metaphorical representations of Northern Ireland's intercommunal strife. She has committed suicide, unable to deal with the legacy of her father's abusiveness. The sins of the previous generation are passed on in a process of transgenerational haunting that is apt to a post-Agreement period riven by the continuation of low level violence.

One of the play's key interventions is to use the family plot to foreground how Frank's insistence on talk serves to obscure a chequered past of domestic violence. His injunction to remember in order to "hold the whole bloody thing together" (18) is designed to restore a form of social relations that never existed, a golden age when Emer was born:

> FRANK   But. But if there was love, if there was love at one time, then maybe –
>
> TESS   No. No.
>
> FRANK   Now hear me out here, Tess. Let the dog see the rabbit for God's sake.
>
> TESS   No. There was love. But it died. We killed it. Killed it stone dead. […]
>
> FRANK   Alright, alright, I'm not saying we have to love each other. It's too late for that. I know that. I'm not askin for hugs an kisses. But we still have to live together again. Now come on now. Remember. Emer. When you were a wee girl.

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[259] Daragh Carville, *Family Plot* (Belfast: Tinderbox Theatre Company, 2005), p.17. All further references to this edition will be cited parenthetically in the text.

EMER   No.
                     (48)

Frank's mode of remembering deploys nostalgia to construct an image of future reconciliation that is far too demanding given the fraught nature of the past. Worse still, his talking cure propagates a narrative of his own "impeccable behaviour" (41) based on the inaccurate and selective operations of his memory. Frank's injunctions are prefaced by Emer's memories of her father "ragin fallin in full drunk" and her mother "standin in the kitchen, cryin, her hand to her face, her eye" (42). Given these revelations, his image of the future, akin to the desire for a renewed communal wholeness, cannot sustain a plurality of voices and interpretations. Not all are equal at the "talks process" table, Carville suggests, particularly female victims of male violence.

Even as Carville's vernacular spelling and use of recognisable colloquialisms situates the play firmly in the context of post-Agreement Belfast, no information is provided that would indicate the confessional or political background of each character. This distancing technique allows *Family Plot* to explore of the culture of misogyny that inflects the relationships onstage. However, the play also entertains metaphorical resonances that leave little room for the contextual detail required to understanding how gendered violence relates to the experience of civil conflict in Northern Ireland. As Lisa Fitzpatrick observed, the deployment of the family-as-nation metaphor "limits engagement with the characters as individuals: they are stock characters who stand for a group identity."[260] This is reflected in Karen Fricker's observation, in her review of the play, that it had "fallen hard between the two stools of specificity and universality: we don't find out enough about the characters to care about their miserable lives, but the larger points he may be making remain vague."[261] Either the violence directed towards the women of the play is reduced to an allegory for warring 'tribes', or the complex history and political causes of such violence is simplified within a rather benign and depoliticised familial scenario. That little room was given the influence of broader structural conditions was intensified the play's

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[260] Lisa Fitzpatrick, "Performing Gender, Performing Violence in the Northern Irish Stage: 'Spittin' Blood in a Belfast Sink'', *Contemporary Theatre Review* 23.3 (2013), pp.302–13 (p.305).
[261] Karen Fricker, "*Family Plot*", *Guardian*, 8 November (2005), https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2005/nov/08/theatre1, [retrieved 1/3/17].

fast-paced, looping dialogue and comically exaggerated vernacular. Rather than inspiring critical reflection, the script "produce[d] nervous laughter in the audience".[262] Overall, then, the audience was left with a sense that *Family Plot* failed effectively to navigate the desire to make legible the multifarious legacies of pain caused by a society in conflict, and the complex of particular memories.

The conclusion of the play intensified the ambiguity arising out of this tension identified by Fricker. As each of the characters share their memories, all but Frank leave the stage having resolved to "forgive an forget" the misdeeds of the past (45). Frank is not included in this moment of transcendence because he continues to suppress his involvement in causing the suffering of those around him. But the precise meaning of each character's departure remains unclear: do they represent the unnevenness of accountability in a context where politicians continued to justify the violence of the 'Troubles' as necessary? Or does Frank's recalcitrance figure the elision of gendered forms of violence amidst the 'two communities' focus of conflict transformation? As Fricker noted: "the reason all but one of the family members find their way out, and where they are heading, remain as unclear as everything else."[263] Such mixed responses reflected the inadequacy of the family-as-nation allegory in a region trying to escape modes of nationalist representation that effaced the interdependent and internally differentiated nature of identities in Northern Ireland. Though the metaphor of the family offered a way for the audience to understand the intimacy that exists between two warring communities, such a framework erased the intersecting forms of violence that operated during the conflict and put forward a model of forgiveness premised upon transcending division by giving up discussion of the past entirely. The plurality of local and embodied experiences of violence during the Troubles could not be sustained when inscribed within such figurations of reconciliation and remembrance. Lumping the complex legacies of the 'Troubles' into one comprehensible metaphorical language of familial reconciliation and the injunction to "forgive an forget" (45) offered, as Grania McFadden put it in her review, "little comfort to those afraid to lay down their burden".[264]

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262 *Ibid.*
263 *Ibid.*
264 Grania McFadden, "Review: *Family Plot*", *Belfast Telegraph*, 4 November (2005), p. 25

Composure, AH6905 and the Body Beyond Metaphor

The question remained: how could theatre and performance model ethical forms of remembrance and witnessing that both challenged sectarian narratives of the conflict and respected its complex, particular and differential effects on the bodies of the wounded and bereaved? The role of the artist in this process has been a central concern of Sandra Johnston's performance practice. Born and raised in Protestant household in rural County Down, Johnston had direct experience of the particular vulnerability faced by women during the 'Troubles'. She lived for a time on the Lower Newtownards Road in East Belfast, a strongly Loyalist and Protestant part of the inner city known for periodic sectarian conflict with the neighbouring Catholic enclave of the Short Strand. She experienced first hand the risks faced by strangers in such a context when in 1994 she suffered a serious attack at the interface between the two areas. In the days that followed Margaret Wright, a Protestant woman from West Belfast, was murdered by Loyalist paramilitaries on Donegall Road in a case of mistaken identity: they thought her a Catholic.[265] A sense of the casual brutality faced by women, and horror that such violence was an acceptable part of the conflict, informed Johnston's subsequent work, much of which explored ways to ethically bear witness to those women affected by the conflict while also working through memories of her own traumatic experience.

Unlike *Family Plot*, as a live artist Johnston devised performance forms that dispensed with plot and characterisation to foreground the role of the performing body as a site of witness. The term "live art" was adopted in the late 1980s to foreground the non-reproducibility and impermanence of the performance event, even as the supposedly live event is inevitably ghosted by those repertoires of past behaviour that Taylor notes are a part of performance's anti-archive.[266] In other words, by emphasising ephemerality rather than permanence, live artists draw attention to the performing body as a repository for cultural memories that can only be inadequately restored in the present. In a manner akin to the "living memorial museum", and in contrast to the metaphorical and allegorical frameworks put forward in the parades and *Family*

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[265] See Rosemary Sales, *Women Divided: Gender, Religion and Politics in Northern Ireland* (London: Routledge, 1997), p.71.
[266] Taylor, *Op. Cit.*

Plot, live art offers a potent means to figure the provisional, changeable and imperfect nature of remembrance.

In 2004 Sandra Johnston devised *Composure*, a durational live art piece, as a part of the RELATIONS project featuring Asian and Irish artists. Performed twice, first in the Chapel of Adoration on the Falls Road, and then at the Catalyst Arts gallery in central Belfast, the performance attempted to illustrate the challenges of bearing witness of another's memories of loss and pain. Using a middle finger dipped in saline liquid, Johnston carefully draws patterns on two large windows. She then blows chalk dust onto the wet surface of these shapes to reveal them to the audience (see figure 2). This process of inscription is conducted in response to a 1976 video, played on a loop, of Jane Ewart-Biggs delivering a statement about her husband Christopher Ewart-Biggs, the recently appointed British ambassador to Ireland, killed by an IRA land mine while travelling in his official car. In the unedited footage, Ewart-Biggs manages to maintain her composure for the duration of her tribute, delivering a the plea for peace on behalf of her deceased husband, before being overwhelmed by grief and collapsing, unaware that she is still being recorded. The dignified Johnston, meanwhile, closes her eyes in deliberation and solemnly continues to mark inscrutable shapes on the window.[267]

In this performance Johnston foregrounds the failure of composure as a necessary, even productive process. For Ewart-Biggs, language fails at the point where her grief and loss overwhelms her sense making capacities, a moment that exposes the troubled relationship between collective forms of political remembrance (in this case, the carefully crafted broadcast statement) and the particular, often traumatic, memories they seek to mediate. This relates to the fact that Ewart-Biggs set up the Christopher Ewart-Biggs Memorial Prize to promote literary, theatrical and academic contributions to Anglo-Irish co-operation.[268] For the live artist such narrative responses perhaps lose sight of how the extra-linguistic dimensions of memory might provoke a different modality of empathy and understanding. Across the six hour duration of the piece, the relationship between Johnston's markings and

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[267] Sandra Johnston, *Composure* (Belfast: Catalyst Arts, 2004) DVD.
[268] "Christopher Ewart-Biggs Memorial Prize | A Biennial Literary Prize", http://www.ewartbiggsprize.org.uk/ [retrieved 1/3/2017].

the video remains enigmatic. At the very least, the contrast between her careful labour and the repetition of the video might suggest the possibility of the artist providing some narrative coherence. However, that her markings remain inscrutable to the audience acknowledges the impossibility of translating or resolving the painful memories of another, but nevertheless commits to the arduous work of bearing witness to, and empathising with, them. Johnston's body therefore becomes the centre of attention not as a carrier of meaning, but in its physicality and gesticulation. Here witnessing is an ongoing form of labour that, in reproducing the physical effects of vulnerability and exhaustion, grasps analogously at Ewart-Biggs's debilitating loss.

In her review of the performance, Suzanna Chan sensed that Johnston eschewed "mythic claims of objectivity" in order to distinguish "between engagement and appropriation, benevolent humanism and political responsibility". [269] Johnston modelled a process of bearing witness that, unlike the employment of victimhood within parades, refused to usurp the place of the other, respecting the alterity of their experiences, while also maintaining the physicality of the body as a means of coming to terms with their pain. In Chan's words, "Johnston is prepared to leave herself vulnerable."[270] Unlike *Family Plot*, where the the ties of "flesh and blood" (17) allegorise for the audience the intimacy of inter-communal violence, *Composure* situated direct experience of corporeal vulnerability as central to developing an ethical form of empathy that works through analogy, rather than metaphor. Because, as Judith Butler suggests, vulnerability is common condition "that cannot be thought without difference", placing the body, rather than narrative, centre stage, allowed Johnston to feel the pain of Ewart-Biggs at the same time as recognising its incommensurability.[271] The recognition that the analogising grasp of empathy is never complete or adequate was crucial in a context where states of injury were taken up in masculinised forms of remembrance as a means of bolstering sectarian narratives of identity and belonging.

Here it is important to stress the implication of biography and the absence of characterisation. Following her 1994 attack, Johnston's work repeatedly (re)turned to

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[269] Suzana Chan, "Sandra Johnston", *Circa*, 111, winter (2004), pp.68-9 (p.69).
[270] *Ibid.*
[271] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life* (London: Verso, 2004), p.27.

the trauma of other women.[272] A decade later, she was still attempting to come to terms with her own experience of gendered violence by bearing witness to an story of loss that likewise illuminates the effects of a culture of violent masculinity. But even as the performance suggested commonalities between the experience of two women who were victimised by difference 'sides' in the war (one IRA, the other the UVF), Johnston was careful to maintain the alterity and inscrutability of Ewart-Biggs's grief. By insisting on the difficulty of translating another's memories, *Composure* suggested that though histories of pain mark the violation of our primary ties to one another, the bodily life of those histories suggest the need for a different mode of co-existence, one in which we live beside on another, but not as one. This could properly be called a feminist approach to remembrance and reconciliation: a process of witnessing that refuses to control vulnerability within a comforting narrative of community renewal, but instead insists that co-habitation be based upon a respect for difference.

Though *Composure* used the body to rethink the relations between remembrance, reconciliation and identity, it concentrated more on the role of the artist in this process than directly engaging spectators in the task of ethically addressing the legacy of the 'Troubles'. As Chan insightfully observed, in focussing on Johnston's relationship with Ewart-Biggs, the performance risked entertaining "expectations of the artist as some sort of conscience of troubled locations."[273] Positioning the artist as a stand in for, or exemplar of, the community as a whole risked promoting the form of audience engagement that Megan Boler has called "passive empathy".[274] In her critique Martha Nussbaum's humanist and democratic concept of "compassion" she argues that such an affect is based on projecting oneself into the life of the other as a surrogate for taking meaningful action.[275] Passive empathy arises from identifying with the experience of another without feeling the obligation to take action to "shift existing power relations."[276] Sometimes it is precisely because injustice exposes certain subjects to forms of violence from which one is shielded, and of which one

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[272] See Bryonie Reid, "'A Profound Edge': Performative Negotiations of Belfast", *Cultural Geographies* 12.4 (2005), pp.485–506.
[273] Chan, *Op. Cit.*
[274] Megan Boler, "The Risks of Empathy: Interrogating Multiculturalism's Gaze", *Cultural Studies*, 11.2 (1997), pp. 253-273 (p. 255).
[275] Martha Nussbaum, "Compassion: The Basic Social Emotion", *Social Philosophy and Policy* 13.1 (1996), pp.27–58.
[276] *Op. Cit.*, p.256.

does not have any direct experience, that we feel the need to participate in social change. Consequently, the past should be remembered and witnessed in a way that does not reproduce the differential distribution of precarity that defines societies at war; rather, in order that the 'Troubles' never happen again, it should enlist the audience in transforming the masculinist conceptions of identity (as self-enclosed and self-sufficient) that drove the conflict in the first place.

Dave Duggan's play, *AH6905*, focussed on this task and did so by incorporating conventions derived from live art; specifically, both by using the body as a metaphor for the painful process of remembering the past, and by foregrounding the physicality, rather than fictionality, of the performance encounter to remind the audience of their individual obligation to address "the truth of the past" (85). First produced in October 2005 at the Playhouse in Derry, the play was staged by Sole Purpose Productions, an company founded with the specific intent of staging work that addressed the challenges of the Peace Process. The play is set in the waiting room of a hospital where Danny (played by Robin Greer) is seated in an uncomfortable hospital chair, nervously waiting to undergo a surgical operation designed to uncover the truth of Northern Ireland's recent past (figure 3). He addresses the audience as if they were fellow visitors and it quickly becomes apparent that he suffers from a psychosomatic illness close to Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID). The *DSM-IV* describes the symptoms of DID as the presence of "two or more distinct personality states that take control of behaviour".[277] The personalities that intrude on Danny's narrative consist of those killed during the Troubles on all sides, including: a child victim of an IRA bomb; a Republican paramilitary who willingly sacrificed himself to the cause; a working-class soldier from Lancashire who joined the army out of financial hardship; a Loyalist victim of his side's internal feuding; a civilian murdered for being in the wrong area of the city; and a victim of the Bloody Sunday massacre.

Using DID as a model for the haunting of the past allows Duggan to depict traumas and their competing demands for justice as unmediated by a pre-emptive notion of

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[277] American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: Fourth Edition* (Washington DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1994), p.484.

reconciliation. Even as we are able to witness glimpses of the past in *AH6905*, Danny never actually *remembers* his own trauma onstage. Neither does he incorporate the intrusive voices of the dead into a unified sense of self – that process of reconciliation is delayed until "tomorrow" and his next scheduled truth extraction (104). Indeed, though Danny stresses the need for "Procedures. Terms of reference" he also highlights the dangers of advocating a rigid form or process of remembrance, one that might serve a specific ideological agenda, asking: "Who set up the Panel? Who is paying for it? Who's on it? Who benefits from it?" (90). Here it is the ambiguity of reconciliation as a horizon or goal that allows for a more inclusive process. Duggan figures this openness in gendered terms: Danny is a vessel for these stories precisely because he has given up the defensive reflexes associated with the "logic of the masculine role of protector".[278] His many many moments of vulnerability, such as when he finally resolves to undergo surgery so "the record can be set in stone" before mocking himself for "[a]cting like I've got it all worked out" (103), contrast the certainty of those who would forget the past, or use it to stoke yet more violence. Indeed, he registers the irony that those who wish to securitise the present by forgetting the past perpetuate cycles of violence: "The Lion is awake and he's dripping wrongs and memories and he's yowling for vengeance" (101). It is only by suspending judgement, and assuming vulnerability, that an inclusive process of remembering the past can be initiated.

Duggan's deployment of surgical procedure as a metaphor for truth extraction and, by extension, psychiatric therapy, is crucial since the body functions in the play as both a communal sign and designates the Other as Other. Jon Erickson has observed in his study of the body in performance that:

> When the intention is to present the performer's body as primarily a sign, idea, or representation, corporeality always intervenes, and it is *too much* of a body […] it is the "problem of other minds" which posits the "as if" of projection, but finds its identification always incomplete […]. The body can be seen, then, both as instrument *for* the sign and something inexplicably Other.[279]

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278 Young, *Op. Cit.*
279 Jon Erickson, "The Body as the Object of Modern Performance", *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism,* 5.1 (1990), pp.231-246 (p.242).

Danny's body in *AH6905* certainly functions effectively as a sign. In Scene 7, for example, traumatic memory is represented as a wound, a "raw place, still oozing pus and blood" that causes pain: "the steady hum of something not properly addressed" (99). The metaphor enables the audience to translate Danny's traumatic memories – intruding as psychosomatic pain - in terms of their own experience of bodily affliction. The images of the bleeding body and Danny's "*spasm[s] of pain*" (88) make intelligible both the collective pain of the body politic of Northern Ireland and the personal wounding of the individuals afflicted. The actor's body is a common sign encouraging a degree of empathic identification with the other's trauma, where empathy entails a shared experience of corporeal vulnerability that is analogous to that performed by the other.

Duggan is nonetheless quick to forestall any complete identification between audience and Danny. This manoeuvre has an ethical purpose. In order to avoid passive empathy, an audience must be incited to reform themselves and their society when confronted with the trauma of the Other, or as Danny puts it, "[i]t has to be more than just telling stories. It has to be" (99). He refuses to become a sacrificial victim for the audience. The injunction to do more than merely remember – "making sure that it doesn't happen again" (94) - is enhanced by a refusal of complete identification. Even if Danny functions as a sign for every *body* in the audience, so to speak, he insists on his own particularity by demanding action from them:

> So don't ask me to do it on my own. Don't ask me to do the truth recovery while you stand on the sidelines muttering 'get on with it'. (*Laughs and points at an audience member*.) I knew that thought had crossed your mind.
>
> It could be any one of us.
>
> Yes, you. (*Points at audience members*.) Does your heart ache with the truth of the past? Do your joints creak at the pain of memories? Do your body cavities throb at the unsolved murders, the lost files, the buried remains in the bog? My very being shudders with it all. (94)

At this moment in the play they are singled out as physically occupying the theatre space. The stage metaphor gives way: they are no longer interpellated as hospital visitors within the fictive circle of the drama, but as individuals whose singular

embodied experiences are being invoked. The spectator must not merely imagine their body *as if* it were Danny's but must actively seek to undergo the same process of "lift[ing] the nails out of the flesh, pris[ing] back the knuckles" (95). The legacy of war, Duggan insists, is felt across society through its effects on the body, but these can only ever be felt separately and in an unevenly distributed way. In calling upon a form of ethical relation based both on this co-implication, or interdependence, and on the incommensurability of corporeal experience, Danny attempts to incite the audience's active engagement. Indeed, his body is never opened up onstage just as he never reveals the kernel of his traumatised past. Just as in *Composure*, the body appears as an object amongst others that indicates a subjective life and a painful past that is never fully legible to others. Since both the performer's body and the fictional trauma remain, in Erickson's words, "inexplicably Other", identification with Danny's pain is never a simple or straightforward affair.[280]

Unlike the comprehensively "unmatrixed" structure of *Composure*, then, *AH6905* deployed *both* stage metaphor and excessive physicality: levering the former to conceptualise a collective process of coming to terms with the past, and employing the latter to remind the audience of their presence and the necessity to participate actively in social change. In this way Duggan's staging of the body *beyond metaphor* challenges what Jacques Rancière has called "the essence of consensus": "the annulment of surplus subjects, the reduction of the people to *the sum of the parts of the social body*".[281] Such abstract metaphorical or allegorical conceptions of community identity serve to negate the presence of a multitude of vulnerable witnessing bodies. As *AH6905* suggested in its push *beyond* the sufficiency of metaphor, the incitement to remember should concentrate intellectual resources in the hands of the individual, rather assimilate them into a collective body disseminated in top-down regimes of remembrance, because, "in a theatre […] there are only individuals plotting their own paths in the forest of things, acts and signs".[282] That is not to say that truth recovery is conducted in isolation, but that it is founded on a presumption of equality when processes of coming to terms with past wrongs are negotiated. When reminded

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[280] *Ibid.*
[281] Jacques Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics", *Theory & Event*, 5.3, (2001), http://www.egs.edu/faculty/jacques-ranciere/articles/ten-thesis-on-politics/ (my emphasis).
[282] Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trn. Gregory Elliot (London: Verso, 2009), p.16.

simultaneously of their corporeal particularity and shared vulnerability by Danny, the audience at *AH6905* are induce not "to stand on the sidelines" (94), but to engage actively in reckoning with the past, a form of critical engagement that diverges from the masculinist practices of remembrance that predominated at the time of the play's première in 2005.

Navigating Speech, Silence and the Injunction to Tell in Theatre of Witness

Duggan's centralisation of corporeal vulnerability and the ongoing somatic afterlife of the 'Troubles' ran against the grain of prevailing tendency in formal politics to treat such memories as dangerous material to be taken off the streets, archived and safely consigned to the past. The pressure to 'move on' from the past only intensified after Sinn Féin and the DUP agreed in 2007 to establish a new power-sharing Executive. The spectacle of former enemies Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness, the new First and Deputy First Ministers, joking together in Stormont provoked a mixture of euphoria and perplexity. "Northern Ireland's recent history is full of unreal moments that have you pinching yourself to make sure they're really happening", declared Liam Clarke.[283] Particularly interesting was the extent to which contemporary coverage focussed (with different degrees of cynicism) upon the symbolic capital of this meeting of former enemies. Paisley and McGuinness quickly became known in the Northern Irish press as the "Chuckle Brothers", signalling that, in the local context at least, their media appearances were being treated as carefully staged and strategic performances. What astonished most was the capacity of both leaders to assume the reserved, professional demeanour expected of world leaders in Western states. Shortly following the establishment of the new regime, both leaders were invited to open the New York Stock Exchange on Wall Street. Liam Clarke noted that despite being an historic moment:

> [T]he symbolism was strange, however. This, after all, was Ian Paisley, born-again Christian and lifelong opponent of terrorism, standing in the temple of Mammon proclaiming himself a "businessman for God" as he posed beside a republican. This was Martin McGuinness, the self-proclaimed revolutionary

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[283] Liam Clarke, "Moderates Playing Hardball To Stop Chuckle Brothers' Fun", *Sunday Times*, 9 December (2007), p.12.

republican, standing beside the exemplar of diehard unionism to celebrate capitalism red in tooth and claw just as a credit squeeze bites and the bottom falls out of the property market.[284]

As symbolic ceremony, the leaders performed their transformation from street preacher and revolutionary to technocratic custodians of a new economic order. In political terms, Northern Ireland seemed to be assimilating to the political and economic norms of capitalist governance (even as those norms were beginning to be questioned, thanks to the first stirrings of what would be the Financial Crisis). And as Clarke's bewilderment suggested, many were sceptical as to the extent such media performances papered over the shortcomings of the Peace Process.

For Anthony McIntyre, writing from a Republican perspective, the image of Paisley and McGuinness "idiotically grinning at each other" resembled "a quaint Kafkaesque production where those who died to make it stageworthy do not come back to take the encore at the end."[285] If the parades and plays such as *Family Plot* reduced the difficult aspects of the past to a set of standardised narratives, so these media performances presented the new economic consensus as a tale of redemption; but this tale was only sustainable with the suppression of those memories of loss and pain that rendered vulnerable the security of the present. This devaluing of peace work was reflected in a reduction of funding. Power-sharing resulted in the devolution of peace and reconciliation policy to the Office of the First and Deputy First Ministers. Despite their outward agreement, neither party was able to agree on a comprehensive community relations policy until after 2013.[286] Following the Financial Crisis, international funding for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland steadily declined, but because of disagreement between the two parties the shortfall was not matched by an increase in domestic support. As Braniff and McGrattan remarked in 2012: "The prospect of engaging with victimhood in a

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[284] *Ibid.*
[285] Anthony McIntyre, "Chuckle Ar La, 8 May 2007", *The Irish Review*, 38, Spring (2008), pp.65-68 (p.67).
[286] Duncan Morrow, Lisa Faulkner & Sean Pettis, *Funding Peace: A Report on the Funding of Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland, 2007-2017* (Belfast: Corrymeela, 2018), https://www.corrymeela.org/cmsfiles/resources/FundingPeace/Funding-Peace.pdf [retrieved, 8/10/19].

meaningful way as a society is being increasingly erased."[287] Peace, understood as the mere prevention of antagonism and grounded in declaring Northern Ireland fit for integration into the norms of globalisation, risked becoming an injunction to forget. Under such conditions, the staging of those memories that were busily being rendered surplus to the requirements of this 'post-conflict' social body could become a statement of political defiance.

After the controversies of 2005 applied theatre projects emerged specifically to address the issue of remembrance and memory through the staging of personal testimonies. Companies such as Blue Eagle Productions and Smashing Times began to produce work in collaboration with those who had direct experience of loss and trauma during the 'Troubles'. Both followed the lead of Theatre of Witness, an theatre project whose director, Teya Sepinuck, was invited to the Playhouse Theatre in Derry a few months following the establishment of the new Executive. The guiding principles and devising process for Theatre of Witness was derived from Sepinuck's work in the United States. Its method involves working with a group of volunteers to develop short, ten-minute monologues that account for a specific event or experience. These are then interweaved in productions that use stage imagery to link the stories together. Productions therefore have a tight thematic focus, and to date there have been six Theatre of Witness productions in Northern Ireland, each of which has addressed a specific topic. *We Carried Your Secrets* (2009) involved recollections of growing up during the Troubles; *I Once Knew A Girl* (2010) explored the impact of violence towards women of both Protestant and Catholic backgrounds; *Release* (2012) featured an all male cast that included a former IRA volunteer and members of the security forces; *Sanctuary* (2013) investigated the stories of those who have sought asylum in the North; *Our Lives Without You* (2014) centred on those who lost loved ones in the 1971 Ballymurphy Massacre; and *Unspoken Love* (2014) staged the testimonies of those in mixed marriages. Alessia Cartoni and Thomas Spiers, two practitioners mentored in the Theatre of Witness process by Sepinuck, directed, respectively, the two most recent plays. Feedback and question and answer sessions have been a feature of each of these productions in the understanding that the

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[287] Cillian McGrattan & Maire Braniff, "Depoliticising Victims in Northern Ireland", *opendemocracy.org*, 18 September (2012), https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opensecurity/depoliticising-victims-in-northern-ireland/ [retrieved 2/5/17].

audience should be able to question the aesthetic decisions taken by the director and participants.

Cartoni's production, *Our Lives Without You*, is of particular interest because it incorporated an existing victims' group, the Ballymurphy Families, and was therefore the first single community piece produced as a part of the Theatre of Witness programme. Performed in 2014 at the Brian Friel Theatre in Belfast, the Playhouse in Derry and the 147 Trust in north Belfast, the show involved six family members of those who died when British paratroopers shot and killed eleven Catholic civilians during protests against the introduction to the North of internment without trial in 1971. The period between 9 and 13 August saw some of the worst violence of the 'Troubles', with nationalist areas such as Ballymurphy, located in West Belfast, in upheaval against the British Army's sweeps against suspected members of the Provisional and Official IRA. Many Protestants living in Catholic areas of the Province fled their homes while Catholics were burned our of their home by Loyalist vigilante groups. To protect against further incursions, the women of Ballymurphy set up 'hen patrols': "Armed with whistles, football crackers, bells and rattling binlids, and calling 'Quack! Quack!', they would follow the invading troops from street to street, handing over from one hen patrol to the next."[288] In a context where the Republican movement was dominated by male leaders and representatives, these events saw the development of women's political involvement contrary to conservative notions of 'feminine' passivity and domesticity. This involvement was extended after the events when members of the Parachute Regiment argued that they had only opened fire having first been fired upon by Republican paramilitaries. In order to dispute such an account, relatives of survivors began a campaign to clear the names of their deceased loved ones and seek justice against the soldiers who shot them. Involving as it did five women and a man from the Ballymurphy Families, *Our Lives* offers an interesting test case for how accounts of the 'Troubles' can challenge both the injunction to 'move on' from controversial events, and standardised narratives of women's involvement in the conflict.

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[288] Ciarán de Baróid, *Ballymurphy and the Irish War* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p.78.

The single community focus and partiality of *Our Lives* immediately presents a problem for the strategies used to resolve the conflict, the most pervasive of which is encapsulated in the Agreement's concept of "parity of esteem". This liberal pluralist model of conflict transformation seeks to develop recognition and respect for Northern Ireland's cultural 'traditions', conceived of as essentially and symmetrically divided between Catholic/nationalist and Protestant/unionist communities, at the same time as finding communality between individuals from the communities in conflict. Such a model is reflected in the project's funder: the European Union's PEACE III programme, which specifically stipulated that participating groups aim at "reconciling communities".[289] Addressing onstage an event that had been a major recruiting sergeant for the Provisional IRA certainly risked re-entrenching those divisions which "parity of esteem" was attempting to move beyond. Writing in 2011 of the prospect of a public inquiry, journalist Kevin Myers declared that it threatened a "fragile and unnatural coalition which only stays together because no faction disputes the ambitions or efficacy of the other" before declaring "this addiction to an Official Victimhood must stop, before Protestants explode. A line has to be drawn somewhere in the history: a line which says, Yes, Much Evil and Great Wrongs were done, BUT NO MORE PUBLIC INQUIRIES."[290] Remembering the experiences of a single community risked unleashing the kind of mass hysteria that so worried commentators such as Max Hastings. The vulnerabilities of the past had to be mastered and contained lest they infect the delicate balance of mutual recondition and "parity of esteem" set out in the Agreement. Indeed, in 2012 the Coroner's inquiry into the Ballymurphy massacre was suspended due to vague "national security concerns".[291]

Rolston has attacked the liberal pluralist strategy as reducing the various political claims of Republicans, nationalist, unionist and Loyalists to seemingly intractable differences in identity. He argues that understanding conflict as a question of cultural

[289] Special EU Programmes Body website, http://www.seupb.eu/programmes2007-2013/peaceiiiprogramme/overview.aspx [retrieved 10/04/17].

[290] Kevin Myers, "A Line Has to be Drawn in the History of Northern Ireland – There Must be no More Public Inquiries", *Irish Independent*, 18 November (2011), http://kevinmyers.ie/2011/11/18/kevin-myers-a-line-has-to-be-drawn-in-the-history-of-northern-ireland-%E2%80%93-there-must-be-no-more-public-inquiries/ [retrieved 10/04/17].

[291] BBC News, "Coroner John Leckey Suspends Inquests into Controversial Killings", *BBC News*, 15 November (2012), http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-20340606 [retrieved 10/04/17].

difference obscures the historical role of the British state, particularly its "differential relationship with Irish nationalism on the one hand, and Ulster unionism on the other."[292] Indeed, those who participated in *Our Lives* did so precisely in order to raise questions of social justice that pertained to the involvement of the state as a protagonist in the 'Troubles'. They used theatre as a political resource: a space in which to confront those historical events that had conditioned their internalised sense of self, as well as to testify to the innocence of their loved ones. *Our Lives* therefore presents an interesting case study in how to resist the erasure of those whose bodily lives bore the marks of politically inconvenient memories while, at the same time, seeking to move beyond standardised or sectarian narratives of the 'Troubles'.

Sepinuck's method of working with participants to create ten-minute monologues that capture the essence of their stories uses many conventional – and potentially problematic –narrative structures to shape their experiences into a performable form. The production of some narrative coherency is necessarily informed by familiar themes, images and tropes, many of which may work to reproduce conventionalised understandings of the past and present. The stories in *Our Lives* follow a linear and developmental structure, beginning with each speaker's pre-'Troubles' childhood experiences, working through the difficulties of dealing with the anger provoked by those experiences, and concluding with a collective commitment to fight for justice on behalf of the deceased. Conservative representations of motherhood, family and childhood feature in many of these narratives, particularly the gendered trope of politics, identified with a public sphere dominated by British soldiers, intruding upon the sanctity of the private, domestic space. Rita Bonner describes the killing of her brother John Laverty as a loss of childhood innocence. Where before the shooting she made tea for the incoming soldiers, they were now the enemy: "they took away my family life".[293] The assumption of familial sanctity is also evident in Briege Voyle's narrative. She relates how as a child she loved to "play house" and "dream about having children", only for such dreams to be shattered by the death of her

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[292] Bill Rolston, "What's Wrong with Multiculturalism? Liberalism and the Irish Conflict", *Rethinking Northern Ireland: Culture, Ideology and Colonialism*, ed. David Miller (London: Longman, 1998), pp. 253-74 (p.272).

[293] Theatre of Witness, *Our Lives Without You*, dir. Alessia Cartoni, art dir. Teya Sepinuck, prod. Chris McAlinden (Derry/Londonderry: Cmore Films, 2014), DVD. All subsequent quotations transcribed from DVD recording of The Playhouse performance.

mother, Joan Connolly. Subsequently she describes leaving home and, after a period of depression, finding redemption when, like her deceased relative, she "took on the mother role". By contrast, Pat Quinn's account of losing his brother Frank involves a period of politicisation: he took to the streets in protest against the presence of the British soldiers, throwing stones and rioting against their incursions. The contrast between Pat's testimony and his fellow participants reproduced a clear division between 'masculine' public and 'feminine' private spheres. Unlike the depiction of Frank as a domestic abuser in *Family Plot*, *Our Lives* placed significant cultural value into keeping the family together, despite the hardships of conflict and poverty, and situated the domestic sphere as a site of redemption by conceptualising it as separate from public, political sphere.

Even as these elements of the women's stories aligned with the mythologisation of the heterosexual family in narratives of the 'Troubles', other aspects of their accounts also opened for discussion marginalised aspects of the conflict and its aftermath. For example, Eileen Corr, whose father Joseph was killed in the massacre, speaks of the poverty that came with losing the male breadwinner. So busy was she with looking after her siblings and traumatised mother that she was unable to speak to anyone about how her father's death affected her. Her story made public the particular burdens faced by women who lost loved ones, burdens taken on, but rarely recognised, precisely because of gendered distinctions between the public and private spheres, and the tendency to focus on the sufferings of those directly engaged in the conflict. Corr also resisted the injunction to redeem this difficult period of her life in an ordered narrative of familial harmony. The experience of trauma was such that Eileen can only mark the absence of explicit memories of the aftermath of her father's death (figure 4):

> I can't remember what happened and why or how. I've had to make up memories. These tattoos mark my troubled time. They are forty years old. Marks from my past. I was twelve when I did them with Indian ink. I drew the shapes and I put the needle in and I kept pushing until the skin bled and the ink got in. They were painful, but no more than what was going on inside.

The body and in particular the tattoos mark the stubborn resistance of Eileen's traumatic experience to ordered narration in a manner that reflects the randomness

of the violence. But by expressing her pain in non-verbal form she allows the audience to imagine her internal grief as comparable to the physical pain of the tattoo needle. These are physical wounds, a part of Eileen's sense memory: that non-narrative trace of past pain that is felt in her body alone. Just as with Johnston's shapes, the tattoos communicate in their very inscrutability, encouraging a form of empathy that also resists those ideological narratives that seek to encode, exploit or expel the particular and embodied experiences of victims.

As noted above, discussion of memory and memory work in post-Agreement Northern Ireland has privileged the transformation of painful memories into discourse over their public performance. Such an approach is understandable in a context where women's experiences had been consistently marginalised. Monica McWilliams notes that the silencing of women's voices was central to the culture of anti-colonial Irish nationalism. The idealised image of Ireland as a dignified woman whose honour war defended by her macho sons "silenced the much stronger imagery of the sovereign goddess figures and female Celtic warriors of the early Irish tradition."[294] In practical terms, both the Catholic and Protestant churches in the North perpetuated cultural beliefs that upheld the sanctity of marriage and defined women's 'proper' place as being in the home. As Kathryn Conrad has remarked: "Those who stepped outside the ideal are pilloried in the public sphere or confined to silence in the private sphere".[295] In a context where political leaders conjured the spectre of the other 'side' violating the sanctity of the home and committing violence against 'their' women and children, reporting domestic violence or rape committed by one's own side was all the more difficult.[296] However, the fetishisation of speech also ignores the political stakes of speaking of the past. Some compel victims to speak

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[294] Monica McWilliams, "Violence Against Women in Societies Under Stress", *Rethinking Violence Against Women*, ed. R. Emerson Dobash & Russell P. Dobash (London: Sage Publications, 1998), pp.111-140 (p.126).
[295] Kathryn Conrad, *Locked in the Family Cell: Gender, Sexuality, and Political Agency in Irish National Discourse* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), p.14.
[296] This was most notable in the case of Máiría Cahill, who alleges that working for Sinn Féin's youth branch in the late 1990s she was subject to sexual abuse by a member of the IRA. When Cahill reported her ordeal to the IRA they dealt with it internally, subjecting her to an extended period of questioning before forcing her to meet her alleged attacker. In a context where the reputation of Sinn Féin's political credibility was at stake, and where Republicans mistrusted the Northern Irish security forces, Cahill was forced to keep her allegations private; that is, until she made them public in 2010. See "Timeline: Máiría Cahill Allegations", *BBC News*, 24 November (2014), https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-29786451 [retrieved 10/03/17].

precisely in order to justify the dubious cure of strong-armed custodianship and the strengthening of sectarian bonds. Silence can become a way to resist the idea that telling a story will mean that pain will be healed. As Sepinuck herself has observed, "the difference between the *untold* and the *unheard*" has become a central guideline for the Theatre of Witness project.[297] To be silent publicly can take on an eloquence of its own.

One performer in *Our Lives*, Alice Teggart, had been doubly silenced: her father Daniel was murdered at Ballymurphy and her brother Bernard, a young man with learning difficulties, was abducted and killed by the IRA on the false accusation that he was a British spy. Apart from two brief lines and the beginning and end of the play, she remains silent and seated. Teggart's niece, Aisling Devlin represents "the next generation who is a witness to these stories" and recalls, in her aunt's stead, what she has learned of the deaths. During her account she constantly refers to Teggart's physical presence, what she sees rather than hears: "When I look at you, I see a woman who is carrying the burdens of the past, and I see what you are capable of and I see that you are truly the voice of our family". Devlin observes her aunt's trauma in her physical presence, rather than in language; she identifies resilience in her aunt's resolute and sturdy comportment. It is an interaction that insists upon that bodily afterlife of her particular history of hurt, an afterlife that that takes non-verbal form precisely because the nature of her loss confounded one-sided narratives of victimhood and placed her beyond support networks afforded to the families of more palatable victims. It is a powerful example of Lehmann's postdramatic paradigm in which "the present actuality of the body's visceral presence take precedence over the logos."[298] He describes such moments as producing "shock" because audience members become unsure whether to respond to the events onstage as 'fiction' or 'reality'.[299] In Teggart's untold testimony, the performance matrix provided by Theatre of Witness's process of organising each story into a performable narrative gives way to allow the audience to sense, in their own bodies, the unaestheticisability and alterity of her painful memories. This is communicated non-verbally to

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[297] Quoted in David Grant & Matthew Jennings, "Processing the Peace: An Interview with Teya Sepinuck", *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 23.3 (2013), pp. 314-322 (p.319).
[298] Lehman, *Op. Cit.*, p.145
[299] *Ibid.*, p.104.

spectators in the difficulty she has controlling her emotions throughout the performance. It is in the very resistance of her memories to ordered narration that the audience sense the raw 'reality' of her loss. Those present, if moved at all, are moved by the realisation that this is not a mere story, but an 'authentic' version of the otherwise well-known history of Daniel and Bernard Teggart's murders.

Whether intentionally or otherwise, Alice Teggart's silent presence encourages a form of witnessing which is ethical because it is partial and incomplete. Her "visceral presence" allows the audience to feel the pain and vulnerability caused by her loss, even as her silence insists upon the separateness and specificity of that pain. She shows spectators that to be silent is not to be condemned to invisibility within a culture that marginalises those whose losses cannot be decoded within standardised narratives of Northern Ireland's past and future; rather, the difficult persistence of certain memories in particular bodies should "shock" us into challenging the exclusions enacted by existing practices of remembrance. At the same time, Teggart's refusal to disappear from view communicates to them the unfinished nature of the Ballymurphy Families' struggle for justice, resisting injunctions to 'move on' in the name of new dawns, hopeful beginnings and peace dividends. It is the next generation, represented by Devlin, who, through their solidarity, carry on this struggle.

The audience feedback for *Our Lives* reflects this careful negotiation of speech and silence, the known and the unknowable, and the sense that solidarity should arise precisely out of, rather than in spite of, difference. One spectator declared that they felt "blessed to have been in contact" with what were "deeply personal stories". Another praised the production while noting that they "didn't really understand what it must have been like for all you wonderful and brave people."[300] Such remarks perhaps attest to the way the corporeal vulnerability of those onstage facilitated empathy while simultaneously insisting upon the resistance of the testimonies to translation or inscription by witnesses. Significantly, perhaps, one respondent, a "Protestant from the Shankill", declared that they were "deeply

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[300] Holywell Consultancy, *Theatre of Witness 2010-2014: Project Evaluation* (Derry: Holywell Consultancy, 2014), p. 38.

touched by the stories", adding that the production showed: "We have all suffered way too much."[301] At the very least, this remark suggests that stories of grief, suffering, and loss were performed in such a way as to evoke a sense of solidarity and avoid being uncritically inscribed within the prefabricated narratives of the two traditions.

On the surface, then, it is easy to see how projects such as Theatre of Witness accorded with the broader project of rendering Northern Ireland safe for investment, leisure and consumption. They provided a relatively low cost alternative to more systematic truth and reconciliation processes and accorded with an overall model of 'post-conflict' governance based on economic austerity and pro-market reform. The family focus of *Our Lives* also risked perpetuating the notion that peace and reconciliation was a private affair, distanced from the monumental changes taking place in the Assembly. However, the project as it developed undermined such assumptions by reasserting the need for community engagement and collective solidarity in addressing the ongoing legacies of the conflict. Indeed, many of the participants recall their involvement in resisting the British incursions during internment. Rather than confining their grief to the private sphere in the name of protecting the fragile peace and Northern Ireland's integration into the norms of global capitalism, the Ballymurphy Families drew upon the legacy of the 'hen patrols' and transformed their experiences into a form of political activism. Though the unpaid labour of care undertaken by the women to hold their families together could be deemed normatively 'feminine', in the context of Northern Ireland, their role as community advocates was not. Indeed, it was precisely by bringing the lessons of the private sphere into public that they challenged the idea that the care and support associated with familial relations should begin and end in the home. And in asserting the value of strong local networks that they threw into relief the failure of 'post-conflict' political reforms to support those working-class communities, like Ballymurphy, that were most affected by the 'Troubles'.

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[301] Theatre of Witness, "Reflections: *Our Lives Without You*",
http://www.theatreofwitness.org/reflections-our-lives-without-you/ [retrieved 10/03/17].

Nowhere is the more evident than in Rita Bonner's narrative. She recalls how grief at the loss of her brother prompted her to hate the British army because they "took away [her] family life". But it is precisely this experience of sundered kinship ties that eventually allows her to empathise with her apparent enemies. She recalls how 18 months after her brother's death a British soldier was shot outside their home. Much to her incomprehension, her mother rushed out to comfort the dying man. In a particularly moving moment Bonner reflects on her mother's response:

> "Rita! He's somebody's son and I only wish to god somebody had been with my son, and my son died on his own." I'm glad she did it because when I was younger I carried so much hate. But that humane thing comes back to you. It does come back. I carried hate, but it did leave me.

Though relying on traditional gender roles, Rita recognises in her mother's actions an expansion of those kinship ties that valorise proximity or blood relation as conditions for encountering, knowing, and feeling responsible for another. In fact, family ties provide a way for Rita to bridge the political divide: just she experienced the loss of her brother in the breakdown of those familial relations of care that constituted her, so she is able to imagine, by analogy, how a similar loss might affect the soldier's family. Judith Butler argues that grief exposes "the thrall in which our relations with others hold us".[302] In losing a loved one we realise just how entangled our lives were in their's, and just how much we depended upon them for our sense of self. Rita's moving account of her mother's act of care represents just such a realisation: the realisation responding to the loss of her brother with hate reproduced the very binary distinctions between friend and enemy, familial and unfamiliar, that contributed to his death in the first place. What was required was the expansion of kinship ties that constituted the Ballymurphy Families, a practice of care communicated not in the particular testimonies, but in way those onstage supported one another with reassuring touches, hand clasps, and hugs (figure 5). It is precisely through their different experiences of family breakdown, the absence of a supportive state, and in the case of Eileen Corr and Alice Teggart the absence of community support networks, that they have comes to terms with their need for the support of those beyond their immediate kin and kind. So even as the stories contained in *Our*

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[302] Butler, *Precarious* Life, p.23.

Lives commemorated the particular harm exacted on Ballymurphy by the British Army, participants remembered these events in a manner that suggested the responsibility to care for those from different communities.

Conclusion

The regimes of remembrance that emerged in the post-Agreement period promised, in a veriety of different ways, to master the past. In the parades organised by victims' groups, common identity was discovered precisely where it was under threat. At these events, particular accounts of the past were narrated in terms of a broader crisis of collective identity, one that could only be solved by those strong-armed political leaders and community activists who claimed to defend it. Conjuring with the chaos of the past became an effective way to develop community cohesion and justify political authority. Even those "moderates" who regarded the parades as a threat to the fragile peace used that sense of vulnerability as a foil to strengthen their own political claims; namely, the project of rendering Northern Ireland safe for foreign investment and industry. Making particular accounts of loss and pain stand in for a broader threat to the collective wounding, cut off from its historical specificity and complexity. Those whose personal histories of pain and loss did not accord with political claims about identity, or disrupted standardised accounts of the past, were liable, therefore, to be 'disappeared' from view.

The lesson of the 'Troubles' stalemate may well be that mastering those considered to be a threat is impossible. At the very least, power-sharing reminds us that in order to co-exist peacefully we have to come to terms with the very limits of our desire for mastery. *Composure*, *AH6905* and *Our Lives* demonstrated that the same was true of memory. Whether in Johnston's refusal to resolve the trauma of Ewart-Biggs, or in Danny's declarations that he does not know what he is doing, or in Alice Teggart's refusal to speak, these productions emphasised the incommensurability of painful memories in the interplay between verbal and non-verbal communication, silence and speech, the knowable and the unknown. At the heart of each production was an embracing of corporeal vulnerability as the basis upon which a form of empathy may be built. But, by insisting upon the resistance of particular, embodied memories to the analogising grasp of empathy, they reminded their spectators that this common

condition is experienced separately and in different ways. This alterity has important ethical functions in post-conflict Northern Ireland. In *AH6905*, Danny's insistence on this alterity prevents him from becoming a sacrificial figure that can be processed as a surrogate for the rest the community. Indeed, Johnston, Duggan and the Theatre of Witness Project are all skeptical towards possibility of embodying a definitive account of the past in a single person, character or master narrative because we cannot merely transcribe individual embodied memories into abstract historical narratives (whether statistical, ideological, or archival) without violently defacing difference. By drawing attention to the intrusive materiality and alterity of embodied experience, theatre can nevertheless elicit an ethical form of witnessing that never allows the audience to complacently incorporate another's account of pain into pre-established narratives of identity and belonging. They must instead embark on a process of actively engaging with remembering the past in a manner that does not repeat its violent elision of difference.

Illustrations

(Figure 1) Daragh Carville, *Family Plot* (Belfast: Tinderbox Theatre Company, 2005).
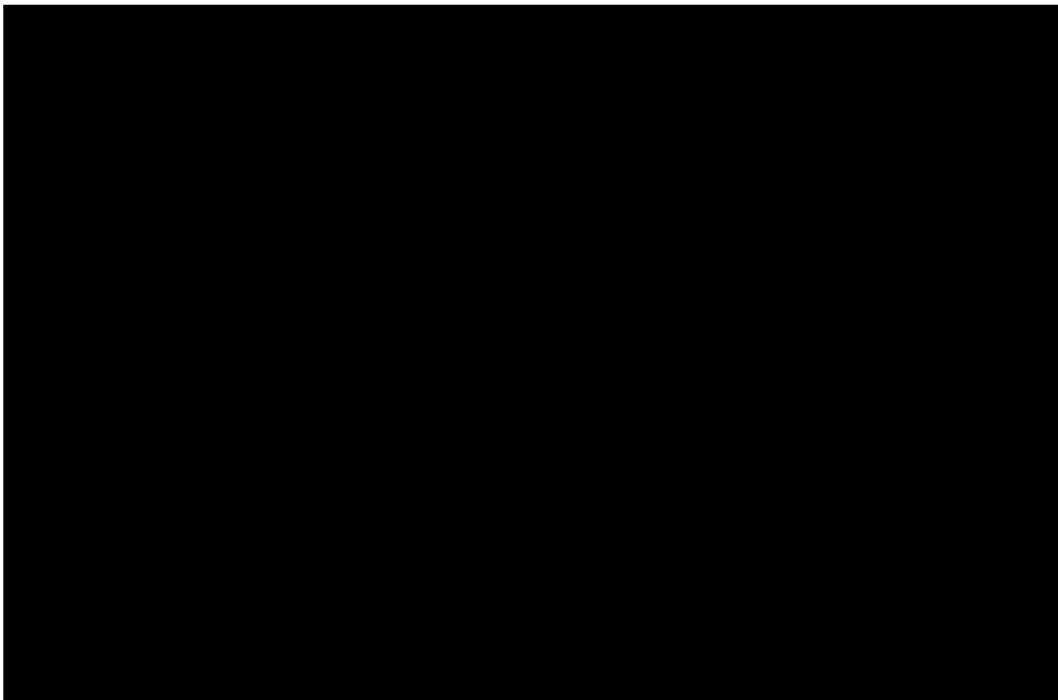
(Figure 2) Sandra Johnston, *Composure* (Belfast: Catalyst Arts, 2004).

(Figure 3) Robin Greer in Dave Duggan's *AH6905* (Derry: Playhouse Theatre, 2005).

(Figure 4) Eileen Corr reveals her tattoos in *Our Lives Without You* (Derry: Playhouse Theatre, 2014).

(Figure 5) The cast of *Our Lives Without You*.

Chapter 3
Stitched Up: Challenging Narratives of Modernisation in Feminist Performance.

In December 2013 pedestrians walking up the Creggan Road from central Derry were greeted by a new and strange sight. A 23-metre long neon display had been installed on the roof of the old Rosemount Shirt Factory. Overlooking the River Foyle, it bore the ambiguous message: "A Stitch in Time" (figure 1). The installation was created by the English artist Tim Etchells, founder of the renowned performance group Forced Entertainment, and was commissioned as a part of the Lumière Light Festival, held in Derry to conclude their year as the inaugural UK City of Culture. According to the artist, the sign was designed to evoke both the "timely and patient work of mending lives, communities, political and social relations" and to provoke "a kind of imaginative looping back, a trip in time to something forgotten that is again suddenly present; the factory, the memory of another culture of labour and of other forms of work and community."[303]

One reading of the sign suggests a reparative approach to the past. Derry, like many cities in Northern Ireland, is divided along sectarian lines. The Cityside – where the sign was located – is majority Catholic and the Waterside, on the opposite bank of the Foyle, is majority Protestant. Etchells invited onlookers to remember a pre-'Troubles' Derry, a city which was a centre of clothing manufacturing at the turn of the nineteenth century. The industry employed local women from both Catholic and Protestant communities. In 2013 Sinn Féin and the DUP had presided over the longest period of unbroken power-sharing since the 1998 Agreement and the history of Derry's desegregated workplaces offered a notionally shared past in which both 'sides' could take pride. Recognising women's overlooked historical role in manufacturing industries also accorded with the Agreement's anti-discriminatory policies. Such histories challenged cultural constructions of gender difference that

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[303] Tim Etchells, "A Stitch in Time", *timetchells.com*, http://timetchells.com/projects/a-stitch-in-time/ [retrieved 08/7/2018]

traditionally confined women to the private sphere and so-called "caring professions" (unpaid domestic labour, nursing and community work) in contrast to productive industries dominated by men.[304]

Etchells's reference to "another culture of labour" also implied a more radical, fugitive history in which class emancipation and gender equality were stitched together. Performance makers had long been intrigued by such a past. In 1982 the Abbey Theatre in Dublin produced Frank McGuinness's *The Factory Girls*. Set in the 1950s, it told the story of five women facing redundancy who stage a lock-in their Donegal shirt factory. A year later, the Charabanc Theatre Company performed *Lay Up Your Ends* at The Arts Theatre in Belfast. The play followed the women who participated in the 1911 Belfast Mill Workers' Strike. Though they are defeated, they defy the demure conduct enforced on them by their male bosses by singing as they go back to work. Theatre-makers staged such historical dramas as a direct response to the 'Troubles'. They reenacted the past to insist upon the present and pressing need for a different culture of resistance, one based not upon the politics of the Orange and the Green, but the idea that "women of a certain social class have more to unite them than to divide them."[305] This struggle for gender justice included transforming the working conditions of women within the male-dominated theatre industry of the 1970s and 1980s. Charabanc's work was informed by the radical community theatre initatives of the time. Pam Brighton, the group's director, had experience with socialist and feminist groups in Britain and actor Eleanor Methven had worked with the left-wing musical theatre group WildCat.[306] Brighton in particular was instrumental in creating independent, touring theatre companies, such as Dubbeljoint and JustUs, that provided a platform for female artists and explored issues such as the intersection of class, gender and sectarian violence from a broadly nationalist viewpoint. In contrast to the Lyric Theatre's focus on literary productions, this work was devised to be accessible, challenging and at times controversial.[307] The

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[304] For information on "occupational stereotyping" see Rosemary Sales, *Women Divided*, pp.162-165.
[305] Helen Lojek, "Charabanc Theatre Company's *Lay Up Your Ends*, 1983", *New Hibernia Review*, 2.3 (1998), pp.102-116 (p.112).
[306] See Fiona Coleman Coffey, *Political Acts: Women in Northern Irish Theatre, 1921-2012* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2016), p.84; p.88.
[307] For example, Dubbeljoint's 1999 production *A Mother's Heart*, an account of the 1994 murder of Sean Monaghan by the UDA, received negative attention for casting four women who were former Republican prisoners.

period also saw significant work by Anne Devlin and Christina Reid, whose *Ourselves Alone* (Liverpool Playhouse Theatre, 1985) and *Tea in a China Cup* (Lyric Theatre, 1983) explored the violence faced by working class women as they resisted the patriarchal structures internal to their communities (natinonalist and unionist, respectively). If these efforts were overlooked in a theatre scene that was dominated by internationally celebrated organisations such as the Field Day Theatre Company, and playwrights such as Brian Friel, Stewart Parker and, later, Gary Mitchell, they attested to a faith in the transformative power of organising women as workers, both on and off the stage. That such struggles still ghosted Derry landscape in 2013 suggests either that little had changed, or that a political conjuncture had emerged in which it was necessary again to reimagine feminism in anticapitalist form.

In the 2000s work by women continued to struggle to be produced in Northern Ireland. Charabanc no longer existed; Anne Devlin and Christina Reid were writing little. Despite the significant victories of the 1980s and the important subsequent efforts of companies such as Aisling Ghear and Big Telly Productions to programme female playwrights, of the ten plays produced at the Lyric Theatre between 1998 and 2002 only 2 were by women.[308] That Northern Ireland's *de facto* 'national' theatre weighted its programme in such a way perhaps had its roots in the tendency of female playwrights to complicate the narrative of Northern Irish modernisation. In a 2007 interview Brighton remarked upon the narrowness of media interest in the North: "there are only two stories the BBC wants now", she argued, "my life as a bomber" and "Belfast is like everywhere else".[309] Those plays that were produced were fraught with anxieties about what the Peace Process would mean for women. Maria Connolly's *Massive* (2002), produced by Tinderbox Theatre Company at the Errigle Inn in Belfast, imagined the possibility of transcending the past in the commodification of Republican cultural signifiers. Two aspiring DJs and their dancer friend fantasise about transforming their 'gritty' war zone experiences into a lucrative career as hip-hop artists in America. But the play ends with Snake, the group's female dancer, being forced to perform for a local paramilitary hardman. In Morna Regan's *Midden* (Derry: Playhouse Theatre, 2001) a prodigal daughter returns

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[308] Based upon data compiled from www.irishplayography.com [retrieved 03/05/18].
[309] Quoted in Tim Miles, "Fighting the Peace: Counter-Narrative, Violence and the Work of Gary Mitchell", *Performing Violence in Contemporary Ireland*, ed. Lisa Fitzpatrick (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2010), ebook, n.pag.

from Philadelphia having become a successful purveyor of Irish linen only to find herself out of touch in a Derry that is both transformed and haunted by its past. Similarly, Lucy Caldwell's *Leaves* (London: Royal Court Theatre, 2007) portrayed a student who is forced to leave her studies in London after attempting suicide. Upon her homecoming, Lori is caught between with the inarticulacy of her father – an historian of Irish place names – and the strained normality of middle-class Belfast. Across these plays men punish women wishing to escape their narrow gender roles while those who achieve social mobility are alienated from the people they left behind. As this chapter shall explore, the pessimism of this work reflects the broader enervation of radical feminist politics, both within and beyond the theatre.

The individual success of particular playwrights should not be taken as representing a far reaching and structural transformation but as the marginal gains of neoliberal captialism's individualist ethos. In 2010 the Arts Councils of Northern Ireland and Ireland commissioned a joint report into the living and working conditions of artists in both jurisdictions. It found that though 61 percent of professional visual artists identified as women, the performing arts in North remained 60 percent male. Moreover, the average income of professional female artists remained only 62 percent of their male equivalents.[310] The Good Friday Agreement had promised "to promote equality of opportunity in relation to religion and political opinion; gender; race; disability; age; marital status; dependants; and sexual orientation", but by 2013 it was becoming increasingly clear that justice delayed was indeed justice denied.[311] In 2013 Northern Ireland, like the rest of the United Kingdom, was suffering the after-effects of the 2008 Financial Crisis. That the increase in unemployment and rolling back of the state in the name of austerity disproportionately affected women made it increasingly clear that the liberal grammar of equality masked ever widening economic and social inequalities. This set the stage for a return of the class conscious approaches to gender justice put forward by McGuinness and Charabanc. In such conditions, Etchells's installations raised important questions: had the developmental

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[310] Claire McAndrew & Cathie McKimm, *The Living and Working Conditions of Artists in Ireland and Northern Ireland* (Belfast & Dublin: Arts Council of Northern Ireland & Arts Council of Ireland, 2010), http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/images/uploads/publications-documents/LWCA_Study_NI_Full_Version_(with_preface).pdf [retrieved, 19/05/20].
[311] Northern Ireland Office, *The Belfast Agreement* (London: NIO, 1998), https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-belfast-agreement [retrieved 8/10/2017].

narrative of free market modernisation been, for women, a stitch up? And how might art, by stitching together past and present struggles, weave different modalities of emancipation and alternative trajectories to the future mapped out by capitalism?

This chapter sets out to contextualise and trace performances that sought to snag, arrest, and transform narratives of progress that naively posited the market as liberating Northern Ireland from its socially conservative past. It will focus, first of all, on two of Abbie Spallen's plays: the 2008 Lyric Theatre production of *Pumpgirl* (originally staged in 2006 in London) at the Queen's Drama Theatre in Belfast and the 2011 Fishamble production of *Strandline* at the Projects Arts Centre in Dublin. Reflecting Spallen's own anxieties concerning the difficulties and costs of success as a female playwright in the North, both deal in different ways with the problem of complicity navigated by women who attempted to carve out a degree of autonomy. Centring defiant characters that, due to their adoption of an individualist approach to emancipation, end up in lonely and tragic circumstances, Spallen's plays explore the inadequacy of merely challenging harms rooted in Northern Ireland's androcentric patterns of cultural value while leaving untouched the deeper gender structures of neoliberal capitalism. While Spallen was inspired by her forebears at Charabanc - members of the company performed in her plays - her work is haunted by the absence of the kind of collective action that characterised their generation of activism, both on and off the stage.

A more robust critique was forming outside of the theatre altogether in the networks of feminist live artists based in Ireland, both north and south of the border. In 2012 the Void Gallery, located in Derry's Old City Shift Factory, hosted a performance exhibition entitled *LABOUR*. If, as Spallen's work suggested, the promise of modernisation was a stitch up, then the collective of artists who performed in *LABOUR* turned to the work of cross-stitching struggles past and present to offer the possibility of, and need for, a renewed materialist feminism. The exhibition drew attention to the historical instrumentalisation of so-called women's work – from clothing manufacture, to social care and reproductive labour – as a means to the making of profit and advancing national projects. They did so by renewing the collective politics of the past, working to create an exhibition that in its collaborative form rejected the androcentric ideal of individual independence and the devaluing of

interdependence, care, and solidarity in Northern Irish politics as a whole. *Pumpgirl* and *LABOUR* together exemplify how a materialist feminist critique of the peace process formed across a heterogenous mix of theatre and performance in the wake of the Financial Crisis.

Modernisation, Individualism, and the Repression of Socialist Memory

The Good Friday Agreement was, in part, a product of feminist activism in Northern Ireland. Clauses emphasising "the right of women to free and equal political participation " and "the advancement of women in public life" were included after strenuous efforts by the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, a political party founded to represent women's interests in the peace negotiations on the basis of human rights and equality.[312] These interventions were designed to counter the familialist ideology, shared by both nationalist and unionist communities, that prevented women from accessing the formal political sphere and the labour market on equal terms to men. The NIWC and other feminist organisations detected the persistence of rigid schema of gender roles that had its roots in both the dynamics of civil war and prevailing social policy. Though nationalism/Republicanism and unionism/Loyalism had divergent traditions and cultures, both enlisted women's unwaged social and reproductive labour in their respective national projects. As socialist Republican activist Bernadette Devlin-McAliskey wryly observed, demographic anxieties fuelled a gendered division of labour: "Either we shoot them or we outbreed them. There's no politics here. It's a numbers game."[313] In terms of the national imaginary, militarism and heteronormativity were tightly enmeshed and the ideal-typical citizen was a man willing to defend and protect the (feminised) nation and its women, women who were in turn expected to make the 'right' kind of citizen to guarantee the future of the community. This schema replicated and reinforced the "family wage" model of the post-war welfare state, built on the assumption that men could earn a living while women were responsible for the care of dependents.[314] As depicted so vividly in *Lay Up Your Ends* and *The Factory Girls*,

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[312] See Kate Fearon, *Women's Work: The Story of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1998).

[313] Quoted in Kathryn Conrad, "Fetal Ireland: National Bodies and Political Subjectivity", *Éire-Ireland*, 36.3&4 (2001), pp.153-173 (p.153).

[314] See Sales, o*p. cit*, pp.108-135.

those Northern Irish women who did enter the labour market tended to face lower pay owing to gender discrimination and, in the case of Catholics, religious discrimination.[315] Both the ethno-nationalist and state capitalist social models, then, entrenched associations between (predominantly unwaged) caregiving, dependency and femininity on the one hand and breadwinning, individualism and masculinity on the other.

The NIWC's 1998 manifesto was fairly radical. It committed to developing "family-friendly policies" such as caregiver parity: childcare must be better funded by the state and fathers should be encourage to take on the burden of domestic labour.[316] Despite this, the NIWC tended to organise politically around narratives of female identity as an antidote to sectarian politics. Their power emanated from their ability to lever conservative gender stereotypes and a concern for so-called "women's issues" for the benefit of women. As Pierson notes: "the gains from this form of activism must be contrasted with its effect, which may be to re-establish and reinforce normative notions of femininity within the political sphere."[317] The NIWC's challenge to the gender-coded division between independence and dependency was therefore limited; their focus on the latter was often taken as a sign of weakness by politicians from other parties. As the DUP's Peter Robinson remarked: "they haven't been at the forefront of the battle when shots were being fired or when the constitution of Northern Ireland was in peril."[318] By 2005 they had lost their last remaining elected representative. The party seemed to have been squeezed out by those who represented either nationalist or unionist interests. Another factor, however, was that the SDLP, UUP, Sinn Féin and (to a markedly lesser extend) DUP began to incorporate similar concerns into their manifestos.

Of the many cultural and political initiatives launched by women's liberation movements in the North, "equal opportunity" is the one that survived best in the policies of the main political parties. The marked increase in women's participation

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[315] *Ibid.*, p.167.
[316] Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, *1998 Northern Ireland Assembly Election Manifesto - A Voice For New Times*, (NIWC: Belfast, 1998), https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/niwc/niwc98.htm [retrieved 10/10/2017].
[317] Claire Pierson, "One Step Forwards, Two Steps Back: Women's Right's 20 Years After the Good Friday Agreement", *Parliamentary Affairs*, 71.2 (2018), pp.461-481 (p.469).
[318] Fearon, *Op. Cit.*, p.19

in the labour market has led most political parties to develop and expand policy interventions concerned with the gender pay gap, equality in the workplace and childcare provision.[319] The UUP's 2011 manifesto stated: "we want to create opportunities for women of all ages, providing them with genuine choices, empowering each to reach their full potential and to further maximise their contribution to society."[320] Likewise, the SDLP committed to delivering "the Single Equality Bill, to strengthen and harmonise protection against discrimination and guarantee equality for all groups".[321] Of all the political parties, Sinn Féin could lay claim to incorporating the feminist currents of the 1970s and 80s. Before 1994 their party contained a robust and remarkably active Women's Department, which significantly contributed to the party being the first to adopt a women's policy document, which advocated for a similar approach to the NIWC on public childcare provision.[322] But this strand of materialist feminism was marginalised as a Republican ideology less conscious of class ascended to efface its achievements. The Women's Department became the gender-neutral Equality Department and the grassroots activism in working-class communities pursued by the former gave way to a liberal discourse of individual rights and citizenship "founded on the principles of the 1916 Proclamation to 'cherish all the children of the nation equally'."[323] As a part of the Sinn Féin's effort recast itself as respectable and mainstream: "the republican movement effectively included republican feminists while excluding feminism."[324] Across the political spectrum, then, equality legislation – such as advocacy for measures to assist women in achieving parity in political representation and access to the labour market – tended to emphasise individual freedom over broader issues such as economic inequality. The question of whether this was a

[319] Yvonne Galligan, "Gender and Politics in Northern Ireland: The Representation Gap Revisited", *Irish Political Studies*, 28.3 (2013), pp.413-433.

[320] Ulster Unionist Party, *Ulster Unionist Party Manifesto*. (Belfast: UUP, 2011), https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/uup/uup_2011-05-05_man.pdf [retrieved 10/10/2017].

[321] Social Democratic and Labour Party, *Uniting People, Building Prosperity: SDLP Manifesto* (Belfast: SDLP, 2011), https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/sdlp/sdlp_2011-05-05_man.pdf [retrieved 10/10/2017].

[322] Theresa O'Keefe, *Feminist Identity Development and Activism in Revolutionary Movements* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p.135.

[323] Sinn Féin, *Leadership Across Ireland: Sinn Féin Assembly Election Manifesto* (Belfast: Sinn Féin, 2011), https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/sf/sf_2011-05-05_man.pdf [retrieved 10/10/2017].

[324] Naill Gilmartin, "Feminism, Nationalism and the Re-Ordering of Post-War Political Strategies: The Case of the Sinn Féin Women's Department", *Irish Political Studies,* 32.2 (2017) pp.268–92 (pp.285-6).

tenable means of advancing gender equality would later surface when the 2008 Financial Crisis challenged political-economic assumptions undergirding the peace process.

The uptake of a rights-based discourse of equality in Northern Ireland paralleled a shift in the region's political economy. Since the 1994 ceasefires, the people of Northern Ireland have been continually told by politicians that peace would bring prosperity to the region through a combination of foreign direct investment, job creation and tourism. Prior to 1998 the North had been sheltered from the reforms taking place elsewhere in the United Kingdom - the region enjoyed a level of state expenditure above the national average. [325] But as the Agreement was being negotiated Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown declared that political stability could be secured with "the modernisation and regeneration of the Northern Irish economy through the encouragement of long-term business investment."[326] Successive Executives - including the Sinn Féin-DUP regime that took power in 2007 – would go on to find rare common ground in implementing a neoliberal reform agenda characterised by anti-statism, downsizing welfare, and pro-market activity.[327] Even as the uptake of investment was disappointing, Belfast experienced a property boom, and politicians of all shades were declaring Northern Ireland was "open for business".

The logic behind these changes inflected the implementation of equality legislation enshrined in the Agreement. Neoliberal reform went hand-in-hand with a liberal grammar of equality: the individual, after all, had no gender. In theory, the market delivered rewards to the most capable regardless of whether they identified as male, female, Catholic or Protestant. Such sentiments were captured in a speech given by New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg in 2008. He told the assembled audience of Northern Irish politicians and businesspeople that "while politics will always be defined by differences of opinion, economics offers a vast common ground that can

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[325] See Colin Coulter, "Under Which Constitutional Arrangement Would You Still Prefer to Be Unemployed? Neoliberalism, the Peace Process, and the Politics of Class in Northern Ireland", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 37.9 (2014), pp.763–76.

[326] "Brown plans new drive to create jobs in Northern Ireland", *Irish Times*, 18 April (1998), p.7.

[327] See Brian Kelly, "Neoliberal Belfast: Disaster Ahead?", *Irish Marxist Review*, 1.2 (2012) pp.44-59–59.

unite diverse people around shared goals."[328] The market's invisible hand was particularly appealing in a context where the British state had a history of favouring unionists over their nationalist counterparts. But, as David Harvey has written, equality of opportunity under capitalism means ensuring: "the inalienable rights of individuals (and, recall, corporations are defined as individuals before the law) to private property and the rate of profit [above] any other conception of inalienable rights you can think of."[329] The structural inequality inherent to a market-led system based upon economic competition undermines the notional equality that the liberal discourse of rights is designed to achieve.

That the 2008 banking crash coincided with the tenth anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement threw into relief such utopian pronouncements. The unprecedented spectacle of Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party and Martin McGuinness's Sinn Fein sharing power surprised many. But it also prompted critical assessment of the extent to which the peace had delivered social transformation of the kind promised a decade earlier. In 2009 John Nagle observed that there was little sign that the reshaped Northern Irish economy was "transforming the deep-rooted problems of poverty, poor mental health and segregated living that afflict the poorest districts of Northern Ireland or the nature of sectarian conflict."[330] The political violence was over, but it seemed that the radical spirit of previous generations had dissipated. "The centre ground has not imploded" remarked Anthony McIntyre, a former I.R.A. member and prominent critic of the Republican elite, "Rather it is now the largest political space in Northern Irish politics with virtually all elected representatives standing on it."[331]

Most of all 2008 made clear that neoliberal modernisation meant the persistence of gender inequality in Northern Ireland. A failed attempt was made in Westminster to liberalise abortion in the region. The leaders of the four main parties in the North

[328] Michael Bloomberg, "Michael R. Bloomberg Speaks at the U.S. - Northern Ireland Investment Conference", *The Official Website of the City of New York*, 8 May (2008), http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/174-08/mayor-michael-bloomberg-speaks-the-u-s-northern-ireland-investment-conference [retrieved 08/10/2017].
[329] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), p.181.
[330] John Nagle, "Potemkin Village: Neo-Liberalism and Peace-Building in Northern Ireland?", *Ethnopolitics*, 8.2 (2009) pp.173–90 (p.188).
[331] Anthony McIntyre, "Goodbye Mr Adams?", *The Pensive Quill*, 29 May (2008), http://www.thepensivequill.com/2008/05/and-goodbye-adams.html [retrieved 12/10/2017].

wrote to MPs decrying the move as a threat to devolution, after which the proposed amendment was quietly pushed down the agenda.[332] The increase in women's representation in Stormont did not seem to be yielding legislative results. Even when Sinn Féin later shifted their position on abortion, the possibility of change was stymied by the persistence of sectarian wrangling, with the DUP blocking subsequent attempts at liberalisation.[333] Economic reform, meanwhile, had mainly benefitted individual women, often those already in a favourable position, while for others, particularly those living in Northern Ireland's working class communities, life had not improved. This predicament was brought home in a 2011 report by the Belfast-based Women's Resource and Development Agency. They found that the majority of part-time employees and public sector workers were women. This left them particularly exposed to the welfare cuts and the precaritisation of working conditions that followed the Financial Crisis.[334] The very (neo)liberal forces that combatted the social conservatism of Northern Ireland's political parties, then, precipitated economic conditions that pushed women further into states of dependency. From this point of view, modernisation seemed less a linear narrative of development than a dialectical process of renegotiation and re-entrenchment.

Much political commentary on gender equality issues focussed on Northern Ireland's supposed backwardness; its belated temporality. Remarking on the abortion debate in 2008 one journalist declared: "During our self-imposed absence from 'normal' society, the rest of the UK and Ireland was making decisions about many of the very issues we are now pre-occupied by."[335] Speeding up to catch up was of course appealing in a context where politics seemed to be afflicted by an inability to forget old grievances and past sacrificial glories. But the desire to straighten things out ignored the negative role played by the supposed antidote to this time lag. The language of "equality of opportunity" represented a shift from concerns for economic redistribution to an overemphasis on what feminist theorist Nancy Fraser calls "the

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[332] Henry McDonald, "'Last Chance" to Legalise Abortions in Northern Ireland", *The Observer*, 18 October (2008), https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2008/oct/19/abortion-devolution-northern-ireland [retrieved 12/10/2017].

[333] Jennifer Thomson, "Abortion and Same-Sex Marriage: How Are Non-Sectarian Controversial Issues Discussed in Northern Irish Politics?", *Irish Political Studies* 31.4 (2016), p.483–501.

[334] Bronagh Hinds, *Women on the Edge? A Comprehensive Analysis of the Impacts of the Financial Crisis* (Belfast: WRDA, 2011).

[335] Staff Reporter, "Moral and Ethical Debates are Decades Too Late", *The Belfast New Letter*, 12 August (2008), n.p.

politics of recognition". She explains that while this shift broadened conceptions of gender justice, it also "dovetailed all too neatly with a hegemonic neoliberalism that wants nothing more than to repress socialist memory."[336] In the North this was exemplified in Sinn Féin's abandonment of its Women's Department. "Did we not count?", remarked one former IRA member, "I just feel there have been too many women who are just forgotten about or who have not ever been recognized or given any recognition for all the work she [*sic*] done."[337]

Theatre and performance makers have tended increasingly to underwrite the narrative of modernisation and, in doing so, have unwittingly colluded in this repression of socialist memory. To take one example, site-specific work in theatre has flourished since the Good Friday Agreement. The Belfast-based Kabosh Theatre Company, for example, has sought to bring the city's local histories into the present, often with an explicit focus on writing women back into the narratives of the North. Written by Lawrence McKeown, *Two Roads West* (2008-2013) took the form of a black taxi tour – a form of sightseeing that has become popular since the Agreement. Rosie and Bill, the play's central characters, accompanies audience members on their journey as they travelled along the Falls and Shankill Roads in West Belfast, well-known strongholds of Loyalism and Republicanism that saw a significant amount of violence during the 'Troubles'. Bill relates the particular difficulties he faced living and working in such a segregated and violence-ridden area while Rosie, a recently returned emigre, familiarises herself with a transformed city in which she now feels a complete stranger. The contrast these two narratives emphasises the distance Belfast has put between itself and its war-torn past: the Falls and Shankill are now safe enough to be a site of tourism, consumption and investment. This account of progress and modernisation illustrates theatre's role in recasting the image of Northern Ireland around the imperatives of the post-Agreement political and economic settlement. *Two Roads West* produces its value within the broader "experience economy" of the city by trading on the ephemerality of performance

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[336] Nancy Fraser, *Fortunes of Feminism: From State Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis* (London: Verso, 2013), p.160.
[337] Quoted in Niall Gilmartin, "'Without Women, the War Could Never Have Happened': Representations of Women's Military Contributions in Non-State Armed Groups", *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 19.4 (2017), pp.456–70 (p.460).

and the non-reproducibility of place both to sell itself and the city.[338] In order to sustain the image of Belfast as a modern and cosmopolitan city, the past is rendered present to be judged by individuals that are firmly placed beyond it. In this way the production foregrounds the development of a new consumerist subject at the expense of addressing inequalities of class and gender that continue to prevent women from attaining equality. *Two Roads West* encampsulates less a cynical attempt to repress radical political currents than it expresses the way theatrical form and content is subtly shaped by shifting political circumstances and material conditions. It demonstrates how the sustainbability of artistic practice, particularly in a context where public subsidy is shrinking, often depends upon buying into Belfast's status as a modern, cosmopolitan, and 'post-conflict' city. Sometimes it is only by colluding with the prevailing political agenda – namely the task of rendering Northern Ireland an attractive destination for cultural tourism and inward investment – that more critical work can be financed.

This chapter and the next will periodically return to the anxieties that arise out of such a bargain, particularly the risk of becoming uprooted and unmoored by the trade-offs required to survive as both a woman and an artist. It is precisely people such as Rosie, who have sought their fortunes abroad in an effort to escape the socially conservative society of their youth, that take centre stage in the work of Abbie Spallen. These solitary women, exiled to escape the confines of their gender, return home with a profound sense of the community they have had to give up. The barely expressible sense that something has been sacrificed in the process is a feature not only of Spallen's plays but her own career as a playwright who found success in London and New York, before returning home to the place of her birth. It is an anxiety that registers an absence of tightly-knit networks of feminist solidarity, and presages a stirring of the region's repressed socialist histories.

"A stagnation of souls": Abbie Spallen's *Pumpgirl*

Abbie Spallen's career as a playwright began just as post-Agreement economic reforms began to come apart. Of a Catholic background, she grew up in the

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[338] See B. Joseph Pine and James H. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy,* (Cambridge MA: Harvard Business Press, 2011).

borderlands of south Armagh in a council estate in the town of Newry, an area that, unlike Belfast's refurbished city centre, would see little of the fruits of foreign direct investment. Far from the centre of commerce and politics, is a background that furnishes her work with a critical attitude towards easy notions of progress. The border remains one of the poorest regions of Northern Ireland and, far away from state's urban centres of power, is often overlooked in theatrical treatments of the post-Agreement period. But precisely because it has been bypassed, forgotten, and left behind in the political and cultural imaginary of the North, it provides a powerful locale from which Spallen has sought to critique developmental narratives of progress and prosperity.

At twenty-six Spallen left Newry for Dublin to be an actor and subsequently appeared in various productions for the Replay Theatre Company, the Lyric Theatre and Rattlebag, and early exposure to female-led writing was essential to her development as an actor and writer. In 1995 she played a leading role in the last production by the Charabanc Theatre Company, *A Wife, A Dog, and a Maple Tree* (Derry: The Playhouse, 1995), a play which addressed domestic violence in the context of the 'Troubles'. Charabanc had been crucial in developing women's writing in the male-dominated theatre environment of the 1980s and 1990s.[339] It was established because, in actor Eleanor Methven's words, they "got fed up with the kinds of parts that were going; you were never somebody, you were somebody's wife, somebody's sister or mother and we just wanted to redress that balance."[340] Working on a collective and collaborative basis, they pioneered a feminist and socialist approach to political drama that delivered its message in a combination comedy and serious social commentary. It was Charabanc's Carol Moore who Spallen chose to adapt her 2006 play *Pumpgirl* into a film. And Methven featured in one of the leader roles of her second play *Strandline* (2009). Such connections not only demonstrate the importance of informal networks of support, but also reveal how women continued to struggle for equality within the Northern Irish theatre. Spallen, like her predecessors, turned from acting to writing after she "got fed up with parts for

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[339] See Maria R. DiCenzo, "Charabanc Theatre Company: Placing Women Centre-Stage in Northern Ireland", *Theatre Journal*, 45.2, May (1993), pp. 175-184 (p. 176).
[340] Quoted in Bernice Harrison, "Off the Charabanc and to the Gate", *Irish Times*, 1 December (2003), https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/off-the-charabanc-and-into-the-gate-1.396370 [retrieved 15/5/18].

women. You're always somebody's wife or somebody's mammy. You're always a feeder, feeding lines to the main characters."[341] The similarity between Methven and Spallen's words is striking. But whereas Charabanc responded to such conditions by looking to the past for moments of collective action and agency, Spallen's plays are marked by the conspicuous absence of solidarity between women. Her first and most successful play *Pumpgirl* represented Northern Ireland as a society where survival and success for women means abandoning the prospect of collective emancipation for the pursuit of personal self-empowerment.

In order to understand this thematic concern, fraught as it is with the spectre of collusion and compromise, it is first necessary to trace briefly the changing relationship between artists, the state and capitalism in the North, and the effect of these changes on Spallen's career. Though their struggle for theatrical representation was by no means easy, the women who founded Charabanc could take advantage of the fact that Northern Ireland in the 1980s was relatively sheltered from Thatcherite anti-statism. "When we write our plays, we're usually on the dole", Marie Jones observed in a 1987 interview.[342] Employment allowance supported the kind of artistic independence that could produce work that was socially critical. In such conditions, artists could better resist the influence of both public and private funders. But, as Angela McRobbie has traced, when state provision was subsequently cut, artists were more likely to become "de-specialised cultural entrepreneurs", working multiple jobs (both inside and outside the arts sector), and developing personal brands that would help them to compete over scant public and private resources.[343] Spallen shifted to playwriting at a time of scarcity and had to adapt to these changes. Even before the 2008 Financial Crisis core funding for the arts in Northern Ireland began to stagnate. In 2006 the Arts Council of Northern Ireland halved its provision for the Belfast Festival and increased funding for theatre companies such as Tinderbox, Prime Cut and Kabosh below the rate of inflation. This occurred even as resources were diverted to flagship regeneration projects such as the redevelopment

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[341] Quoted in Grania McFadden, "The Driver, the Pumpgirl, his Lover and his Wife", *Belfast Telegraph*, 29 August (2008), p.2.

[342] Quoted in Carol Martin, "Charabanc Theatre Company: 'Quare' Women 'Sleggin' and 'Geggin' the Standards of Northern Ireland by 'Tappin' the People", *The Drama Review: TDR*, 31.2 (1987), pp.88–99 (p.94).

[343] Angela McRobbie, "'Everyone is Creative': Artists as Pioneers of the New Economy?", *Culture and Contestation in the New Century*, ed. Marc James Léger (Bristol: Intellect, 2011), pp. 77–92.

of the Lyric Theatre and Old Museum Arts Centre.[344] Given that per-capita funding for the arts in the North was the lower than in England, Scotland or Ireland, personal mobility become more important that the establishment of local networks of support.[345] When asked in 2008 what advice she would give to upcoming artists, Spallen declared: "Until things change further, get out".[346] In the absence of those resources that supported the collective, local projects of yesteryear, individual enterprise seemed the only viable route to success. The power of progressive narratives, the idea of a modernising Northern Ireland, was increasingly unsustainable in a context where female performance makers had few opportunities at home to produce their own work.

Spallen's first play *Abeyance* received a rehearsed reading from the Druid Theatre Company in Galway, but it was only in 2006 that she would achieve her first production. Because Belfast's Tinderbox Theatre Company did not have the funds to stage *Pumpgirl*, it had its premier at the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh in a production by London's Bush Theatre.[347] Even then, it only reached the stage because Spallen had managed to respond to the demands of the market. *Pumpgirl* took the form of a monologue consisting of three interwoven monologues spoken by two women and a man: Sandra, a petrol station attendant and "tomboy" whose nickname the play takes for its title; Sinead, a mother of two small children; and Hammy, her unemployed husband, who enjoys racing stock cars in his spare time.[348] This formal arrangement was itself a symptom of the lack of support provided for playwrights in the North: "I can absolutely understand why newer playwrights write monologues", Spallen declared in a 2010 *Irish Times* article by Christina Madden, "And I think we need to look at why those playwrights feel the need to write something so spare and sparse. Sometimes they feel the support network might not

[344] See Jane Coyle, "Two Sides to Coin for North's Funding", *Irish Times,* 11 March (2006), p.8.
[345] See Arts Council of Northern Ireland, *Inquiry into the Funding of the Arts in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: ACNI, 2009),
 http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/images/uploads/publications-documents/CALInquiry.pdf [retrieved 4/5/18].
[346] Quoted in Kiran Acharya, "Abbie Spallen", *cutlurenorthernireland.org,* 13 August (2008),
https://www.culturenorthernireland.org/features/performing-arts/abbie-spallen [retrieved 13/10/2018].
[347] Quoted in Jane Coyle, "Inspired by a Youthful Landscape", *Irish Times,* 29 August (2008),
https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/inspired-by-a-youthful-landscape-1.935150 [retrieved 13/10/2018].
[348] Abbie Spallen, *Pumpgirl* (London: Faber, 2006).

be in place."[349] Theatrical recognition was contingent upon adapting to depleted state support, and as Madden made clear, it was "certainly less expensive to pay a salary to only one actor".[350] But central to this adaptation was the adoption of an entrepreneurial attitude that risked uncritically reproducing the very neoliberal individualism that, as we shall see, Spallen set out to critique.

Spallen's use of the monologue was also a savvy act of feminist appropriation that build on already established traditions. Patrick Lonergan has argued that the international success of plays by Brian Friel, Conor McPherson and Mark O'Rowe in the 1990s epitomised the "way in with the Irish monologue conforms to international expectations about masculinity and Irishness [in] its use of storytelling."[351] Their work was able to harness contemporary anxieties around male political disenfranchisement, the decline of patriarchal nationalism and the neoliberalisation of Ireland's Celtic Tiger economy, while yet again centring the masculine speaking voice, however beleaguered it may have been. But Spallen was well aware that the success of McPherson and Friel in London meant that there was space to make feminist claims with a conspicuously 'masculine' form. In 2007 she remarked that "Irish writers will always get read quicker. We do have a reputation. But there's an incredible baggage that comes with that. People compare you to other Irish writers; you get put into a bunch, and that can be debilitating."[352] Though adapting to international tastes had its limitations, it was a crucial way to gain a reputation when companies in Northern Ireland seemed reluctant to take risks. Indeed, it often seemed as if the region's cultural conservatism contributed to Spallen's difficulties. *Pumpgirl* would eventually be staged in the North by the Lyric Theatre at Queen's University in 2008 but, in Spallen's words, it had "taken a long time and been halfway around the world before anyone at home has shown an interest in staging it."[353] Prior to the first performance a letter appeared in the *Irish News* that accused the play of being "gratuitously sensationalist", "sated with such foul language and coarse sentiment", and devoid of an "uplifting message nor hope

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[349] Christine Madden, "The Music of the Lone Voice on the Irish stage", *Irish Times*, 03 August (2010), p. 9.
[350] *Ibid.*
[351] Patrick Lonergan, *Theatre and Globalization: Irish Drama in the Celtic Tiger Era* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p.180.
[352] Quoted in Arminta Wallace, "From the North Country", *Irish Times*, 15 December (2007), p.20.
[353] Quoted in McFadden, *Op. Cit.*, p.2.

for the condition of mankind."[354] Ironically, the letter criticised the play for depicting Northern Ireland internationally as a backward or hopeless place in terms that exemplified the persistence of rather traditional conceptions of respectability. Yet again, futurity seemed to be bound up in the retention of certain conservative attitudes, making it doubly difficult for a female playwright to criticise the trajectory of the peace process on home turf.

Nevertheless, the task of adapting, appropriating and compromising for survival was a central theme of *Pumpgirl*. In a complex and self-reflexive manoeuvre, Spallen employed a form associated with androcentric individualism to explore a character - the Pumpgirl - who attempts to achieve parity with the men around her by foregoing the performative trappings of femininity. In this way monologue enabled Spallen to interrogate simultaneously her own career trajectory and the fate of her characters. The play suggested that both were shaped worries over the possibility of internalising oppression. The broader message was that, even if individualism seemed to contest the normalisation of women's dependency in Northern Ireland, it left unchallenged the ideal of independent and autonomous subjectivity that was historically associated with patriarchal power. The question remained as to whether the female adaptation of normatively masculine forms of subjectivity would contest or reproduce the power, competition and domination usually associated with them.

Written at the tail end of the Celtic Tiger economic boom, *Pumpgirl* is set in a Northern border town "on the wrong side of a fluctuating exchange rate" (n.p.), a place resembling Spallen's native Newry. In three overlapping monologues, the play explores the complicated and deleterious psychological effects of poverty, conservatism and violence on its three protagonists. Together they tell the story of how the unevenness of post-Agreement economic modernisation served to entrench existing gender norms. Sandra, the eponymous Pumpgirl, works as the local patrol station. She catches glimpses of this thwarted future in the many cars that race past her workplace. Like the other two monologists with whom she shares the stage, she finds herself thoroughly left behind. Sinead lives a similarly suffocating life confined

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[354] Drama Lover, "Armagh Play does not 'Hold the Mirror up to Life'", *Irish News*, 18 August (2008), p. 22.

to the domestic roles of wife and mother. She dreams of a life as saturated in excitement and love as those she reads about in her self-help books and magazines. Bored of her indifferent husband, she embarks on an affair with a man she meets in the town centre. Unbeknownst to her, Shawshank is one of her husband's drinking partners - a brutal former paramilitary who was interned at the notorious Maghaberry Prison.[355] After learning that she is pregnant, Sinead tells her lover, who viciously beats her, leaving her battered and bruised by the side of the road. Hammy, Sinead's neglectful husband, is no less bored by his predicament. Precariously employed at a local chicken hatchery, he attempts to fend off feelings of emasculation and impotency by stock-car racing and striking up a casual sexual relationships about which he can brag gratuitously to his mates. Because of her short hair and tomboyish looks, Pumpgirl is the town outcast: an object of revulsion and fascination to the gender conforming around her. She scorns the consumerism and conventional femininity of those women who visit her place of work, and prefers the company of Hammy, with whom she is in love. However, she finds her attempts to join his friends as peers thwarted, despite adopting their competitive jibes and misogynist patter. In fact they punish her for refusing to inhabit feminine passivity: in a shocking scene, related by Pumpgirl in vividly dissociated terms, Hammy and his friends pick her for a joyride and gang-rape her in the back of the car. Bereft and traumatised by the experience, she foregoes her former tomboyish looks and adopts a more conventionally feminine gender presentation.

Both Sinead, who until her affair has conformed to the conventional role of wife and mother, and Pumpgirl attempt to glean a minimum of control over their lives by rejecting traditional feminine roles only to find themselves violently spurned by the men around them. As Fiona Coleman Coffey correctly asserts, *Pumpgirl* depicts a post-Agreement society in which the uncertainties of forging new identities in peacetime leads men to cleave ever more fiercely to the strict gender roles cultivated to support the ethno-nationalist struggle.[356] But the play is also shaped by Spallen's awareness, as a female playwright, of the compromises involved in surviving times of economic scarcity. More than merely elaborating the resistance of Northern

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[355] Located in south Armagh, during the 'Troubles' many Loyalist and Republican prisoners were interned at the prison.
[356] Coffey, *Op. Cit.*, p.169.

Ireland's rural peripheries to the modernising ethos of neoliberalism, it registers how women bear the costs of 'catching up'. The play represents post-Agreement society as comprising a neoliberally adjusted patriarchy that threatens to absorb even the best efforts of women, such as Sinead and Pumpgirl, to seek change. Rather than positing any easy distinction between social and cultural backwardness and 'Northern Ireland PLC', Spallen offers a complex, dialectical account of the peace process, one that depicts sexual violence, depression and suicide as endemic to its 'modern' political economy.

Pumpgirl attempts to achieve a minimum of power and authority by disavowing the passivity and weakness associated with femininity. Throughout the first act of the play she participates in the misogynistic one-upmanship that is the hallmark of Hammy's friendship group. Pumpgirl's conversations with Hammy at the garage are characterised by her complicitly masculine language games:

> "How's the cunt?" says I, meaning his wife. It's always the same. "Still a cunt" says he and we laugh. "How's the cunt," says he, meaning my cunt. "Still a cunt", says I. It's our wee game.
> (8)

If language of this exchange presages the violence to come, Spallen is careful also to locate such complicity in the harassment Pumpgirl receives from women. In the first scene she declares that she "can't stand women drivers. They can't drive for shite" (4) only to recount an encounter in which she is interrogated by a group of passers by at the petrol station. One of the group ask her, in a mocking manner: "we were just wondering like, if you were, like, a *man* or a *woman*?" (5). The monologue allows her to respond to such taunts with vivid, humorous and critical reconstructions of her interlocutors, but it also registers the extent to which such encounters affect her. More broadly, her refusal to accept traditional feminine roles only serves to isolates her, not only from the local women, but from Hammy's friends too. They treat her an an intriguing freak, pejoratively referring to her as Pumpgirl, Pumpy and sweetheart. These patronising, needling nicknames are designed to remind her that, despite her best efforts to be 'one of the lads', in their eyes she remains a 'girl'.

Pumpgirl is left in a double-bind: she will never be accepted as an equal by men but, in scorning femininity, she forecloses the possibility to seeking common ground with the women around her. This is emphasised by the fact that Sinead, whom Pumpgirl so disparages, is standing next to her throughout the play. This competing narrative reveals that, far from being a passive figure, Hammy's wife embarks upon her own, equally thwarted, act of rebellion. The two are connected as victims of a rigid and unforgiving gender order. But Pumpgirl's internalisation of the most self-destructive elements of masculinity - its misogyny, competitiveness, lack of care - prevents her from realising this. As a consequence, she ends up reproducing, rather than contesting, associations between maleness, power and domination, a response that inhibits her from levering her connectedness to others for positive social change.

This lack of solidarity has consequences for Sinead too. In contrast to Pumpgirl, she is initially positioned as a stereotypical housewife and a dutiful mother to her and Hammy's children. But in an ironic twist, Sinead is far more intellectually curious than her gender nonconforming counterpart, who ends up subordinating her needs and desires to Hammy in a manner that is similar to the passivity expected of a wife. Sinead's narrative, however, is characterised by anger and resentment at her situation. Though she dutifully goes through the motions of raising children and tidying the family home, she does so with sense of reflexive self-awareness, conscious of the fact that these tasks are both limiting and undervalued. Though necessary, her domestic chores amount to nothing more than "robotic crap" (29). She can barely stand the presence of her husband as he returns home late from the pub, wondering "Does he ever notice the new pillowcases practically every night on his side of the bed?" (10). Unfortunately, without qualifications and an income of her own, Sinead is unable to move away and pursue a different life. The only option available to her is to develop an active fantasy life. To compensate for her boredom Sinead imagines what it would be like to murder her husband:

> 'Your honour. It was the way his bottom lip puckered when he snored that made me put the hatchet through his head'
> How's that for a country and western song Hammy? I would call it 'And I'm Praying for a Female Judge"
> (10)

The understanding she would hope to find in a female judge is nowhere present in the play itself, however. Pumpgirl makes clear early in the play that she regards Sinead as a "pure cunt" who "doesn't deserve" her husband (9). So while the freedom and authority of the monologue enables Sinead to discredit the image of her as a passive victim of her circumstances, it also registers the social isolation that arises out of poverty and an absence of sisterly solidarity. Situated side-by-side, Pumpgirl and Sinead's narratives powerfully communicate the way that economic precarity and patriarchy produce conditions that pit women against one another to inhibit collective feminist resistance.

Sinead's monologue also begins to unpick the fallacy that the modernisation of Northern Ireland constituted a radical break from the region's supposed parochiality. Throughout the first act she wonders how and why she ended up with Hammy and compares herself to famous women who populate the lifestyle magazines that she reads. She remarks on how the singer Shakira was catapulted to success after marrying the actor Michael Caine: "One minute she's dancing about, waving a few coffee beans round her head and the next minute she's half a house to herself, and the husband on the other side needing permission to come in" (10). Later Sinead queries the latent determinism and essentialism underlying such a route to personal fulfilment:

> Our youngest Diane gave me this book on *Women Who Love Too Much*. Although in her case it should be called 'Women who love too often'. Or 'Women who'll love for a spin round Camlough Lake and a tray of curry chips'. This book says it's in your genes like cancer or baldy men. The kind of men you end up with. Patterns. Makes you think though, doesn't it? I mean, some women are going to get picked off the telly, aren't they, and given half a house. I get a hotpress full of pillowcases and a plastic trophy. (16)

Gender equality and material advancement is no longer a question of radically changing social and gender relations, but involves exploiting the objectification of the female body for personal gain. But Sinead is wary that this consumer-modelled identity constitutes a welcome delivery from socially conservative gender roles. Perhaps, Spallen suggests, the region's integration into the cultural norms of capitalism constitutes nothing more than another form of biological determinism,

where those already possessing the requisite genetic or financial 'gifts' advance at the expense of others, particularly working-class women. This may be a form of female agency, but it is not feminist emancipation, for women are not free to determine the rules of the game.

Spallen is nevertheless attentive to how this 'game' also affects those working-class men who, like Hammy, find themselves at the bottom of the economic hierarchy. His precarious existence is symptomatic of Northern Ireland's shift, detailed above, from a society with minimal social protections and ready employment to one in which it is increasingly difficult to make a secure and stable living. Though officially unemployed, Hammy collects the dole and works secretly at a local chicken hatchery. Even with various sources of income, he finds it impossible to fulfil his role as breadwinner to Sinead and his children, a situation that he experiences as a form of emasculation. Instead he attempts to achieve the masculine ideal in surrogate arenas of competition: racing and womenising. Indeed, the two practices seem interchangeable, as indicated by Hammy's use of the common Northern Irish slang term "ride" (29) to refer to attractive women: just as he races in the understanding that "The lads'll all be watching" (6), he is also at pains to show off his virility. Early in the play he describes giving a lift to his friends and the conversation quickly turns to women: "Conversation goes on an on and becomes a bit of a competition" (17). Each man shares ever more fantastical stories about their various sexual encounters, most of which are certainly fictional. It is a clear elaboration of what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick famously called "homosocial desire"; that is, the establishment of relations between heterosexual men which are cemented through the exchange of women and characterised by homophobia and misogyny.[357] Unable to access paramilitary prestige, and excluded by unemployment from the a gendered accumulation process that used to benefit them, women provide the men in *Pumpgirl* with an alternative currency through which they can prove themselves capably dominant.

The past feeds into this process of displacing feelings of disempowerment onto the bodies of women. Pumpgirl's narrative draws close connections between the violence

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[357] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp.1-20.

of the 'Troubles' and the depleted social conditions of the present, suggesting how the former is renewed in the present in the form of sexual violence. When early in the play Pumpgirl recalls a sexual encounter between her and Hammy, she notes that the make-out spot is beside a "oul' burnt out library van" in an area "where two Prods were took and killed about fifteen years ago" (12). And during the intercourse itself Pumpgirl's mind draws morbid associations. Perceiving scratches on the roof of Hammy's car, she is reminded of a story she had been told of a group of people whose car crashed into a local bog. "The people had ben trapped inside", she recalls, "And when the car was dragged out they found marks in the ceiling, like animal scratches" (12). The reflects the entrapment faced by Pumpgirl and Sinead, both of whom are stuck in poverty and stifled by their social and cultural environment. But it also foreshadows the sexual violence that is to come. Indeed, when Pumpgirl is raped by Shawshank, McManus, and Hammy, she returns to the story of the car in the bog: "My head is moving back and forward and I'm looking at the scratches on the roof above. Four people on a night out in Warrenpoint. Four people scratching on the roof of the car. Four people scratchin' on the roof of the car. Broken fingernails, silent screams, stiletto shoes and Saturday-night boots banging against black squeezing windows" (27). Warrenpoint is itself an evocative location: both a place where British Army soldiers were killed by the Provisional IRA in 1979 and, as Newry's closest seaside town, a place of leisure, consumption and relative prosperity.[358] In this context Pumpgirl's victimisation seems to be the culmination of a violent past and benighted present (as symbolised in the burn-out library van); another brutal act in a society where men are culturally conditioned to respond to powerlessness with violence, and where women's social mobility is curtailed by this reactionary displacement of class resentment. Working against the simplistic notion that Northern Ireland's modernisation entailed the transcendence of the past, domestic violence, rape and misogyny appear not as backdated crimes of the 'Troubles', but as endemic to modernity itself.

The morbid interaction of past and present becomes a feature, too, of the audience's experience. As the first act draws to a close, Sinead's affair with the man from the

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[358] See David McVea & David McKittrick, *Making Sense of the Troubles: A History of the Northern Ireland Conflict* (London: Penguin, 2001) p.132.

market is interwoven with Pumpgirl's account of her rape. For Sinead, it is an ecstatic moment of escape from conditions of dependency: "He undresses me with so much love, so much kindness, that I want to cry […] I think for seconds, maybe even a minute, I'm gong to be able to forget about being someone's wife, a ma or just a woman doin' something that's bad […] there's a gap. Just enough. A gap that's filled with nothing. I get my moment" (26). Immediately after this account the play switches to Pumpgirl, who describes being raped by Hammy's friend Shawshank: "The Indian buckle is pressing on my belly as he pulls open my combat trousers" (26). It is a horrific moment because it recalls a moment, earlier in Sinead's account, where she refers to her lover's belt buckle as "A stupid lookin' thing with an Indian head on it" (24). Spectators realise that both women are having sexual encounters with the same man, a man who had bragged to Hammy about sleeping with "some housewife" (17). The moment creates an intense sense of tension as the audience are party to information of which those onstage are ignorant. And as the second act unfolds, Sinead's lack of awareness about Shawshank's exploitative intentions becomes almost unbearable. Eventually it emerges that she is pregnant with another child and suspects that it is her lover's. But when she attempts to reveal this fact Shawshank mistakenly believes she knows about the gang rape and brutally beats her. When she eventually tells him that she is pregnant, Sinead recalls how he coldly laughs, before leaving her bloody and bruised by the roadside. The play ends with her returning to the scene of her misery: "Hammy and the kid'll be home soon and I start to make the tea." (51). Not only does this conclusion demonstrate the double standard that men are allowed to transgress the marriage bond while women face brutal violence, it also confronts the audience with the consequences of this violence being hidden from public view. Rather than confessing his crime, the guilt-ridden Hammy ends his monologue by committing suicide. Seeking to protect herself, Pumpgirl discards her butch identity and adopts conventionally feminine attire. And rather than share her story with others, Pumpgirl seems to accept responsibility for her rape. She bumps into Hammy with his family in the local shopping centre and tries to communicate with him: "to say 'It's okay but I miss you' with my eyes" (34). So when Sinead is cruelly attacked, the audience is left with a sense of opportunities having been missed: if only her husband had told her the truth; if only Pumpgirl had exposed the truth. In this way Spallen impresses upon them that the first step to

addressing such issues is to share stories, to seek solidarity, to organise the fragments of an atomised social world into a more coherent picture.

Pumpgirl expressed a broader dilemma within feminist activism and demand making in Northern Ireland: the question of to how best to address the persistence of misogyny and sexual violence amidst poverty and stagnation. The play's pessimism demonstrated an awareness of the degree to which women's survival and emancipation risked being coopted and absorbed by a neoliberally adjusted patriarchy. This was epitomised in Spallen's appropriation of a form with a markedly masculine history. On the one hand, the monologue allowed her characters (and herself as an upcoming playwright) to speak freely and without interruption within a society where their dependency had been normalised and voices marginalised. Both Sinead and Pumpgirl's performances were powerful expressions of bodily autonomy; their attempts to reject motherhood a powerful statement in a society whose demographic politics (Northern Ireland's 'numbers game') continued to place particular emphasis on women's unpaid reproductive labour. Following Judith Butler, to stage such claims in the theatre was "part of any normative aspiration of a movement that seeks to maximize the protection and the freedoms of sexual and gender minorities, of women, and of racial and ethnic minorities".[359] However, as Butler goes on to say, this aspiration to autonomy also risked denying the sociality that is a fundamental condition of embodied subjectivity: "I may wish to reconstitute my "self" as if were there all along […] but to do so would be to deny the various forms of rupture and subjection that formed the conditions of my emergence as an individuated being".[360] This problematic was central to *Pumpgirl*: female characters rejected socially sanctioned gender norms and spoke their own stories, but only in theatrical conditions that rendered solidarity impossible and, in the case of the play's eponymous character, exemplified the risk of collusion with privileged forms of competitive masculinity. The play's rather pessimistic conclusion suggested that the recognition of marginalised voices alone - as prescribed within Northern Ireland's liberal grammar of equality – obscured the social character of identity. To render the

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[359] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life* (London: Verso, 2004), p.26.
[360] *Ibid.*, p.27.

asserton of autonomy an end in itself was to cut identity off from its richness, its openness to productive change.

Pumpgirl was well received when it premiered at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2006. It went on it win the *Irish Times* Theatre Award for best new play and the 2006-7 Susan Smith Blackburn Prize alongside *Leaves* (Galway: Chapel Hill, 2006), a family drama by fellow Northern Irish playwright Lucy Caldwell. A production of by the Manhattan Theatre Club in New York quickly followed, where the play was compared to monologies written by Conor McPherson and Brian Friel. One reviewer in the *New York Times* praised the play for "Adding a fresh, female voice to the boys' club of Irish playwrights", declaring that its "penetrating language and unsentimental view place it among the most powerful" contemporary Irish plays.*361* According to such assessments, its focus on the experiences of downtrodden women in rural Northern Ireland confounded the idea of a linear progression from the parochial past into the sunny uplands of neoliberal modernity. As the playwright remarked in one interview: "There's a stagnation of souls, even with a developing economy." [362] The positive reception internationally of the 2006 and 2007 productions lead directly to the Lyric Theatre's 2008 staging at the height of the Financial Crisis. Declan Kiberd has remarked, when the Celtic Tiger bubble burst, Irish theatre of the 1990s and 2000s seemed retrospectively to act as "'an early warning system' against various forms of abuse".[363] When the play arrived in Belfast its exposure of the poverty lurking at the heart of Northern Ireland's so-called economic development could not have been timelier. Just as Pumpgirl and Sinead bore the displaced costs of economic precarity, so the implementation of austerity would adversely affect thousands of women across the region.

Pumpgirl launched Spallen's career as a playwright and lead to her achieving major success, but with that success came a wariness about the very problems of complicity

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[361] Caryn James, "From Ireland, Love Songs in the Key of Desperation", *New York Times*, 5 December (2008), https://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/05/theater/reviews/05pump.html [retrieved 19/09/19].

[362] Justin Bergman, "Pumpgirl Explores the Dark Fringes of Ireland", *New York Times*, 20 November (2007), https://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/19/arts/19iht-theater.1.8390111.html, [retrieved 19/09/19].

[363] Declan Kiberd, "Irish Writers are an Early Warning System about Abuse", *Irish Times*, 21 October (2017), https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/declan-kiberd-irish-writers-were-an-early-warning-system-about-abuse-1.3260748, [retrieved 19/09/19].

and compromise that haunted the play. "With great wealth can come an uneasiness about self and an uneasiness about identity," she observed in 2007, "I left Dublin because I saw that around me, and I just think it's such a terrible thing to lose, the heart and soul of the country."[364] That uneasiness would indeed become a feature of her subsequent work. In 2009 Fishamble produced *Strandline* at the Project Arts Theatre in Dublin, a realist play that focussed on Máirín, a successful artist who has returned to the border town in which she was raised. The minimalist home in which most of the play takes place is a sign both of the costs and benefits of her success. In the corner stands a weaving loom and one wall hands "*a beautiful, enormous tapestry/woven hanging – modern, yet containing traditional elements, obviously Máirín work.*"[365] The loom and tapestry, symbolic of Irish life in the north west of Ireland and evocative of the deep significance of this form of 'women's work' to Irish cultural nationalism, offer a romantic image of the island's past that is benign enough to sell to wealthy collectors and galleries in London. As a result Máirín is "*stinking rich*" but, as Spallen puts it, "*there is a feeling […] that the place is soulless*" (18). The play, in short, dramatised Spallen's own worry that her newfound status as one Northern Ireland's brightest emerging female playwrights – a generation that included Lucy Caldwell, Stacey Gregg, Lisa McGee and Rosemary Jenkinson – would divest her of the social consciousness she fostered as a part of her working-class upbringing. Though her success represented progress in the representation of women in the arts, Spallen was wary in case this gloss over Northern Ireland's widening inequalities.

It is worth briefly dwelling on *Strandline* because its thematic concern for selective or broken memory offers a precursor to the formal experimentation with disjointed and discontinuous temporality that would emerge in subsequent live art and theatrical pieces. After Máirín's husband Tom drowns in the opening scene of the play, his funeral becomes a pretext for the airing of class resentment. Tríona, Máirín's step daughter, Clodagh, Tríona's mother-in-law, and Eileen, whose husband was Tom's drinking partner, gradually exact their revenge on a woman they believe looks down on the community; or as Clodagh puts it: "She can sit up here drawin' in the proud breath right up into her oul' gums. She doesn't know what we know" (35). The four

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[364] Bergman, *Op. Cit.*
[365] Abbie Spallen, *Strandline* (London: Faber, 2009), p.18.

women decide to knit mementos to place in Tom's empty coffin, and as they do so they reveal to Máirín the secrets he kept from her: his nighttime drinking, fly-tipping, and murderous past. It emerges that prior to meeting Máirín he and another man strangled a local woman, Shirley Sweeney, at the behest of Clodagh. Her crime was that she pursued affairs with unmarried men and those from the 'other side'. And just as in *Pumpgirl*, her murder is a powerful symbol of the violence women face when they transgress traditional notions of womanhood.[366] There is some irony in the fact that Clodagh ordered the murder; her status as the town's matriarch paramilitary leader is itself far from the patriarchal ideal of femininity. But such brutal and controlling behaviour reminds the audience that the concentration of power in the hands of particular women does not necessarily entail the dismantling of patriarchal social structures. The same is true for Máirín's success. Despite the fact that she makes money from a commodified version of Irish domestic femininity, she too has spurned the trappings of traditional femininity: she neither has children, nor is she interested in pursuing a close relationship with her step daughter. Tríona suggests that while Máirín was "knitting razor blades" (49) she also neglected her duties as a wife. Holding in her hands a piece of knitting full of holes, she declares of Tom: "It's like remembrin' two different men. I remember a sad oul' broken cowp of a man, once your oul' wormin' magic had wore away" (48). The cloth symbolises those aspects of the past that Máirín left untended, or chose to ignore, in the entrepreneurial pursuit of personal fortune. The individualist future mapped out by neoliberalism - the future Máirín herself pursued – ignored the unravelling of social solidarity, particularly amongst women, in the face of economic violence and widening inequality. As Helen Meaney put it in her review of the play: "Post-peace-process politics, the environment, inequality, class envy, the role of the artist: all of these are tossed around, leaving the impression of a whirlpool of ideas, and a writer with big ambitions."[367]

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[366] One 2008 survey of anti-LGBT hate crime in Northern Ireland found the percentage of respondents who experienced hate crime was higher than in Great Britain. See Marian Duggan, *Queering Conflict: Examining Lesbian and Gay Experiences of Homophobia in Northern Ireland* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), p.85.

[367] Helen Meaney, "Strandline", *Guardian*, 22 November (2009), https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2009/nov/22/strandline [retrieved 22/09/19].

Spallen would continue to achieve personal success. Following *Strandline* she was appointed writer-in-residence for 2012 at the newly reopened Lyric Theatre. In 2015 they produced *Lally the Scut*, another play about complicity and collusion in the struggle for women's autonomy – it centred a female lead attempting to work the levers of power to achieve the rescue of her son, who is stuck, unseen, down a well. This led to her being the 2016 recipient of the prestigious Wyndham Campbell Prize. She also continued to criticise the normalisation of women's marginality both on and off the stage. And in 2009 she turned down the opportunity to take part in a series of staged readings at the Abbey Theatre entitled 'The Fairer Sex' on the basis that such events represented the reluctance of the national theatre to mount productions of new writing by women. Such a sentiment took on a sector-wide importance in 2016, when female workers across the performing arts mounted the #WakingTheFeminists movement in response to the Abbey's "Waking the Nation" programme. Ten productions were planned to respond to the centenary of the Easter Rising, only one of which was written by a female playwright. Focussing on how the compromised labour conditions of the sector marginalised women, the movement signalled a return of forms of direct action not seen since the 1980s and Charabanc. Here, perhaps, was the solidarity that Spallen had so longed for – the collective action that had seemed to be lacking in the Northern Irish theatre scene and was so conspicuously absent in her work.

Pumpgirl and *Strandline* looked beyond benign celebrations of Northern Ireland's modernisation to the atomising effect of interdependent class and gender inequalities on feminist solidarity. In them, Spallen put forward a complex depiction of neoliberal modernity in which women – particularly working-class women – bear the cost of modernisation. Together they elaborated a system whose competitive ethos sundered the possibility of sisterly solidarity, and where women shouldered the burden of the inability of men to deal with their vulnerability and powerlessness. Neither advocated for neoliberal modernisation as the antidote to the violence and social conservatism of the past; quite to the contrary, they represented such a process as sustaining these pathologies. Both plays invited spectators to set their sights on a more radical alternative, one that, in Fraser's terms, combined "the politics of

recognition" with a economically redistributive politics of gender.[368] However, even as Spallen's work snagged the developmental narrative of progress, the prospect of alternatives was only registered as a meaningful absence, particularly in the purgatorial loneliness of the characters in *Pumpgirl*. If her work set the stage for left-wing feminism's ghostly return, it did not use the particular resources of performance to enact such a restoration. Though suggestive, the metaphor of weaving deployed in *Strandline*, a linear and rather predictable thriller tragedy, did not extend to the form itself.

Spallen's work should be understood as marking a transitionary moment in Northern Irish performance history. On the one hand the form of her plays can be situated within the tradition of liberal feminist theatre. They gave voice to the particular and, crucially, distinctive experiences of people marginalised as women. And in representing such violent and debilitating conditions, the plays bemoaned the Agreement's failure to deliver equal rights and protections regardless of gender. On the other hand, in emphasising the loneliness and isolation the comes with individual authority and entrepreneurial achievement, Spallen was skeptical that the feminist practice of demanding rights and representation could either account for, or provoke challenges to, those broader political economic structures that helped to entrench patriarchy. However, the atomisation of her characters reflects how the solidarity celebrated in *Lay Up Your Ends* and exemplified in the Charabanc initiative were no longer available in the post-Agreement period. Instead, Northern Ireland had become a place where depleted social and economic conditions left women exhausted, angry and unable to organise. It is precisely through the loneliness and rage of her characters that Spallen invites her audience to feel the loss of feminist solidarity that this entails. Reduced to personal rebellion or careerist self empowerment, feminism lacks the support needed to expand it into a structural challenge to the prevailing gender order.

In her book *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* Rebecca Schneider argues that the citational quality of performance can "flummox those faith-keepers who hold that the present is fleeting and entirely self-identical, or who

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[368] Fraser, *Op. Cit.,* p.160.

hold that the movement from the present to the future is never by way of the past, or who believe firmly in absolute disappearance."[369] Under certain conditions the performing body can restore the past from a different critical angle and at a temporal juncture, "moments stitched through with repetition" that might "not only remind us of yesterday's sense of tomorrow, but also compose the sense again and offer, without expiration date, a politic of possibility".[370] Far from being ephemeral, then, theatre and live art could unstitch capitalism's linear trajectory, looping back, like *A Stitch in Time*, to return it to its ghosts: those opportunities missed and persistent continuities that, when knitted together in performance, might suggest a way forward. Unlike Spallen, feminist live artists took a more reparative approach to the conditions of social fragmentation caused by capitalism. Precisely because of its marginality relative to other forms of artistic expression, the medium sustained a more collaborative, less entrepreneurial, ethos. As exemplified in the 2012 *LABOUR* exhibition, such a collective approach constituted the historical excavation of "yesterday's sense of tomorrow" in order to stress, as participant Helena Walsh put it, "the potentials for developing communal strength".[371]

Unpicking Progress in the *LABOUR* Exhibition

The artists who took part in *LABOUR*, a 2012 exhibition of live art that took place in the LAB in Dublin, Performance Space in London and the Void Gallery in Derry, responded to this impasse by reviving the materialist feminism that had characterised European and North American theatre in the late 1970s and 1980s. As Sue Ellen Case remarks, this work tended to address women as a class in order to "analyse [their] underemployment, unemployment and wage inequalities within revised notion of surplus value."[372] In Northern Ireland, the plays of Anne Devlin, Christina Reid and Charabanc exemplified this trend, emphasising the various religious and ethno-nationalist discourses used to devalue women's labour, both on the factory floor and in the domestic sphere, often to the benefit of political and capitalist elites

[369] Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London: Routledge, 2011) p.50.
[370] *Ibid.*, p.180.
[371] Chrissie Cadman, Amanda Coogan & Helena Walsh, *LABOUR: A Live Exhibition of Irish Female Artists* (Dublin: The LAB/ Dublin City Council, 2012), n.p.
[372] Sue-Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988), p.84.

within both communities. As indicated by the title of the 2012 exhibition, the artists involved in *LABOUR* were similarly concerned with the intersection of cultural norms and economic relations of production in the construction of gender difference in Irish history, both north and south of the border. In the words of Helena Walsh, one of its co-curators, by "reaching back into the past, the artists in *LABOUR* repetitiously performed histories unresolved in the present." [373] They stitched together different periods not only to make visible the overlooked, forgotten or repressed aspects of women's history, but also to broaden what counts as 'labour' beyond waged work. By focussing on the unpaid and underpaid toil of women in Ireland's religious institutions, in its shirt factories, or in the home, the exhibition stressed that restrictive notions of femininity were more than merely the residual effect of retrograde ethno-nationalist ideologies; they were also a product of women's material economic exploitation under capitalism, an economic logic that persisted in the present under the guise of modernisation.

LABOUR was co-curated by Dublin-based live artist Amanda Coogan, the Kilkenny-born and London-based Helena Walsh, and Chrissie Cadman, a Northern Irish live artist from Derry, while they were studying at the University of Ulster in Belfast. Though the exhibition would challenge developmental historical models, it ironically had its roots in liberalising influence of economic and social modernisation. As Walsh notes: "The development of the Peace Process in Northern Ireland and also the Republic of Ireland's momentary brush with prosperity during the so-called Celtic Tiger era throughout the 1990s allowed a relinquishing of the defensive forms of nationalism maintained during the twentieth century." Equally, she argues that "the modernizing effects of the late-capitalism" created a space to question the influence of religion in shaping the two states on the island of Ireland.[374] In the early 2000s public discussion turned to historical abuses in the Republic's Catholic-run Magdalen Laundries and Mother and Baby Homes, [375] as well as equivalent Protestant institutions operating in the North which brought, in the words of

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[373] Helena Walsh, "Live Art and Femininity in Post-Conflict Ireland", *Performance Art in Ireland: A History*, ed. Áine Phillips (Bristol: Intellect, 2015), pp.209-241 (p.221).

[374] It should be noted here that, given the Celtic Tiger spanned over a decate, Walsh is guilty perhaps of exaggeration in describing it as a mere "brush with prosperity". Helena Walsh, Unpublished Email Correspondence with Alexander Coupe, 12 June (2018).

[375] See Frances Finnegan, *Do Penance Or Perish: Magdalen Asylums in Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Reverend William Park, "erring girls and women away from evil influences and put them on the past of virtue, honesty and usefulness."[376] Scholars began to note the economic, as well as ideological, value of traditional domesticity in the post-partition Republic, particularly in the context of worries over the cost to the state of caring for illegitimate children.[377] In the North this was paralleled with feminist scholarship on the instrumentalisation of women's reproductive labour in the context of ethno-nationalist demographic competition,[378] a consequence of which was that legislative change lagged behind attitudinal shifts towards the liberalisation of abortion.[379]With their references to the Magdalen Laundries, Derry textile workers, Armagh Prison protest and contemporary fashion industry, the artists who took part in *LABOUR* were deeply influenced by this probing of Ireland's socially conservative past.

Less attention, however, was being given to the continuities of exploitation that the exhibition would seek to tease out in its weaving of diverse temporalities. It set in relief a narrative of modernisation had developed that, though sometimes of capitalism's excesses, tended to present its influence as a definitive temporal break with the past. Writing in 2007 Tom Inglis argued that while capitalism had accelerated criticism of social conservatism in Ireland, north and south, the embrace of consumerism and ethic of self-realisation had made its citizens "more selfish".[380] This rigid demarcation of an earlier religious culture of sexual regulation from a contemporary culture of selfish individualism tended to stitch the past seamlessly into the present as its complimentary opposite. Indeed, it replicated the moralising critique of contemporary capitalism levelled by more conservative sectors of society. For example, one article in the *Irish News* lamented that: "Ireland used to be Ireland, distinctive and different. Now it is just another beaten docket on an international

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[376] Quoted in Leanne McCormick, *Regulating Sexuality: Women in Twentieth Century Northern Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p.62.

[377] James M. Smith argued that the women who entered these institutions both contravened socially sanctioned gender norms and were deemed unproductive due to their poverty or infirmity and therefore "presented a challenge to the economic stability of men newly converted to the benefits of capital accumulation." See, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p.28; See also Mary M. Daley, "Women in the Irish Free State, 1922-39: The Interaction Between Economics and Ideology", *Journal of Women's History*, 7.1 (1995), pp.99–116.

[378] See Kathryn Conrad, *Locked in the Family Cell*.

[379] See Jennifer Thomson, *Op. Cit.*

[380] Tom Inglis, *Global Ireland: Same Difference* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), p.258.

bookie's floor."[381] Such criticisms were by no means restricted to nationalist voices. Alf McCreary, religious correspondent for the unionist *Belfast Telegraph*, averred a similar diagnosis, lamenting: "there have been few church voices - until the comments of Archbishops [Rowan] Williams and [John] Sentanu [sic.] this week - to remind us that the financial crisis came as a result of a moral laxitude."[382] Though Inglis neither endorsed the 'progressive' credentials of the capitalist status quo nor the cultural superiority of a seemingly lost religious culture, by promoting history as a teleological continuum he denied the past its residual capacity to disrupt the dominant ideologies of the present. His linear narrative masked a deeper continuity in gender inequality and, as *LABOUR* sought to suggest in its title, the economic exploitation of working class women in particular.

Walsh, however, is quick to criticise such a neat division between religious repression and capitalist hedonism. Indeed, *LABOUR* arose precisely out of a contradiction between the emancipatory promises of liberal capitalism and the disproportionate effects of deepening material inequality on women. As Walsh notes:

> The impact of the 2008 financial crisis was reverberating in Ireland leading to its economic collapse in 2010 and acceptance of bailouts from the European Union and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). As highlighted in numerous studies on how austerity disproportionately impacts on women. The exhibition sought to interrogate issues of gender and labour in light of these events.[383]

Though so-called modernisation opened up new avenues of feminist critique, it also extended the devaluation and exploration of work constituted as 'feminine'. As Gerardine Meaney wrote in 2010: "The narrative of rapid national progress was dependent on the suppression of the evidence of the persistence of structures of conformity, domination and exclusion".[384] Like Spallen, Walsh and her co-creators set about interrogating and challenging those that would draw simple historical distinctions, but *LABOUR* emerged explicitly out of a desire to recover the

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[381] Patrick Murphy, "Ireland's Tiger has Eaten Everything that's Celtic", *Irish News*, 18 October (2008), p.10.
[382] Alf McCreary, "Why the Churches have a Crucial Role", *Belfast Telegraph*, 27 September (2008), p.26.
[383] Walsh, Unpublished Email Correspondence (2018).
[384] Gerardine Meaney, *Gender, Ireland and Cultural Change: Gender, Sex and Nation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), p.xvii.

"suppressed evidence" of gender inequality in light of the Financial Crisis and the failed promise of liberalisation in Ireland, north and south. Unlike their theatrical counterparts, those who took part in the exhibition conjured marginal, repressed and recalcitrant fragments of history to search for emancipatory possibilities outside of the capitalist trajectory.

From its inception, then, *LABOUR* was concerned with overcoming the separation of "recognition" from "redistribution" and the sundering of class politics from feminism, a manoeuvre that had particular political weight in a context where parties such as Sinn Féin espoused a concept of gender justice as equal participation in society while also preparing to underwrite austerity.[385] Marxist feminists have long argued that gender is the product of a separation between waged work – the production of commodities – and reproductive work that ensures the health, well-being and life of people.[386] As Silvia Federici has traced, this separation led to "the economic importance of the reproduction of labor-power carried out in the home, and its function in the accumulation of capital became invisible, being mystified as a natural vocation and 'women's labor'."[387] What Federici refers to a mystification was nothing less than a powerful form of social engineering: culturally constructed and ideologically sanctioned notions of etiquette, modesty, sinfulness allowed interpersonal relations and individual subjectivities to be marked by the interests of capital. Not only was the body incorporated into the production of surplus value, but so too was its cognitive and affective faculties; the 'soul', as Franco 'Bifo' Berardi puts it, became a product in its own right.[388] This understanding of labour – as the formal subsumption of life by capital – accords with Judith Butler's famous dictum that gender identity, rather than being 'natural', is "instituted through a *stylised repetition of acts*".[389] Because these acts are structured by the separation of labour into gendered spheres, the embodied subject emerged as sexually marked according to the

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[385] See Fraser, *Op. Cit.*, p.164-171.
[386] See Leopoldina Fortunati, *The Arcane of Reproduction: Housework, Prostitution and Capital*, trn. Hilary Creek (New York: Autonomedia, 1995) & Endnotes, "The Logic of Gender: On the Separation of Spheres and the Process of Abjection", *Endnotes*, 3 (2013), https://endnotes.org.uk/issues/3/en/endnotes-editorial, [retrieved 11/12/19].
[387] Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004), p.75.
[388] Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy,* trn. Francesca Cadel & Guissepina Mecchia (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009).
[389] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory", *Theatre Journal*, 40.4 (1988), pp.519–31.

particular kind of work they undertake. *LABOUR*, then, was concerned less with merely recognising the hidden histories of women's toils than with rendering sensible how those histories live on insofar as the category of 'woman' itself has been brought forth by and through the gendered division of labour.

Each of the three *LABOUR* events took place over an eight-hour duration – the length of the average working day – with many of the eleven pieces consisting of ritualised and repetitive acts. As Boris Groys has noted "time-based art is one of the areas in which [the] valorisation of wasted time takes place". By putting "narrative into a loop" and divorcing actions and gestures from their place within "purposefully used time [that is] always historically determined", Groys argues, such art can release these gestures, images, repertoires from the developmental narratives into which they are usually integrated and through which they accrue value.[390] In the case of *LABOUR*, spectators were confronted with a repertoire of actions that seemed to have no beginning or end, and no tangible product other than the sense of work being endlessly endured. Though the gestures and repertoires that the performance conjured in the individual pieces referenced the multifarious histories of work conducted by women in Ireland, north and south, the experience of encountering the exhibition in its enmeshed complexity could hardly by reduced to these constituent parts. As spectators were confronted not by the production of commodities but by the sensible force of disciplined and stylised movement, their attention was called to the performative role of labour in constituting gender norms.

Several participants focussed specifically on the role of reproductive labour in conditioning the embodiment of gender in the present. Áine Phillips, Chrissie Cadman and Helena Walsh all probed the ideological and discursive regulation of social reproductive labour on both sides of the border. Phillips divided her performance *Redress: Emotional Labour* into three parts which together addressed the confinement of women to the drudgery of the Magdalen Laundries. Throughout her performance recordings of the testimonies of those women confined to such institutions could be heard from speakers sewn into her clothing. As they played, Phillips worked her way through three images: she walked through the gallery in a

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[390] Boris Groys, "Time-Based Art", *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 59/60 (2011) pp.337–41.

stupor as black ink stained her clothes; she then crawled across the floor wearing glass-encrusted ballet shoes; and finally she struggled to break free from a large fishing net. Together these images conjured: the use of Catholic and Protestant conceptions of sexual sin for the purposes of self-regulation; the censorship of dance in the post-partition the Irish Free State for fear of sexual promiscuity; and the historical confinement of transgressing women and their children to religious institutions. Her performance made use of proximity: she forced spectators to lean towards her body to hear the testimonies and reached out to pleadingly touch the shoes of male onlookers (figure 2). By confronting spectators in this way she impressed upon them their role in passively allowing for injustices to continue. In 2012 those who survived incarceration had yet to receive legal and legislative redress from the Irish state, a fact particularly poignant in the performance at the Lab, a gallery located in the Monto district of Dublin – the historical site of the city's sex trade and the location of an infamous Magdalene Laundry.

The question of why such social hierarchies existed at all was clarified by Cadman's contribution, entitled *Mutt - mutter - mother - máithair*, a piece developed from a residency the artist undertook on the Shore Road in Belfast in 2008.[391] Sat in a bath of ice, she worked her way through cycles of writing on, and then scrubbing clean, a series of pristine, white sheets. As the slippage between "mutt" and "mother" suggests, the performance was concerted with teasing out the apparent contradiction between the discursive and material aspects of domestic labour. Drawing upon the tradition of endurance in live art, her numbed body and repetitive, arduous toil offered a powerful rejoinder to the adulation of maternity in ethno-nationalist representations of the nation. The cult of "true womanhood" in Ulster can be traced to the cultural agendas of Irish and Ulster Protestant nationalisms that developed in the late 19th and early 20th century. Andrea Ebel Brozyna has shown how religious literature of the period disseminated the ideal of the dutiful "handmaiden", a figure defined by selflessness, cleanliness and piety.[392] Largely excluded from political representation and waged labour, women's bodies existed not for themselves, but to

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[391] See Helena Walsh & Anne Marie Healy, *Brutal Silences: A Live Art Development Agency Study Room Guide on Live Art in Ireland* (London: Live Art Development Agency, 2011), p.29.

[392] Andrea Ebel Brozyna, *Labour, Love, and Prayer: Female Piety in Ulster Religious Literature, 1850-1914* (Belfast; Montreal; Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Belfast Press, 1998).

ensure the cultural and biological futurity of the island's competing nationalist ideologies. In bodying forth the physical exertion required by such ideological and discursive norms, Cadman's performance pointed to the ironic link between the symbolic centrality of domestic labour to nationalism and unionism and the material hardship experienced by those women who undertook it.

Helena Walsh's performance, *In Pursuit of Pleasure*, sought to explore the possibility of deviation implicit in Phillips and Cadman's elaboration of the disciplined body. Of all the artists who took part in *LABOUR*, Walsh's performance most explicitly referenced the historical context of the 'Troubles'. It took as its inspiration the involvement of republican women in "no wash" protests at the Armagh Prison in 1980-1. Their decision to participate was an effort to assert their status as political prisons on equal terms with their male counterparts undertaking a similar protest at the Long Kesh/Maze Prison. By littering their cells with menstrual blood, faeces and food, the women deployed the idea that those who deviated from "true womanhood" were dirty and impure in order to glean a degree of agency within the prison. But the public, including the Catholic Church and republican community, were largely wary of this attempt at reclamation. Fathers Raymond Murray and Denis McFaul, sympathetic members of the clergy, described how the "girls" had undergone "defeminisation" at the hands of the prison regime.[393] Upon visiting Armagh, journalist Tim Coogan declared: "I found the smell far worse than at Long-Kesh, and several times found myself having to control feelings of nausea."[394] We can speculate as to why the presence of menstrual blood in particular made a difference; but at the very least it represented a failure to properly perform the biological and cultural reproductive work associated with "true womanhood". It is this refusal of the handmaiden's servitude and reclamation of immodesty that Walsh sought to reanimate in the very different context of 2012.

As the title of Walsh's performance suggests, her performance tilted away from the efficiency, economy and cleanliness enforced upon women's bodies by their cultural

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[393] Denis Faul & Raymond Murray, *Violations of Human Rights in Northern Ireland, 1968-1978* (1978), https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/othelem/docs/faul_murray/faul_1978_violations/faul_1978_violations.pdf [retrieved 22/10/19]

[394] Quoted in Begoña Aretxaga, "Dirty Protest: Symbolic Overdetermination and Gender in Northern Ireland Ethnic Violence", *Ethos*, 23.2 (1995), pp.123–48 (p.137).

encoding as social reproducers. She wore a blue dress embossed with gold, blue high heels, a balaclava pierced with knitting needles, a belt equipped with bottles containing a mixture of milk and menstrual blood, and a pouch filled with Catholic communion wafers (see figure 3). Sat atop a large pile of soil, Walsh worked through an ordered cycle of events: eating and spitting communion wafers, inserting condoms filled with washing power into her vagina between exuberantly expelling its contents, vigorously cleaning the contents of the baby bottles. As Keef Winter noted in his review of the London exhibition, the balaclava gave "a Bataillian twist to her acts",[395] as masturbation, dirt and bodily fluids combined to give the impression of what the French philosopher called "unproductive expenditure" – those human activities, from festivals to "perverse sexual activity", that are not "reducible to the fundamental necessities of production and conservation."[396] On the one hand, reclaiming images of castration, waste, and abjection constituted a refusal of the ethno-nationalist 'numbers game', where women are expected to produce the next generation of male workers and soldiers. However, this refusal also took on a difference valence in the post-Agreement context of 2012. Helen Davies and and Claire O'Callaghan remind us that the archetypal capitalist values of competition, production of profit, and elimination of risk or weakness "can also be coded as traditionally masculine."[397] At a time when neoliberalism ensured its strength by extracted efficiency savings from the sphere of 'women's work', to withhold social reproductive labour in the name of pleasure was to claim a form of luxury, the pleasure of "wasted time" (to Groys's phrase), usually monopolised by the waged, wealthy and male. If Cadman and Phillips sought to redefine who counts as a 'worker', then Walsh, by reanimating the Armagh Protest, raised the prospect of revolt. Just as the Republican women had refused their reproductive role as guarantors of national futurity, so women in the present should refuse to bear the burden of underwriting the uni-directional time of capitalist modernity.

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[395] Keef Winters, "Labour", *Allotrope*, 9 February (2012), http://allotropepress.moonfruit.com/labour-090212/4561190803, [retrieved 23/10/19].

[396] George Bataille, *The Bataille Reader*, ed. Fred Botting and Scott Wilson (Oxford: Blackwells, 1997), p.168.

[397] Helen Davies and Claire O'Callaghan, "All in This Together? Feminisms, Academia, Austerity", *Journal of Gender Studies*, 23.3 (2014), pp.227–32 (p.228).

The prospect of organising on the basis of class as well as gender was also raised in Michelle Brown's performance *By the Grace of God*. She did so by working with references to both unpaid reproductive work and women's historical role as workers in the northern textile industries. Brown sat at a table and silently stitched a series of pinafores out of a boom of navy fabric. She then inscribed the finished garments with the words "The Fallen" (figure 4) and hung them on a washing line. These actions took on an especial significance when *LABOUR* arrived in Derry, a city that had a peculiarity 'feminised' character. As Eithne McLaughlin has noted:

> Derry is the Maiden City (never having been 'taken' in warfare), portrayed as mother as well as maid ('Derry is the mother of us all', stated John Hume). This attribution of female gender to the city fits well with the fact that the city's only manufacturing industry of any importance has been the shirt industry with a ninety per cent female labour force.[398]

Situated in the Old City Shirt Factory, the Void Gallery was an appropriate place to focus for Brown's performance. Just as with the women of McGuinness's *Factory Girls*, her emphasis on the drudgery of working in the garment factories punctured any notion that the Derry was a site of relative female empowerment, an image that "has diverted attention from the un- and under-employment of women in the shirt factories [and] 'hidden' the lack of employment opportunities other than in the shirt factories for women".[399] The factories were in fact a site of collective struggle. Though they faced discrimination within the trade unions movement, many women joined the local branch of the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers to fight for better pay and conditions.[400] By interweaving this lost culture of labour with workaday domestic tasks - such as hanging out the washing - Brown suggested that distinctions between the different spheres of work are flimsy at best. Both the shirt factories and the domestic sphere were equally invested in producing unspeaking, docile, selfless forms of "feminine" subjectivity that could be put to use in service of both the post-partition Northern Irish state and its economy. However, even as work in both spheres becomes so all-consuming as to be the natural essence of what it is to

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[398] Eithne McLaughlin, "Women and Work in Derry City: A Survey", *Saothar*, 14 (1989) pp.35–45 (p.35).
[399] *Ibid.*, p.43.
[400] *Ibid.*, p.39.

be a 'proper' woman in society, when understood as labour opens up the possibility of revolt.

By the time *LABOUR* arrived in Derry the city's garment factories had long since closed, and with it passed the power of organised labour. The exhibition marked this change in the North's economic relations through Amanda Coogan's contribution entitled *Bubble Up In Blue*. Wearing numerous white high-street winter jackets from Primark stitched together into a weighty garment, she walked the gallery space, blue liquid dribbling from her mouth and onto her pristine clothes (figure 5). In the context of the Void Gallery, her performance reminded spectators of the mass outsourcing of Derry's shirt industry abroad and the shift in the Northern Irish economy from manufacturing to services from the late 1990s onwards. Her solitary, composed, and upright comportment unfolded the emergent pressures facing women in this new economy. As McRobbie notes, though women had unprecedented access to a labour market now geared towards "the large skill pools and flexibility of the female workforce", their success was "tied up with consumer culture and the promises of personal satisfactions therein."[401] The rise in female employment did not augur a renewed sense of feminist labour-power: not only was their no tradition of trade unionism in the jobs they occupied but the often-precarious conditions of their work made collective bargaining difficult. Moreover, ideas of status and agency became attached to consumption, a formerly "housewifely" responsibility refitted as "the archetypal female leisure activity."[402] Coogan's use of blue dye and high-street fashion also situated such changes in global terms. Socially mobile women could enjoy the pleasures of conspicuous consumption – buying as many cheap coats at they could afford – in the transformed city centres of Derry and Belfast. Though the rigidly gendered division of labour may be disappearing, Coogan decried the neoliberal alternative for benefitting a minority while entrenching inequality abroad.

The individual pieces discussed here form only a small part of the eleven-strong group that participated in the three exhibitions. An exhaustive account of each particular performance would reveal political concerns of the kind analysed above,

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[401] Angela McRobbie, "Reflections on Feminism, Immaterial Labour and the Post-Fordist Regime", *New Formations*, 70 (2011), pp.60-76 (p.71).
[402] *Ibid.*, p.67.

but to focus only on each piece in isolation would do injustice to the complexity of the exhibitions as a whole. The 'endless' actions performed by the collective of artists provided another way of thinking about notions of modernisation and 'post-conflict' progress. To identify continuities of oppression and to recover hidden histories of resistance was to refuse the injunction to rush towards a capitalist future in which the past no longer mattered. *LABOUR* reminded spectators that only was this future dependent upon the persistent privileging of productive labour over the work of social reproduction – work which remained gender-coded as 'feminine' – but it also involved erasing the long tradition of Irish women disobeying convention and challenging their subordination. Conceptually, in bringing into question the desirability of the future and contesting the erasure of radical feminist histories, *LABOUR* stitched the present to the futures of the past in order to challenge unidirectional narratives of progress that otherwise seemed inevitable. Indeed, after a time the exhibition began to feel something like the Armagh women's protest: a transformative appropriation of the very gendered behaviours through which the category of 'woman' was constituted. "The longer I stay the more impressive the feat of the artists becomes", Keef Winters observed, "enduring a bitter cold and standing near-still for lengthy periods at a time."[403] Rather than signifying the stereotype of women as weak, silent, selfless, and rather than using their bodies to reproduce the nation or generate profit for others, the performance of repetition offered, in the words of Cadman, "a cultural contribution to [the artists'] standing and strength", in spite of the conditions of economic precarity that afflicted them.[404]

By providing a platform to promote, nurture and develop feminist performance practices marginalised in the wider Irish art scene, the exhibitions themselves also presented in microcosm the kind of intervention required to facilitate change. If *Pumpgirl* and *Strandline* were fraught with the worry that performance makers were becoming cultural entrepreneurs, selling out to the inequalities of market individualism, then the collective form of the 2012 exhibitions constituted a refusal to pursue the goals of feminism in isolation. As Amanda Coogan has noted, live art differs from theatre in its refusal of narrative, plot and fictionality: "The performance

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[403] Winters, *Op. Cit.*
[404] Cadman *et. al.*, *LABOUR: A live exhibition* (Dublin: the LAB, 2012), n.p.

artist is not 'acting' in the traditional theatrical sense. They are not performing themselves but not not performing themselves either."[405] Acting to a professional standard involves effacing the trial-and-error of rehearsal and the effort of perfecting a part. Though what takes place in live art is no more or less 'real', durational live art's intensive focus on the exertions of the body conspires to disturb any easy distinction between aesthetic experience and the everyday. It reminds spectators that those participating are indeed enduring the physical toil of a working day, raising the ethical question of their exploitative working conditions. In emphasising collective strength and standing, *LABOUR* invited spectators to reflect upon how the art world was no less hostile and precarious for women than capitalist society at large. They too had to create spaces of shelter, strength and protection because austerity's assault of social protection included funding for female artists.

LABOUR could be seen, then, as a precursor to the sectoral action taken by the Waking the Feminists movement. It marked the moment at which female performance makers began to include in their work a knowing awareness of their status as marginalised workers within a male-dominated Irish art industry. Cadman, Walsh and Coogan drew inspiration from a series of exhibitions by the feminist art collective Guerrilla Girls. Organised under the title: "I'm not a feminist but…", the first iteration of the project opened in 2009 at the Millennium Court Arts Centre in Portadown and involved the transformation of the white cube gallery space into a New York street, replete with political graffiti and posters that elaborated the underrepresentation of women within Ireland's leading arts institutions. The 1980s heyday of second-wave feminist art activism was brought into contact with a contemporary context where organised feminism seemed to be absent. As the posters informed attendees, however, gender inequalities persisted: only 14% of artists the Ulster Museum's collection were women and Royal Ulster Academy membership was 69% male.[406] *LABOUR* sought to redress this marginalisation by providing a rare space to celebrate and nurture feminist performance practice in spite of the hostility they faced in the wider art scene. Like the Guerrilla Girls, Walsh and her co-curators were inspired by the collaborative initiatives of the 1980s: "One need only look at the

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[405] Amanda Coogan, "What is Performance Art", *What is Performance Art?* (Dublin: IMMA, 2015), p.11.
[406] See Brian Kennedy, "Guerilla Girls: *I'm Not a Feminist But…*", *Circa*, 130, Winter (2009), pp.75-6.

explosion of art spaces and collectives, such as Womanhouse, during the second wave of feminism to see how collective spaces and forms of communal organising connect to the development feminist art and feminist discourse."[407] The democratic appeal of a collective mode of presentation is evident, as it served to challenge the traditional model of the artist as individual (male) genius, emphasising instead the manifold relations and interdependencies involved in the preparation and delivery of a performance. In short, *LABOUR* marked the revival of a feminist strategy that, rather than seeking recognition within existing structures of power, sought to redress gender inequalities by developed alternatives to male-dominated institutions.

Conclusion: From Lament to Liberation

Both the work of Abbie Spallen and the *LABOUR* exhibitions were crucial for contesting a dominant liberal narrative that located the failure to achieve equal rights for women in the North's religiosity, social conservatism and ethno-nationalist political structures. They suggested that misogynistic violence and suffocating gender norms were less the backdated sins of patriarchal nationalism than morbid symptoms of a developing political consensus around the supposed "common ground" of pro-market reform. *Pumpgirl* and *Strandline* invited audiences to feel in the anger and loneliness of the women onstage the loss of feminist solidarity to a neoliberal narrative of individual self-empowerment, a critique that was testament to Spallen's own reflexivity regarding her social mobility as a prize-winning playwright. Both these plays offered a rejoinder to a contemporary feminist discourse that concentrated its energies on levering a liberal grammar of equality to seek legislative change. It was of course crucial that in 2015 the Northern Ireland High Court ruled that abortion laws in the region were in breach of the European Convention on Human Rights. However, the plays can be viewed as expressing a crisis of faith in formal equality as a crisis of theatrical form. Even the analytic thrust of *Pumpgirl* and *Strandline* was that recognition by the state was not enough when women were forced to bear the brunt of violence arising out of increasing economic inequality, both plays were striking for their pessimism. Perhaps it was a reflection of Spallen's own experience of adapting to adverse conditions as a playwright that her female

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[407] Walsh, Unpublished Email Correspondence (2018).

characters were left bruised, isolated and atomised precisely because of their success at resisting gender conformity.

The Financial Crisis of 2008 and subsequent austerity programme precipitated a shift in performance practice away from the notion of capitalism as a stitch up towards a more reparative ethos. If Spallen's work elaborated a kind of feminist amnesia – the suppression not only of misogynistic violence (as in *Strandline*) but also of socialist memory – then *LABOUR* called upon the insistent ghosts of other histories, times and places that haunt the dominant discourse of modernisation and progress. When stitched together with the present, the futures of the past could become the basis of a different kind of activism, one that jettisoned neoliberalism's fetishisation of interdependence for the collective spirit of left-wing feminism. The exhibitions not only revived the notion that women were oppressed as a class, but, in giving a rare platform to feminist artists, sought actively to redress the gender inequalities that existing both within and beyond the Irish art world. As such, the artists of *LABOUR* were perhaps the true inheritors of the interventionism of Charabanc and the Guerrilla Girls. Theatre would have to wait until 2016 and Waking the Feminists for an equivalent reckoning with the sector's internal gender inequalities, but *LABOUR* coincided with the emergence of a broader network of feminist resistance emerging in post-Recession Northern Ireland. Reclaim the Agenda, a collective of trade union activists, grassroots feminist activists, and academics founded in 2010, began to campaign on poverty, welfare reform, gender-based violence, childcare provision and women's representation. Their intersectional approach linked women's social and political inclusion to policies of economic redistribution; as member Kellie O'Dowd summed up: "Building a sustainable, peaceful society will not be possible under neoliberal economic policies that see women rent their lives and those of their families from capitalists, the finance sector and estate agents."[408] By casting economic inequality and the devaluing of

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[408] Kellie O'Dowd, "Peace Will Bring Prosperity: Northern Ireland's Big Lie?", *opendemocracy.org*, 9 June (2014), https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/peace-will-bring-prosperity-northern-irelands-big-lie/ [retrieved 15/07/19]. Reclaim the Agenda helped to organise the Empty Purse Campaign, which was successful in lobbying for reforms to the implementation of Universal Credit in Northern Ireland. Their lobbying meant that the Northern Ireland Executive allowed payments to be made fortnightly rather than monthly, and facilitated couples to split their benefit payments to prevent the possibility of financial abuse. See Angela O'Hagen *et al.*, "Gender Budgeting in the UK:

social reproduction as a matter of public concern, these efforts complemented the work of *LABOUR*. Taken together, they evidenced the expansion of Northern Irish feminism's compass beyond the liberal politics of recognition to include 'bread and butter' issues such as poverty, underemployment and peace building. It is precisely this intersectional approach that would be taken up and advanced by the performance makers discussed in the next chapter, as they centralised the experience of queer, gender non-conforming people.

Devolution, Divergence and Feminist Tenacity", *Gender Budgeting in Europe: Developments and Challenges*, ed. Angela O'Hagen & Elisabeth Klatzer (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp.293-316 (p.312).

Illustrations
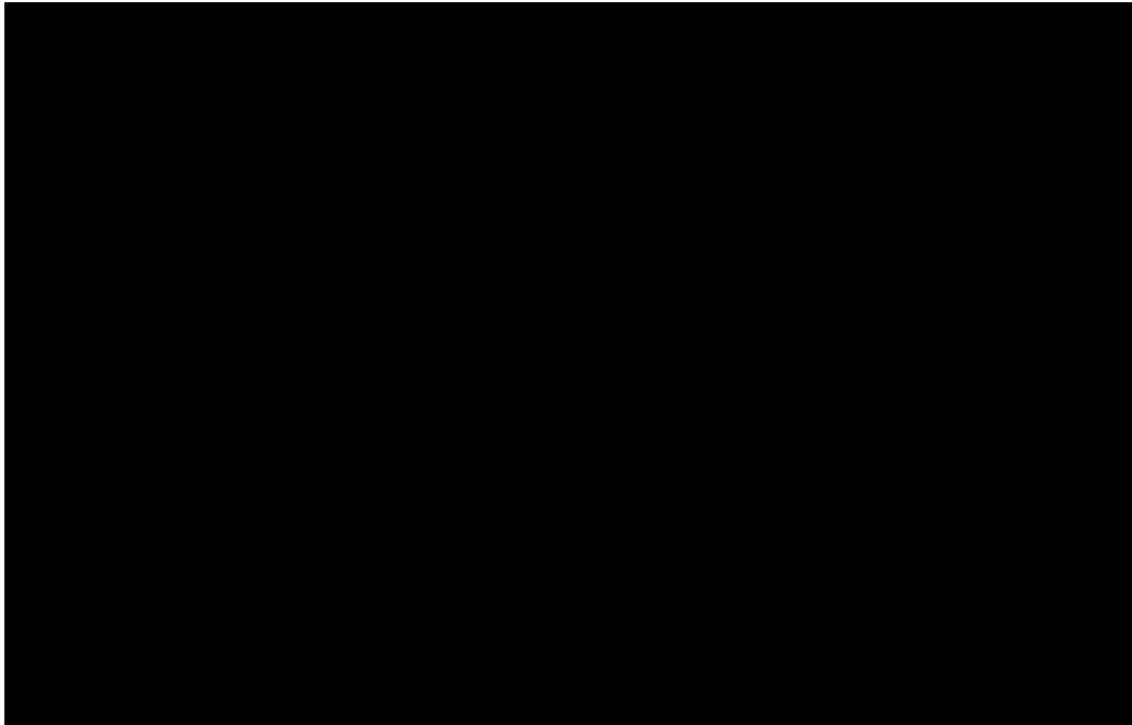
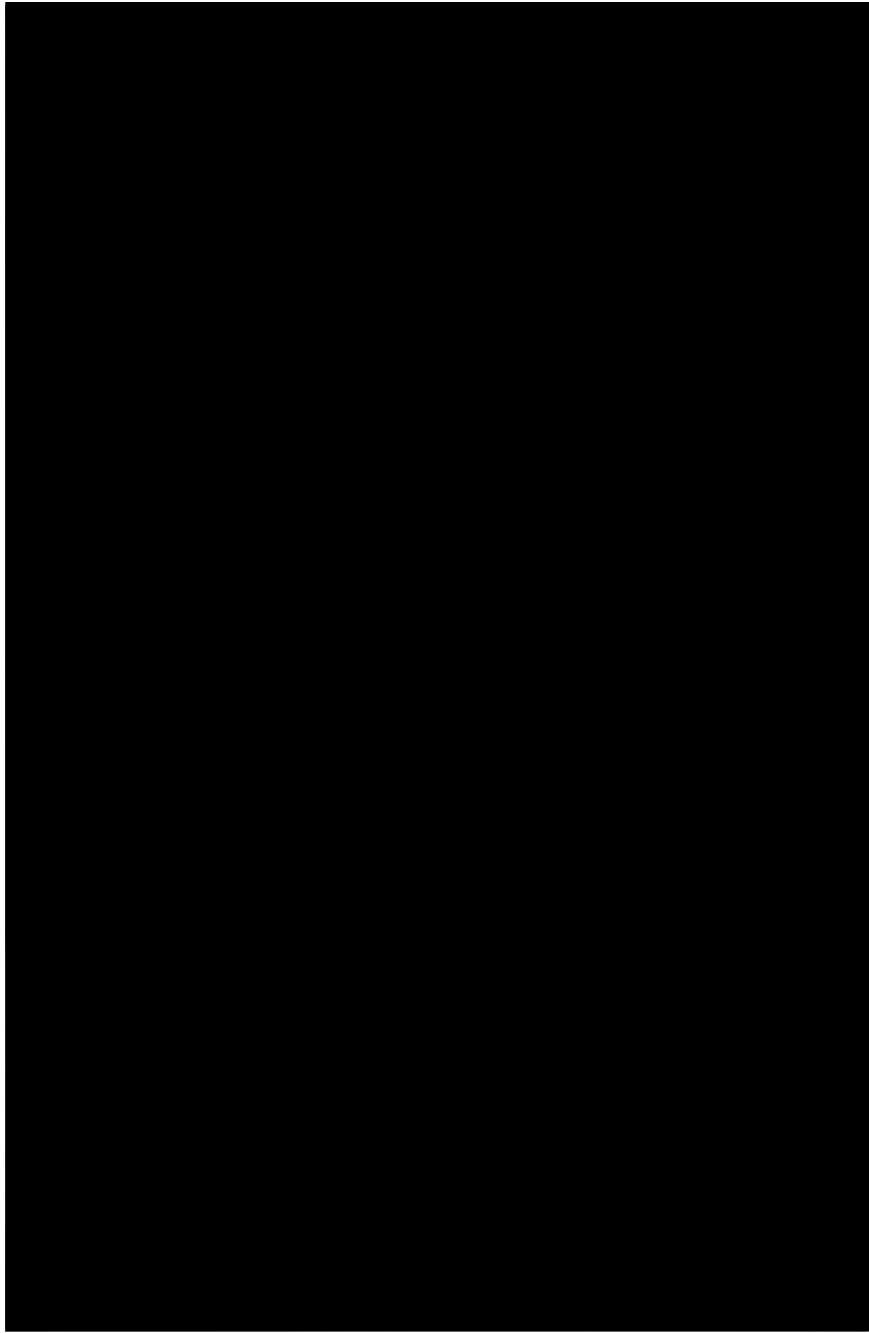(Figure 1) Tim Etchells, *A Stitch in Time* (Derry, 2013-19).

(Figure 2) Áine Phillips performing *Redress* as a part of *LABOUR* (Dublin: the LAB, 2012).

(Figure 3) Helena Walsh's *In Pursuit of Pleasure*, performed as a part of *LABOUR*.

(Figure 4) Michelle Brown's *By the Grace of God* from *LABOUR*.

(Figure 5) Amanda Coogan's *Bubble Up In Blue* from *LABOUR*.

Chapter 4
‘It's All Quite Ordinary’:
Queering Normalisation in the
Theatre of Stacey Gregg and
TheatreofplucK.

In 2010 the Northern Ireland Executive completed its first uninterrupted term of government since the 1998 Agreement. It seemed as if the end goal of the ongoing peace process – that of a shared society in which the pursuit of politics using violence was a thing of the past – was a step closer. Political disagreements were playing out in a constitutional manner that resembled other Western states, particularly the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. That year the *Irish Times* triumphantly declared that the successful passage to fresh elections marked "the normalisation of daily life through the Assembly and power-sharing executive."[409] Such statements depicted progress in the clear demarcation between representative political institutions and the domain of ‘daily life’. The normalisation of the latter involved the delegation of political contestation and dissent to the appropriate elected custodians. For Northern Ireland to be truly ‘post-conflict’, revolutionary and emancipatory politics would be taken off the streets and safely pursued in the sphere of the representative democracy. This rhetoric of normality is alluring precisely because of its apparent incontestability. Who would not want to live their daily lies in the comfort and boredom of the everyday, free from bombs and sectarian strife? But behind such ideas lurked a set of ideological assumptions based, first and foremost, on the pacification of public space and the depoliticisation of the everyday.

A quietist plea for acquiescence to the status quo can lurk behind seemingly benign celebrations of the normal. The redevelopment or ‘regeneration’ of Belfast epitomised the goal of presenting the Norther Irish economy as conforming to the norms of other Western liberal democracies. Public spaces such as the city centre were reshaped to facilitate the patterns of leisure and consumption found in the commercial districts of cities such as London and Dublin. Following a neoliberal

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[409] Anonymous, "The Northern Ireland Elections", *Irish Times*, 10 May (2010), p.15.

logic, the creation of this 'shared space' was designed to recast Belfast as an attractive destination for tourism and foreign investment. Phillip Boland remarks that, after the Agreement, "competitiveness was *the* unquestioned policy lever" of the Belfast City Council, a "postpolitical" strategy that "delimit[ed] debate around a narrow neoliberal growth agenda, and foreclose[d] alternative and more radical approaches to economy and planning."[410] As Neal Alexander wryly observed in 2003: "the 'new-and-improved' Belfast is remaking itself in the image of the globalised everycity of chain stores and sparkling palaces of consumption". But the new upwardly mobile middle class "has little time for any deeper, sustained efforts at social and cultural reconstruction."[411] If neoliberal spatial planning offered a form of daily life freed from violence and urban spaces replete with a sense of post-nationalist possibility, the supposedly unremarkable nature of the everyday risked obscuring the ideological assumptions that demarcated what behaviour passed as ordinary. In other words, discourse of normalisation dangerously elided the difference between normality as a description of those behaviours that have become so common as to pass unnoticed (what Pierre Bourdieu famously described as our *habitus*),[412] and normativity as a partial, prevailing but contestable idea of the way things ought to be. The rush to re-shape divided public space around a notional Northern Irish *homo economicus* overlooked the barriers to comfort presented by factors other than sectarian division.

As traced in the last chapter, feminist performance makers had found the neoliberal narrative of economic modernisation to be an inadequate measure of progress, particularly from the perspective of women's increasingly beleaguered working conditions. Because progressive narratives elided persistent structures of gender conformity, the performance of repetition became a resource for critiquing the desirability of 'post-sectarian' entrepreneurial individualism and a means of developing an alternative strategies of political engagement. But such engagements left unanalysed culture's role in promoting problematic images of the 'post-conflict' city as a pacified and post-political space. Indeed, the crowning achievement of the

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[410] Philip, Boland, "The Relationship Between Spatial Planning and Economic Competitiveness: The 'Path to Economic Nirvana' or a 'Dangerous Obsession'?", *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 46.4 (2014), pp.770–87 (p.778; p.783).
[411] Neal Alexander, "Belfast is Lovely", *The Vacuum*, 9 (2003), http://www.thevacuum.org.uk/issues/issues0120/issue09/is09artbellov.html, [retrieved 12/12/19].
[412] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

spatial reconfiguration of Belfast was two new cultural institutions: the redeveloped Lyric Theatre, located in the middle-class south of the city, and the Metropolitan Arts Centre in St Anne's Square, at the heart of an area rebranded as the Cathedral Quarter. As the City Council's 2007 cultural strategy made clear, the role of such institutions was to create "a positive and affirming physical environment […] to nurture a sense of place and civic pride" and enhance the city's "unique offer".[413] Here, fictional images of a better order – even those that did not conform to neoliberal conceptions of 'post-conflict' normality – could be rebranded as cultural capital to relieve existing society of the pressure to change. Others, however, began to question the enlistment of theatre and performance in the process of 'normalising' the urban spaces of Northern Ireland's capital city. The challenge was to navigate between the erasure of disenfranchisement in innocuous performances of normality, and the blunting of society's counter-normative potentialities through the commodification of culture.

Under such conditions, queer performance makers have begun to provide an important strand of dissent from both sectarian identity politics and its supposed antidote in normalisation. Feminist and queer theory furnishes cultural practice with a means by which to scrutinise the seemingly pre-given and taken for granted aspects of daily life. Drawing on Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, Rita Felski argues that, by unpicking those sedimented practices that naturalise repressive regimes of gender, such approaches can "break the spell of the habitual and the everyday."[414] Others have sought to explore the critical capacities opened up in the public performance of non-normative sexualities and gender. Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* reconceptualises gender and sexuality as forms of spatial orientations: "Gender is the effect of how bodies take up objects, which involves how they occupy space by being occupied in one way or another." Spaces are shaped by the habits of those who usually inhabit them; this explains why non-normative or non-native persons feel out of place when arriving in unfamiliar spaces. The presence of gender non-conforming or homosexual persons in spaces shaped around heteronormative practices is consequently disorientating: "the proximity of such bodies out of place

413 Belfast City Council, *An Integrated Cultural Strategy for Belfast* (Belfast: Belfast City Council, 2007), p.9.
414 Rita Felski, *Doing Time: Feminist Theory and Postmodern Culture* (New York: NYU Press, 2000), p.90.

can work to make things seem "out of line," and can hence even work to "queer" space, people "blink" and do "double turns" when they encounter such bodies."[415] Understood in this way, queerness takes on a broader definition; it involves a personal and social commitment to living at an oblique angle to prevailing patterns of behaviour, a commitment which, in disturbing those patterns, can either provoke violent recrimination, or allow us to question what is "passed over in the veil of familiarity".[416] Deviant sexualities and gender non-conformity, then, can become a way of drawing attention to the violence and processes of exclusion enacted in the pacification and normalisation of Northern Ireland's capital city.

In a context where theatre and performance was increasingly used to support capitalism's role in constructing this social reality, plays emerged that sought to unmask its determining influence on what passes as normal, ordinary and unremarkable in the 'new' Belfast. TheatreofplucK's *Tuesdays at Tescos* (2014), an adaptation of French writer Emmanuel Darley's play *Mardi á Monoprix* about a transgender woman looking after her ailing father, and Stacey Gregg's *Shibboleth* (2015), a play set in the working class urban peripheries of Northern Ireland's capital city, used the queer effects of Brechtian dramaturgical techniques to rupture the representational apparatus of neoliberalism's re-organisation of daily life. Just as the presence of queer subjects and affiliations have the capacity, according to Ahmed, to unsettle the "veil of the familiar", so these plays located in the concept of estrangement – or *Verfremdungseffekt* – a powerful means to open the habitual and the everyday to scrutiny.[417] In his famous definition of the term, Brecht argued that theatre could allay those patterns of repetition that constituted norms and liberal subjectivity. He remarked that "we must give up assuming that the object in question needs no explanation. However frequently recurrent, modest, vulgar it may be, it will now be labelled as something unusual."[418] The well-made, naturalist play operates

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[415] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Objects, Others, Orientations* (New York; London: Duke University Press, 2006), p.161.

[416] *Ibid.*, p.162.

[417] Ben Highmore argued similar when he noted that Brechtianism offers to the study of everyday life "a vehicle more able to contain the multiple strands and complex interweavings of the everyday, while framing them in a way that acknowledges their constructedness and revivifies material that is continuously slipping out of view." See Highmore, *The Everyday Life Reader* (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), p.24.

[418] Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht On Theatre*, ed. Marc Silberman, Tom Kuhn & Steve Giles (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), p.221.

like a reified commodity by eliminating all traces of its production. In post-Agreement Northern Ireland, such work allowed an ideologically charged, neoliberal conception of social reality to pass itself off as an historical inevitability. In order to challenge such political foreclosures, theatre could avow the trickery involved in its processes of construction and, through a juxtaposition of styles and avowed artificiality, reveal the everyday, habitual and seemingly natural as an unfinished, incomplete, *un-well-made* product of capitalist and patriarchal oppression. Brechtianism therefore shares with queer theory an understanding that normativity does not exist *as such*; norms exert their influence precisely because the ideal is unachievable, a condition that is most apparent from the perspective of those LGBTQ+ people struggling to traverse the boundaries of established gender categories. Both the plays discussed in this chapter focus on how queer subjectivities and practices – in their commitment to living at an angle to the imperatives of normalisation – expose the normal and everyday as a contested and contradictory terrain in which economic inequalities violently pressure people to conform to established gender norms.

The presence of queer characters on the Northern Irish stage is not, of course, novel and gay male characters in particular have a long history of being used as a prism through which to explore sectarianism. The earliest example of this was the 1980 production of Frank Wedekind's *Spring Awakening* at the Lyric Theatre, which took place in the context of Save Ulster from Sodomy, Ian Paisley's campaign to prevent the legalisation of homosexuality in the North. The kiss between Clyde Gattell's Hans Rolow and Bernard Padden's Ernst Robel was perhaps the first of its kind on a Belfast stage and prompted recrimination from the Lyric's local political representative, the Reverend Robert Brandford, unionist MP for south Belfast.[419] For Sam McCready, under whose stewardship the play was staged, Wedekind's work directly commented upon the conservatism of contemporary Northern Ireland: "Its subject is not just the forbidden joys of sex or that catastrophe results from sexual ignorance but that youthful creativity, if it is thwarted by the mores of a repressive society, will only lead to destructive violence and despair."[420] The production paved

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[419] See Conor O'Malley, *A Poet's Theatre* (Dublin: Elo Press, 1988), p.66.
[420] Sam McCready, Programme Note for *Spring Awakening* (Belfast: Lyric Players Theatre, 1980), n.pag.

the way for later plays, such as Martin Lynch's *Crack Up* (Belfast: Ulster Group Theatre, 1983), in which a character's coming out at a wedding is met with violence. Robin Glendinning's *Mumbo Jumbo* (Lyric Theatre, 1987), with its focus on the awakening of adolescent political and sexual desires, echoed the controversy surrounding *Spring Awakening*. Featuring a same-sex kiss between two students at a Protestant boy's school, its première provoked audience walkouts. The insertion of queer characters into scenarios charged with the politics of sectarianism became a recurring feature of Northern drama, from Joe Crilly's *On McQuillan's Hill*, analysed in Chapter 1, to Tim Loane's *Caught Red Handed, or How to Prune a Whin Bush* (Lyric Theatre, 2002), a comedy in which the liberal, post-nationalist reform of unionism is imagined through the gay son of the play's Paisleyesque leader.[421] In such work the struggles of the gay male character were designed to reveal how sectarianism is articulated through homophobic and misogynist performances, repressed desires and effemiphobic fears.

In 1982 homosexuality was decriminalised in Northern Ireland on the basis that in infringed the European Convention of Human Rights, specifically its protection of personal and family life. Similarly, these plays narrated the reform of the sectarian and militarist elements as involving the incorporation of LGBTQ+ characters on the basis of the liberal principle of respect for the individual. Collectively they conform to what Ferrier and Campbell have described as "gay theatre", in contradistinction of queer performance; that is, theatre that employs the dramatic model of plot and "recognisably gay stories and characters" to elicit empathy from mainstream audiences.[422] Rather than centring queer experience to question the very notion of plot and character, most of these plays "remain in the (heteronormative) dominant western theatrical mode of psychological realism and attached to the neoliberal focus on the 'subject' (and their rights)."[423] In the context of the shock dealt by the Financial Crisis to the self-evidence to liberal peace building in the North,

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[421] Billy Cowan's *Smilin' Through* (Manchester & Birmingham: Contact & Birmingham Repertory Theatre, 2005) is striking similar. The play sends up the buttoned down and prudish aspects of bourgeois sectarianism by featuring a character who goes on hunger strike after his Presbyterian mother objects his male Catholic lover.

[422] Alyson Campbell & Stephen Farrier, "Introduction: Queer Dramaturgies", *Queer Dramaturgies: International Perspectives On Where Performance Leads Queer* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), pp.1-26 (p.13).

[423] *Ibid.*

performance forms have emerged that mark a significant departure from this model of theatre.

On the surface, that LGBTQ+ issues have increasingly taken centre stage can be been read as a sign of Northern Ireland progressive integration into liberal norms. In 2007 the Outburst Queer Arts Festival – which has been foundational in supporting the work of both TheatreofplucK and Gregg – was granted public funding from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland for the first time.[424] Alongside more conventional theatrical offerings, their annual programme has incorporated acts from Belfast's queer hinterland, including cabaret performers and comedians from the city's LGBTQ+ pubs and bars. It has also become an important point of contact between of domestically produced queer theatre and international artists.[425] But as much as such an initiative may signify Belfast's cosmopolitan credentials, its artistic director Ruth McCarthy is at pains to foreground how the festival's diverse programme is designed to resist those that would use it to underwrite such a narrative:

> On a surface level we are seen as "LGBT" arts and I am okay with that most of the time because I want to make sure the ideas and work in the festival are accessible. There's no point otherwise. And we have been championed by the city and by a few politicians because yes, we are a symbol that things are changing. But I try to programme work that questions that process of normalisation and the thinking that underscores all of it. […] I've lived long enough to see the danger of treating the symptoms of inequity rather than the causes. I have no time for an LGBTQ future that is led by a neoliberal agenda and I have little time for art that is safe.[426]

This balance between accessibility, advocacy and more radical forms of queer performance reflects the specific political challenges facing LGBTQ+ people in the

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[424] Outburst provided a platform for TheatreofplucK's first production in the North, an adaptation of Raymond Queneau's comic exploration of sexual fantasy in the context of the Easter Rising *On est toujours trop bon avec les femmes* (1947). Stacey Gregg's plays *Choices* (2016) and *Scorch* (2015) both featured on Outburst programmes.

[425] Emblematic of this transnational scope was TheatreofplucK's 2009 production of *Bison,* Australian playwright Laughlan Philpott's play about the internalisation of homophobia amongst gay men. Designed to address the high level of homophobic violence in the region, the production epitomised Outburst's concern to represent experiences "sidelined or hidden from the mainstream." See Outburst, *The Third Annual Outburst Queer Arts Festival* (Belfast: Outburst, 2009), http://outburstarts.com/2015/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/OUTBURST2009.pdf [retrieved 15/05/20].

[426] Ruth McCarthy, Interview with Alexander Coupe, 19 January (2018).

North. Appeals using the familiar discourse of liberal rights are still crucial in a region with high levels of homophobic violence and where the DUP continues to endorse homophobic attitudes. [427] Even access to the nominal comforts of a "demobilised domesticity and consumption", the benchmark of what Lisa Duggan has termed homonormativity, remains elusive for many queer people.[428] However, it is equally important to draw attention to the ways apparently progressive cultural manifestations can be used to normalise political and economc conditions that materially detriment LGBTQ+ people. This is precisely why the two plays under discussion here retain conventions of character, plot and empathy while also employing the meta-theatrical flourishes of queer performance to unpick the politically immobilising forms of subjectivity produced by capitalism. Emerging out of important initiatives such as Outburst, *Tuesdays* and *Shibboleth* are a part of a Northern Irish performance scene undergoing its own queer turn: a determined reorientation of the existing liberal critique of sectarianism towards a queer critique of Northern Ireland's embrace of neoliberal norms. Together they help us to understand better the interaction of capitalism, sectarianism, misogyny and homophobia that is particular to the region.

Theatre, Normalisation, and Inequalities of Dependency

The prioritisation of the fragile, neoliberal peace over the task of addressing social and economic justice for LGBTQ+ people in Northern Ireland is best understood with reference to coverage of the 2010 election and the re-election of Peter Robinson as First Minister. This helps us to understand the role certain strands of theatre have played in supporting a discourse of normalisation premised upon obfuscating homophobia and transphobia. The year had begun with a scandal: newspapers exposed that the First Minister's wife Iris Robinson, herself a prominent DUP MLA, had been having an affair with a nineteen year-old man, Kirk McCambley. The revelation was particularly ironic given that, in a 2008 interview on BBC Northern Ireland's *The Stephen Nolan Show*, Iris had contributed to a discussion on the disproportionately high levels of homophobic violence in the North by describing

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[427] This is in contrast to the rest of the United Kingdom, where all major political parties subscribe to policies such as same-sex marriage.

[428] Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston MA: Beacon Press, 2003), p.50.

homosexuality as an "abomination" that "nauseated" her.[429] Despite the 1998 Northern Ireland Act legislating for sexual minority rights, the liberal discourse of tolerance for religious as well as national identities nullified the consequences of such homophobic remarks. Peter Robinson defended Iris's remarks by arguing that "people do have a right to express a Christian opinion on these matters."[430] As Marian Duggan has observed: "It appears that Northern Ireland's reputation as a 'morally conservative' society has created an environment where homophobic prejudices are condoned whilst legal exemptions allow discrimination to remain unchallenged."[431] This logic is epitomised in Gerry Moriarty's coverage of the 2010 election. He narrated the year as a shift from the "mesmerising melodrama" of the Robinson affair to the First Minister's "virtually triumphant" recovery, where "he and [Martin] McGuinness illustrated that Northern Ireland was genuinely stabilising by agreeing a draft budget for the next four years – albeit one that involved £4 billion of cutbacks."[432] What Moriarty called the "[q]uiet achievement of 'normal politics'", then, involved sidelining issues of homophobia and transphobia in order to reestablish the delegation of political conflict to the Assembly and the historical trajectory of neoliberal reform. By transposing inequalities conditioned by economic exploitation and political injustice into a discourse cultural difference, anti-LGBTQ+ views were naturalised and neutralised as an everyday expression of religious identity.[433] Normalisation, then, rested upon a concept of normality in which intolerance towards LGBTQ+ people was to be tolerated, rather than overcome, in the name of economic stability and social pluralism. In this way the liberal grammar of equality colluded with the DUP's illiberal social conservatism to repress the real and debilitating inequalities that disproportionately afflicted LGBTQ+ people in the already factious context of the North.

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[429] *The Stephen Nolan Show*, 6 June (Belfast: BBC Radio Ulster, 2008).
[430] Victoria McMahon, "Robinson Defends Wife", *Belfast Telegraph* 23 June (2008),
https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/robinson-defends-wife-28442412.html
[retrieved 31/10/1].
[431] Marian Duggan, "Theorising Homophobic Hate Crime in Northern Ireland", *Papers from the British Criminology Conference*, 8 (2008), pp.33-49 (p.40).
[432] Gerry Moriarty, "Quiet Achievement of 'Normal' Politics", *Irish Times*, 27 December (2010), p.2.
[433] Slavoj Žižek has called this paradoxical state of affairs liberalism's "impasse of tolerating intolerance." Slavoj Žižek, "Tolerance as an Ideological Category", *Critical Inquiry,* 34.4 (2008) pp. 660–82 (p.662).

Theatre has often supported this heady combination of liberal and illiberal tendencies. Representations of Northern Ireland as a 'normal' have tended to contrast supposedly everyday practices – from eating family meals to doing the weekly shop – with a past in which political conflict tore through the home and the high-street. The result was to place such practices beyond the purview of political contestation. One prominent example is the Lyric Theatre's highly successful 2013 production of David Ireland's *Can't Forget About You* (figure 1). The play used the familiar structure of the romantic comedy to explore anxieties in Belfast's Loyalist community. Stevie, a twenty-five-year-old Belfast man, and Martha, his forty-nine-year-old Glaswegian partner, struggle to gain the approval of former's conservative family. The plot takes place across a spare domestic setting and traces a slow but progressive trajectory of familial reconciliation. Beginning with accusations that Martha is a "fenian" (though she is Protestant), and addressing the couple's insistent reluctance to marry, the play neatly concludes with a rather uncritical celebration of what one reviewer called "calm normality".[434] All the characters sit down to a cozy family meal, overcoming their 'siege mentality' to integrate the new member of the group. Though important for its refusal to dwell on the past, as exemplified in Stevie's declaration that he is "sick of talking about" the Troubles,[435] the play's ending endorsed a bourgeois version of normalisation that placed questions of economic exploitation firmly offstage and reduced political inequality to a problem of intolerance. The bourgeois, heterosexual family could be represented as a neutral background precisely because it was contrasted with a compromised political sphere. Inequalities of class and gender that could not be resolved within this model received no register or voice. Speeding rather too effortlessly to its conclusion, it exemplified an unresolved tension between the realist dramatic model of plot and the complex, unequal social and economic conditions of contemporary Northern Ireland. As one reviewer remarked: "the story has a rather too easy happy ending".[436]

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[434] Eleanor Owicki, "*Can't Forget About You* by David Ireland (review)", *Theatre Journal*, 67.2 (2015), pp.332-333 (p.332).

[435] David Ireland, *Can't Forget About You* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p.43.

[436] Mark Fisher, "*Can't Forget About You* review", *Guardian*, 9 July (2015), https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/jul/09/cant-forget-about-you-review-tron-david-ireland [retrieved 27/11/2018].

The unremarkable nature of normality, then, could be used by playwrights to present a partial view of the way things are or should be. What appeared as a blank and un-ideological instead mystified and normalised social conditions of inequality that persisted at the level of the everyday. For queer and gender non-conforming people such inequalities were a pressing fact; and the frontline of violence existed not at the sectarian stockades but in the home and at the shop counter. A 2015 report by the charity Simon Community found that LGBT people were overrepresented in the young homeless population at 18% of the total. This number was significantly higher than the 1.9% of the general population that identified as LGBT in that year's ONS survey.[437] A similar survey conducted by the Rainbow Project reported that family rejection was the single most significant reason for homelessness.[438] Moreover, since the Agreement the percentage of LGBTQ+ people who had experienced harassment and violence in Northern Ireland has been comparably higher than in Great Britain.[439]

A focus on the politics of the green and orange, however, has done much to hinder action on such issues. It was Westminster that introduced change by forcibly extending equalities legislation to Northern Ireland: the Gender Recognition Act (allowing people to change their legal gender) in 2004 and same sex civil partnerships in 2005. This sluggishness is in part due to sectarian wrangling between Sinn Fein and the DUP at the Assembly. Whereas in the 1980s unionists such as Jeffrey Dudgeon were instrumental in securing legal rights for homosexuals, post-Agreement the DUP took a markedly conservative line, repeatedly vetoing same-sex marriage using the 'petition of concern', a mechanism of the devolved institutions designed to allow for minority dissent.[440] Their intransigence was at least in part a response to Sinn Féin's shift towards a more liberal position. Beginning in the 1990s, they

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[437] Simon Community, *Pathways to Youth Homelessness* (Belfast: Simon Community, 2019), https://www.simoncommunity.org/assets/pdfs/Pathways-to-Youth-Homelessness-Final-Research-Piece-24.07.2019.pdf, p.14, [retrieved 30/11/19].
[438] Rainbow Project, *Through Our Eyes: The Housing And Homelessness Experience of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Trans People in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: Rainbow Project, 2009) https://www.nihe.gov.uk/getmedia/a0eb8f0d-6e0e-4d15-a037-329af560eab3/through-our-eyes.pdf.aspx?ext=.pdf
[439] Duggan, *Op. Cit.*, p.6.
[440] See Brendan O'Leary, "The Nature of the Agreement", *The Northern Ireland Conflict: Consociational Engagements*, ed. Brendan O'Leary & John McGarry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp.260–294.

integrated LGBTQ+ rights into the broader project of Republicanism.[441] Suspicion remained, of course, as to whether the issue of Irish unity came before meaningful reform. When Sinn Fein tabled their motion for equal marriage in 2013, for example, Alliance MLA David Ford noted "that party's failure to deliver on things such as a sexual orientation strategy, a single equality Bill, or the issue of homophobic bullying."[442] That an 2016 Ipsos Mori poll found two-thirds of adults were in favour of same sex marriage demonstrates how far Northern Ireland has come from the militaristic, heteronormative climate at the start of the 'Troubles'.[443] But the sectarian wrangling also marked a failure to address 'bread and butter' issues that went beyond the mere recognition of minority rights. It increasingly seemed that the delegation of political power to the Assembly involved ignoring everyday violence to ensure a process of normalisation grounded in the seemingly benign pleasures of leisure and consumption. The task of modelling a more open and inclusive configuration of normality, one in which queer and gender non-conforming people could pursue what Judith Butler calls a "liveable life",[444] necessitated forms of performance that could trouble what was understood to be unremarkable and mundane on the one hand, and heightened on the other.

Surviving Normality in *Tuesdays at Tescos*

If Ireland's play used dramatic realism to naturalise a heterosexual and bourgeois milieu as the measure of normality, then TheatreofplucK's deployment of Brechtian techniques in *Tuesdays at Tescos* pointed to the limitations of such a benchmark. Brecht's principle was that theatre can show things as it makes them. It is this double perspective, the act of taking identity out of the natural and unremarkable twice-behavedness or performativity of daily life, that constitutes the transformation of art. In his study of Brecht, Fredric Jameson has argued that the adoption of avowedly artificial performance styles and distancing techniques undoes the reification implicit

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[441] Sinn Féin, *Equality, Diversity, Solidarity – Fighting for LGBTQ Rights in Ireland* (Dublin: Sinn Fein, 2014), https://www.sinnfein.ie/files/2015/LGBT-Doc_June2014.pdf [retrieved 14/03/19].
[442] Quoted in Jennifer Thomson, *Op. Cit.*, p.495.
[443] Ipsos Mori, "Attitudes Towards Same-Sex Marriage in Northern Ireland", *Ipsos Mori*, 19 June (2016), https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/attitudes-towards-same-sex-marriage-northern-ireland [14/03/19].
[444] See Eleni Loizidou, "Butler and Life: Law, Sovereignty and Power", *Judith Butler's Precarious Politics*, ed. Terrell Carver & Samuel A. Chambers (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), pp.145-156 (p.145).

in naturalist acting. By allowing the audience "to see back down into the alternative gestures and postures of the actors trying out their roles", Brechtian techniques reveal the surface of appearances to be socially constructed (the product of considerable refinement and struggle) and therefore open to change.[445] If, as Judith Butler suggests, we are always performing our gender, a gender that is naturalised through repetition and habit, then theatre could employ such unsettling devices to call the usually unremarkable, but resolutely social, process of embodying gender to the audience's consciousness.

Tuesdays was produced at the newly refurbished MAC and ran simultaneously with *Can't Forget About You* at the Lyric. Produced by TheatreofplucK, Ireland's first queer theatre company, the play's title signalled an intention to interrogate the "calm normality" so celebrated in Ireland's play. What could be more innocuous and unremarkable than grocery shopping? Such practices had become central to representations of Belfast as a city like any other. Nestled in a newly redeveloped retail area, St. Anne's Square , the MAC is itself a potent symbol of post-conflict normalisation. A striking red brick building, the gallery simultaneously projected the region's cosmopolitan credentials and marketed Northern Ireland's indigenous products to the wider world. What better place to stage an interrogation precisely this process. The play takes the form of a monologue about a middle-aged transgender woman named Pauline, played in the 2014 production by well-know gay Belfast actor Peter Quigley, who looks after her cantankerous and elderly father, a man who scorns his daughter's transformation by using her birth name 'Paul' and criticising her appearance. Adapted from Emmanuel Darley's hugely successful *Mardi á Monoprix*, the play was clearly concerned with the everyday experiences of discrimination that exist in Northern Ireland and are not particular to the region, but nevertheless take on particular local characteristics. Above all, the play centred around the irony that Northern Ireland's rush to prove its normality by becoming like other Western countries involved inheriting experiences of modernity that were riven with inequalities previously obscured in the heightened context of the conflict.

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[445] Fredric Jameson, *Brecht and Method* (London: Verso, 1998), p.11.

The potential of theatre to make the most out of the the disruptive force queer subjectivities and practices was central to the founding of TheatreofplucK. Niall Rea, director of the play, and co-founder of the company, is candid about the importance of applying such an idea to the Northern Irish context. The idea of devoting the company to queer rather than LGBTQ+ work derived from Niall Rea's exposure to transatlantic queer theory and politics while living in the U.S., London and Amsterdam in the 1990s: "I knew what it meant, I knew of Queer Nation from the early 1990s, so I knew it was a reclaimed term."[446] In his PhD thesis, Rea writes that TheatreofplucK adopted the term in two senses. Firstly, they wanted to make work about those non-normative desires and subjectivities that are usually collected under the abbreviation LGBTQ+. Secondly, following queer theorists Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Judith Butler, he situates queerness where subjectivity exceeds existing identity categories (of gender, nationality and sexuality) and insodoing reveals those categories to be performative (an effect of discourse) and relational (differentially constituted).[447] The politics of performing queer subjectivity in Northern Ireland, he suggests, derives from the fact that it operates "as a disruptive, desegregated identity [that] can provide a useful analysis of binaries in gender *and* identity politics."[448] TheatreofplucK set out to do more than merely encouraging audiences to recognise the region's cultural plurality. The company wanted to deploy queer identities and practices to provoke a more comprehensive interrogation of identity's constitutive terms: those structures of interdependency and inequalities of dependency that produce hierarchies of gender, ethnicity and nationality in the first place.

Tuesdays was staged in such a way as to disrupt the distinction between the theatrical and the everyday, between fictional and the so-called real, exposing the boundaries that are produced in the specific political, cultural and social conventions of normalisation. The play was performed to the MAC's ground floor exhibition space, the rear wall of which is taken up by a plate glass window that faces a busy passageway leading to the fashionable restaurants of St. Anne's Square. Quigley

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[446] Niall Rea, Interview with Alexander Coupe, 15 February (London, 2019).

[447] Particularly influential is Sedgwick's capacious definition of queer as "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made". See Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p.8.

[448] Niall Rea, *Queer Identity in Performance in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: Queen's University Belfast, 2016), p.29.

played Pauline from the street outside, with his voice transmitted to the small audience that watched from within the gallery partially shielded by the window's reflective surface (figure 2). This deceptively simple and yet complex staging allowed the audience to observe the double-takes, amused glances and fright that Quigley's drag performance provoked in passers-by. Functioning to produce a Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*, the glass muddied conventional theatrical distinctions: not only did pedestrians encounter him unaware that he was playing a role, but the audience inside observed passers-by framed by the plate glass window as if they were fellow performers. This disorientating effect was heightened by the opening of the play, as Rea describes:

> He started 200 metres away with a radio mic, and you didn't know he was speaking because the sound was transmitted in surround sound to the audience, sitting looking through a big plate-glass window up the side of the MAC. That particular window had a view onto other windows and mirrors and onto a gym. So you saw people being obsessed with their body shape and men and women coming in and out: the peak of masculinity and the peak of femininity. And there was Peter [Quigley] walking up and down talking to the mirrors, talking to the windows.[449]

The confusing play of mirrored surfaces, the awkward combination of theatrical and non-theatrical spaces, and the strange ordering of sound before sight, conspired to disturb conventional modes of spectatorship. Usually the stage space is demarcated to allow the audience to understand which events and objects are to be included within the fictional frame. Unable to draw such distinction, what had formally passed off unnoticed was charged with a sense of conspicuousness. Situated alongside Pauline, the gender of those in the gym appeared to be just as laboured, just as anxious to disappear behind the veil of the familiar. It was a shift in perspective that also implicated a broader set of concerns associated with consumerism: the body as a project to be reshaped by the individual according to contemporary advertising culture. Not only did *Tuesdays* reveal the heteronormativity lurking behind the process of normalisation, it also encouraged the audience to see what normativity actually looks like: the use of abnormal means in attempts to achieve the norm. Given this contradiction, normativity as such cannot exist, nor can it be said to have

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[449] Rea, Interview with Alexander Coupe (2019).

arrived. But as a regulatory ideal that structures daily life it forecloses the possibility of developing alternative modes of affiliation and ways of being in the world.

All this inflected Pauline's account of having to navigate a heteronormative society which rejects her appearance and identity, and where she faces abuse from her own father despite providing him with the assistance he requires in his old age. Much of Pauline's narrative concerns the painfully destabilising effects her desire to pass as unremarkable in public spaces and home places. Early in her narrative, she recalls how after coming out publicly as a woman: "it's quite something to go by streets and places you used to know. Everything looking at you people walls bricks. Reading your features."[450] Here, to quote Sara Ahmed, "[t]o make things queer is certainly to disturb the order of things".[451] It is not only that Pauline finds herself out of place in everyday spaces orientated around straight and gender conforming bodies; it is that her desire to be recognised for who she is brings to the consciousness of others their need for support; that fundamental exposure to others that is usually taken for granted or actively repressed. As Jacqueline Rose has noted: "To survive, we all have to be seen. A transsexual person merely brings that fact to the surface, exposing the latent violence lurking behind the banal truth of our dependency on other people."[452] This is why her narrative centres above all on her relationship with her father, a man who is struggling to come to terms with his own infirmity. Pauline recalls how, when her mother passed away, he was: "Unable to do anything" (4). However, this gruff and traditional man associates his sense of dependency with the emasculation he detects in his daughter's transition:

> At the beginning I would carry the shopping arms like anchors and then one day we walked past that shop for home thingies and a general store one might say and I said That's what you need for your shopping although of course it was That's what I need I meant.
> Can you see me with that? He said.
> I put my hand on the doorknob I say Here we go let's go shall we?
> Are you ready?
> He says Pity's sake

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[450] Emmanuel Darley, *Tuesday at Tescos*, trn. Matthew Hurt and Sarah Vermande (London: Nick Hern, 2011), p.4. All further references to this edition will be cited parenthetically in the text.
[451] Ahmed, *Op. Cit.*, p.161.
[452] Jacqueline Rose, "Who Do You Think You Are?", *London Review of Books*, 5 May (2016), https://www.lrb.co.uk/v38/n09/jacqueline-rose/who-do-you-think-you-are [retrieved 21/04/19].

He says You're going out like that? Like that.
(10-11)

Such moments belie the fact that Pauline's father relies as much upon his daughter for survival as she does upon him for recognition as a woman. He sees in her the truth of his own condition – his increasing need for care, support and recognition – but disavows this 'truth' in order to preserve the fantasy of independence upon which his masculinity and individuality rests. Pauline is well aware of the vulnerability lurking underneath the bravado and reports how her father flits between declarations of "I don't need anything" and "What's going to happen to me me on my own like this?" (11). Transgender experience *defamiliarises* how we rely on others to give us our gender and identity and because of this are intimately bound to them. Having internalised a rigid cultural ethic in which weak masculinity is to be avoided at all costs, Pauline's father stresses to the audience that patriarchy and gender-normativity involves the violent denial of our fundamental needs.

In the context of Northern Ireland, these experiences of rejection are metonymic of the difficult relationship queer people have to the post-Agreement state. normalisation was premised upon demilitarisation, decommissioning, and ensuring the stability of democratic structure alongside the financialisation of the North's economy. The desire to move away from an ethno-nationalist antagonism was, on the surface at least, positive for LGBTQ+ people in the region. The end of military conflict helped to loosen the hold of conservative gender roles, particularly the male warrior type and the idea that women were merely cultural and biological reproducers of the nation. TheatreofplucK reminded its audience, however, that to focus only on transforming sectarian conflict produced a narrow definition of normality that overlooked homophobic and transphobic violence. Just like Pauline's father, politicians were too concerned with protecting the fragile devolved institutions, and declaring Belfast safe for foreign investment, to fulfil their obligations to care for Northern Ireland's queer population.

Given the role of culture in reifying a simplistic and deceptive image of 'post-conflict' normality, how could theatre be used to help audiences to *feel* a sense of obligation to those excluded from it? Even the more experimental or transgressive work that takes

place in institutional theatre spaces can produce a distancing effect. In her book *Distance in the Theatre: The Aesthetics of Audience Response*, Daphne Ben Chaim writes: "Even if the drama presents 'dying agonies' we take pleasure because we know, on some level of our consciousness, that the event is not real".[453] If the capacity of theatre and performance to critique existing social conditions in Northern Ireland relied upon its detachment from those conditions, it risked being reduced to a safety valve for society's transgressive and counter-normative tendencies. By realising utopian images in fiction, the arts risked relieving society of the pressure of those forces that press for change. Certainly in Northern Ireland cultural institutions could be used to support the discourse of normalisation regardless of what was produced within them. The architecturally impressive MAC was touted as a vibrant symbol of the city's 'post-conflict' modernity. Its founding director celebrated it as an "an economic driver" that placed Belfast "on the worldwide stage".[454] However, in such statements the mere fact of the 'good' circulation of Northern Irish cultural capital seemed to matter more than the quality or content of the work staged within such institutions. Particularly for queer theatre produced in a region with high rates of homophobic and transphobic hate crime, the fourth wall could become something of a glass ceiling, rendering art a rarified or exceptional experience detached from daily life. If art was being consumed as a commodity equivalent to any other, then its capacity to "break the spell of the habitual and the everyday" would be limited.[455]

Such conditions added poignancy to TheatreofplucK's decision to blur the boundary between the fictional and so-called real, exceptional and everyday, unfamiliar an familiar, in its staging of *Tuesdays.* Seated behind the plate-class window, the audience was also made aware that Quigley took on some of the 'real' risks of embodying queer identity in public. Passers-by responded to him with double-takes and suspicious looks because they could not immediately see that he as part of a theatrical production; they mistook him for his part. Indeed, Rea and co-director Lyn Harris were strict with the actor, insisting that he direct his lines at those he encountered in the alleyway instead of the audience inside. Re-introducing this sense of risk

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[453] Daphna Ben Chaim, *Distance in the Theatre: The Aesthetics of Audience Response* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984), p.76.
[454] Anonymous, "Belfast's New Arts Cenue the MAC Prepares to Open", *BBC News*, 19 April (2012), https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-17770503 [retrieved 21/04/19].
[455] Felski, *Op. Cit.*

simultaneously disrupted and highlighted processes of passive consumption. Unable to intervene spectators were made to feel the dangers and burdens faced by those who, despite their desire to pass under the veil of the familiar, lived life at an oblique angle to normality. This was heightened at the point in the narrative when Pauline's stoicism and good grace finally fails. Having endured the rejection of her father, and the hostile looks of those in the street, Pauline breaks down after an encounter while carrying out the mundane task of paying for her shopping at Tesco's and, in an emotional outburst, performed right up against the plate-glass window, she declares:

> I am a woman. I am a woman and I go with my father on Tuesdays to Tesco's I do his shopping I help him in any case I'm the one lugging it all my name is Pauline. It's all quite normal. It's all quite ordinary. (17)

The glass protected and distanced the audience from what was happening outside, but did so in a way that emphasised the heightened risks faced by transgender people in public relative to the risk-free environment of the gallery space. Precisely by conjuring in spectators a sense of distance, the play suggested that, though theatre's Brechtian semi-autonomy from the everyday gives it latitude to reshape socio-sexual norms, solidarity with those left behind in the process of normalisation could not begin and end within its walls. Rather than simply underwriting the peace process, or assimilating art to the circulation of cultural capital, *Tuesdays* reflexively signalled how institutions such as the MAC should feel socially responsible for the inequalities that existed in wider society. And at the level of the performance encounter, the play encouraged audiences to think of peace in a more comprehensive manner as requiring both structural *and* everyday interventions. The discourse of normalisation declared Belfast's high streets and homes to be depoliticised, post-sectarian and safe and it did so precisely in order to represent Northern Ireland as a successful case of neoliberal economic reform. Pauline's plea for recognition reminds us that peace is an everyday practice where we strive to achieve co-existence on egalitarian terms as a "banal fact", rather than exceptional circumstance. In this view a commercialised street in central Belfast, rather than being a 'post-conflict' and post-ideological space, is just as important a site of emancipatory struggle as the Assembly.

Pauline's narrative ends with a startling revelation. She reveals that outside her efforts to look after her ailing father she relies on sex work to survive. In the closing passage of the play she recounts how she was murdered at the hands of one of her clients. At precisely the moment when the prospect of welcoming social conditions appears most distant, Pauline returns, despite herself, to the question of familial acceptance and family obligation: precisely that calm normality from which she is excluded, but to which she most desires to accede. "I tried to understand and then he left", she muses, "I lay where and as I was slowing ending I was thinking wondering and that's the last thing I thought Who is going to take care of you who will go with you every week down the aisles of Tesco's and keep you company?" (32) Even at the heightened moment of her death, Pauline centralises the "banal fact" of her father's dependency on others. Though she is murdered because of her gender non-conformity, she recognises her father, whose fear of weakness prevents him from asking for the help he needs, as a fellow victim of culturally restrictive codes of gender and sexuality. Pauline's desire to provide her father the comfort and care denied to her models an alternative form of normality – one based not on jealously protecting the sovereign individual or community but in the ongoing effort to extend familiar comforts and the comfort of the familiar to a greater number of people.

In other words, *Tuesdays* reversed the slippage, identified by Judith Butler, between the normative and descriptive, where partial judgements over what constitutes normality are allowed to masquerade as descriptions. "We judge a world we refuse to know", Butler declares, "and our judgement becomes one means of refusing the world."[456] Peter Quigley's performance should itself be seen as an exemplification of this suspension of judgement, undertaken in order to lay bare, and move beyond, the implicit gender-normative frameworks that determine the boundary between the familiar and unfamiliar, normal and abnormal. For Quigley, acting embodied an ethic of questioning so lacking in Northern Irish politics more broadly:

> People should have the right to fail. Politicians are the last people I would ask for ideas; they have probably spent them all anyway. Unlike acting, where you feel that your vocation is one of questioning and learning all the time, politicians seem to have

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[456] Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2006), pp.155-6.

> learnt it all years ago and are adhering to the same position whatever happens.[457]

An openness to failure involves a recognition of the difficulty of understanding experiences that fall beyond the conventional. Failure has value precisely because it throws into question the norms by which success is conventionally measured. If, as the actor noted elsewhere: "It's important for any minority group that their stories are told and all communities, if possible, become familiar with each other",[458] then his attempt to embody Pauline with such grace and care offered the audience an insight into what it might feel like to regard those different from ourselves without judgment, but with intersubjective consideration and thoughtfulness. Quigley's life did in fact bear striking parallels to Pauline's predicament. Perhaps the most famous openly gay actor in the six counties, he was a veteran of community theatre that shunned the professional stage for much of his career. *Tuesdays* would be his last show, as he died of cancer in 2015, and, as Rea points out, "Some say it was the best performance he ever gave in his life."[459] Confronted by an actor who worked so hard to understand experiences that were different from, but analogous to, his own, spectators were presented with an affirmation of alterity in kind that challenged the idea that anyone was entirely beyond the pale of understanding. In this way Quigley and TheatreofplucK did more than merely call upon the audience to recognise the validity of their transgender cohabitants; they pressed upon them the effort required to foster in Belfast's public spaces a sustainable, inclusive and genuinely egalitarian interdependency.

Niall Rea continues to screen a digital recording of the play (upon which this analysis is based) at theatre festivals and events across the island of Ireland. "Every time I show the DVD at festivals", he remarks, "it gets a standing ovation."[460] Though *Tuesdays* was certainly an emotionally powerful piece of theatre that derived its meaning from a place and time, this digital afterlife allowed it to move beyond the

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[457] Quoted in Marilyn Hyndman, *Further Afield: Journeys From a Protestant Past* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publication, 1996), p.14.

[458] Quoted in Anonymous, "Stories Must be Told…", *Belfast Telegraph*, 7 July (2019), https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/stories-must-be-told-familiarity-wipes-away- ignorance-30410377.html [retrieved 28/01/19].

[459] Rea, Interview with Alexander Coupe (2019).

[460] *Ibid.*

confines of the theatre institution to audiences that it would never have otherwise reached. And even as the play set out to shake audiences into action by disrupting the supposedly normal as normative and the pre-given as changeable, these efforts to disseminate it beyond its sold-out run at the MAC reflected the idea that political momentum gathers iteratively and across different sites of struggle both within and beyond the live performance. Such an approach was in keeping with a play, and theatre company, alert to the potentially mollifying effect of institutionalising queer performance practice, particularly within prestigious venues such as the MAC that politicians held to be an integral part of Northern Ireland's burgeoning cultural economy.

Tuesdays then, exemplified how queer theatre has begun to question the very terms of the process of cultural, political and economic normalisation upon which its inclusion into the mainstream was premised. Just as Pauline's desire for normality disturbed the constitutive terms upon which the normal was founded, so TheatreofplucK inserted *Tuesdays* into Belfast's pristine cultural institutions in in a manner that reflected upon its imbrication into art in the project of presenting the city as a normal city, alike to any other. Northern Ireland had of course come a long way since the 'Troubles'. The 2014 production took place a month after Sinn Féin's latest attempt to pass same-sex marriage through the Assembly. The party had liberalised significantly since the late 1970s, when, in response to a Gay Liberation Movement petition to legalise homosexuality, they responded: "there has never been a gay republican."[461] And in 2007, despite their homophobic and transphobic positions, the DUP signed the St Andrews Agreement, effectively subscribing to Section 75 of the original 1998 Northern Ireland Act that placed a statutory requirement on the Executive to promote equality of opportunity regardless of sexual orientation.[462] Despite these gains, *Tuesdays* set out to integrate the ongoing issue of transphobic violence into a broader critique of liberal identity politics. Its inventive staging both foregrounded the performativity of gender in order to unpick the reification of normality and also point to the "banal fact" of our dependency upon one another. A

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461 Diarmaid Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland* (London: Profile Books, 2009), p.476.
462 Northern Ireland Office, *Northern Ireland (St Andrews) Act 2006* (London: NIO, 2006), http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/53/contents [retrieved 28/01/19].

long way from the heightened zero-sum politics of the Assembly, the play, like *Scenes from the Big Picture* and *LABOUR* before it, represented a shift in focus from discrete identity claims to the task of redressing the differential distribution of precarity in Northern Ireland.

"Beautiful, glorious mess": the Queer Politics of Stacey Gregg's "un-well-made" Play

Even as it traced Pauline's desire to pass under the veil of the familiar, *Tuesdays* demonstrated the political value of failing to entirely achieve the 'norm' to queer struggle in the context where politicians proclaim the successes of the peace process. But doing little or too much can become a means of questioning the cultural, political and economic standards by which the gentle order to normality is measured. As already states, failure has a distinctly Brechtian flavour: to show the process of rehearsal, and the abnormal means used to achieve the norm, is to reveal social reality to be under construction and imperfectly, sometimes badly, constructed. According to Judith Halberstam, to fail is a "queer art" that, whether through inefficiency or enervation, "recognizes that alternatives are embedded already in the dominant logics and that power is never total or consistent".[463] As outlined in the first chapter of this thesis, glorious defeat has been employed by republicanism and unionism a means of bolstering identity claims and re-enforcing dominant masculinities precisely at the moment of their apparent dissolution. Here failure is recuperated as a necessary step on the path to eventual success and becomes an inducement to disavow the vulnerability and dependency associated with inter-group violence. However, doing too much and being over the top also has deep associations with queer performance's undoing of gender and identity norms. Camp performance, for example, exaggerates the empty ostentation, the doing things just for show, associated with femininity within the patriarchal imagination in order both to snag the seamless and efficient reproduction of gender and also to refuse the insistent bourgeois demand for moderation, pragmatism, economy. When Peter

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[463] Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (London: Duke University Press, 2011), p.88.

Quigley died in 2015 his funeral procession, billed as a "farewell performance",[464] took place down Ridgeway Street in south Belfast and ended in the Lyric. In contrast to the sombre funerary traditions of the North – especially the very public performances of mourning in republican funerals – attendees wore bright colours and the white, bejewelled coffin was attended by dancers and a loud samba band. Divested of Christian overtones of sacrifice, and re-presented as (mere) performance, the funeral's failure to live up to prescribed norms was divested of a sense of ideological, spiritual transcendence; it instead became a collective celebration of style, surface, and superficial excess, quintessential features of Quigley's life as an actor who "was never drab, nor modest, who was one of the first men in Northern Ireland to wear make-up and was a bold and outspoken advocate for gay rights."[465] Failure becomes a queer art, or aesthetic, where it refuses to be put to work within existing ideological narratives of identity and community. Falling short, or overstepping, prevailing standards of good taste, efficiency and, above all, productivity can simultaneously point to the limitations of those standards and gesture towards the possibility of alternatives.

In January 2014 Belfast-born playwright Stacey Gregg took part in a symposium of theatre and memory at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. In her speech, entitled "Theatre as Treasure Trove", she argued in favour of the role of failure in theatre:

> Well-made plays are sometimes dead plays: they're corpses hugging the status quo. Whereas there's a spooky, silent energy around some un-well-made plays, those which are not produced or programmed or deemed relevant.[466]

Gregg herself possessed one such script. Her play, *Shibboleth*, written in 2009 as a part of the Abbey Theatre's New Playwright's Programme, failed to be taken up until 2015, when, in contrast to Northern Ireland, funding restraints on the arts in the

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[464] Ivan Little, "Peter Quigley's Coffin in Theatre Final 'Farewell' Performance", *Belfast Telegraph*, 23 June (2015), https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/peter-quigleys-coffin-in-theatre-final-farewell-performance-31321903.html [retrieved 30/01/19].

[465] Jane Coyle, "Celebrating Peter Quigley", *culturenorthernireland.org*, 10 February (2016), https://www.culturenorthernireland.org/features/performing-arts/celebrating-peter-quigley [retrieved 30/01/19].

[466] Stacey Gregg, "Theatre as Treasure Trove: Plays New and Old", *Theatre of Memory Symposium*, 16 January (Dublin: Abbey Theatre, 2014), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fuK9w4oULa0 [retrieved 30/01/19].

Republic began to loosen. Initially Gregg was told: "work about the north wouldn't sell"; that "the play was a big cast and therefore expensive"; and that, as a piece of theatre outside of conventional realism, it was "too risky".[467] It seemed that the delay reflected less the quality of the play, than the standards applied to theatre of and about Northern Ireland. In a time when the performing arts are increasingly pressed into underwriting official narratives of progress and contributing to the North's burgeoning cultural economy, Gregg's "un-well-made play" gives us pause for thought. Formally experimental and thematically ambitious, the very failure of *Shibboleth* to be a good commodity – its flouting of standards of efficiency and economy – better allowed it to scrutinise and open up hegemonic narratives of social, political and economic normalisation.

As austerity produced its first overt and morbid social symptoms in Northern Ireland, the failure of the neoliberal economic model, and its effect upon other social issues such as gendered violence, was rarely broached. In November 2012 riots erupted over the decision of Belfast City Council to only fly the Union Flag on designated days. Over a decade after Gary Michell and Owen McCafferty's explorations of masculine disaffection, news programmes relayed image of young Loyalist men occupying a city centre area held up to the world as evidence of the Northern Ireland's progress beyond its past. But rather than attempting to understand the complex and interdependent inequalities that gave rise to such events, media coverage of the so-called "flag protests" exposed what Connal Parr has called the "sneering middle-class attitudes" of political commentators.[468] Aside from derogatory terms such as "fleggers", used to mock the working-class accents of the participants, many articles regarded the events as a threat to the 'normalised' image of Northern Ireland's capital city. "As the protests continue", wrote one journalist, "fears that the violence could dissuade potential international investment are growing."[469] Rather than raising the prospect that neoliberal spatial planning and economic reform had itself become an inadequate measure of success, such statements depicted the protesters as regressive, aberrant and unthinking. Gregg returned to *Shibboleth* in

[467] Stacey Gregg, Unpublished Email Correspondence with Alexander Coupe, 20 November (2018).
[468] Connal Parr, *Inventing the Myth: Political Passions and the Ulster Protestant Imagination* (Oxford: OUP, 2016), p.214.
[469] Peter Goeghegan, "Violence Flags Trouble for North's Economy", *Sunday Business Post*, 13 Jan (2013), n.p.

response to these events. In the essay published with the play-text, she compared the events to the 2011 riots in England: "even lovely liberals scratched their heads and condemned the rioters in nice, reasonable voices – nothing to do with deepening inequality, social immobility, global recession - 'They exist in a different world'".[470] Liberal interpretation, both on and off the stage, could only understand such events as aberrant to the modernising impulse of the peace process, rather than as complex, contradictory and resolutely contemporary phenomena. While neoliberal austerity remained invisible background to the outworking of the peace process – and while a class perspective was absent from analyses of events like the "flags protest" - there could be no understanding of why men, many of whom were born after the 1994 ceasefires, seemed to be returning to those violent masculinities originally cultivated to support the conflict.

After these events *Shibboleth* "raised its tiny fists from its drawer".[471] Gregg returned to the play just as if were one of those people left behind by the peace process in Northern Ireland. The play followed a group of bricklayers tasked with extending one of Belfast's so-called "peace walls": barriers that divided Catholic and Protestant areas in broadly working class areas of the urban periphery. Alan and his wife Ruby want to sent their child Darren to the local integrated school; and the foreman Stuarty, a former paramilitary who got a degree while imprisoned, fails to see the dividends of his education: "nothing feels the differ", he says, "all the best intentions drain away like piss."[472] But it is the youngest – Mo and Corey – who, as the action progresses, become most disenchanted with their dim prospects, direct their frustration towards those they perceive to be different. Mo grows to hate Yuri, the Polish migrant worker who has joined the group. Corey initially strikes up a relationship with Agnieszka, Yuri's Belfast born, bisexual daughter, only to violently attack her offstage in a jealous, drunken rage. In 2009, after two years of successful power-sharing government in Northern Ireland, it is easy to see why this narrative of social regression, of young men falling back onto shibboleths the peace was supposed to have superseded, would have been unappealing. But following 2013 they could

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[470] Stacey Gregg, *Shibboleth* (London: Nick Hern, 2015), p.89.
[471] *Ibid.*
[472] *Ibid.*, p.43.

hardly be ignored, and in 2015 it finally received a full production on the Abbey Theatre's Peacock stage.

Tuesdays certainly began the process of tracing the interactions between heteronormativity and the class inequalities that subtended the normalisation of Belfast, the former being not only overlooked, but exacerbated within a political consensus that prioritised neoliberal economic reform. *Shibboleth*, however, made explicit the way capitalist elites use nostalgia for the patriarchal gender norms of illiberal ethno-nationalisms to redirect people's frustration at economic precarity against women, queer people and ethnic minorities. Rather than simply condemning those that seemed to shatter the image of Northern Ireland's post-Agreement success, the play gave consideration to the socially outcast: those men, like the bricklayers, whose very desire not to be deemed a failure, to live up to the masculine standard, is cruelly exploited; and those whose dreams of dancing, cross-dressing, play-acting and playwriting established standards of success deemed immodest, inefficient and unbecoming. Above all, Gregg explores in these characters the myriad of associations between queerness, as both gender and sexual non-conformity, and the pursuit of creativity, joy, and pleasure beyond the bounds of wealth, success and productivity. In a context where theatre too was expected to underwrite Belfast's image as an unmitigated success, the play's messy, over-the-top, and ambitiously experimental form mirrors such characterisation. Employing Brechtian techniques, *Shibboleth* depicted the Walls and those who worked on them in a new light - no longer familiar or finished, but rendered strange and alterable. She placed centre stage a large, glowing, partially built "peace wall" whose voice was sung, with full gusto, by the red-clad and blond haired opera singer Cara Robinson. By figuring ethno-nationalist division as a kind of capitalist seduction, this decidedly over-the-top staging sought to reawaken critical perceptions anaesthetised by the ideological and economic forces of normalisation, and elicit an urgently needed political sensing that things might be otherwise.

In order to better situate the political implications of *Shibboleth* as a play that both explored failure and refused to conform to accepted standards of the "well made play", it is important to explore Gregg's non-conformity as a queer playwright from a working class, Protestant background. She has tied the play's critique of ethno-

nationalist and capitalist measures of success to her own experiences growing up in Belfast. From an early age she was keenly aware that to embark on a career as a playwright at all was to diverge from a culture that regarded theatre and overt theatricality with suspicion. She observes of her childhood:

> By and large there was an appreciation of culture amongst my Nationalist friends that just didn't exist amongst my Unionist-Loyalist background. And there is a lot of mistrust about all that stuff. It was seen to correlate in some way, or collocate, with nonsense like Sinn Fein or the theatre of the Catholic Church.[473]

Such a suspicion, as Brian Singleton has observed, has its roots in the North's evangelical churches and a Unionist identity rooted in a sense of its industrial past. "Playing someone other than yourself was frowned upon", not least because it thwarted the efficiency of gesture and instrumentalisation of the body associated with manual labour.[474]

This is a theme present in the work on Gregg's theatrical contemporaries Gary Mitchell and David Ireland. In particular, both have foregrounded the ways unproductive pursuits are commonly equated with queer sexualities within Loyalist discourse. In an interview conducted by the journalist Susan McKay, Mitchell noted how he was told that theatre "was for Catholics and homosexuals."[475] David Ireland wrote about this stigma in his first play *What the Animals Say* (Oran Mor, Glasgow, 2009). One of his characters, Eddie, is an aspiring actor and is forced to confront the assumption that "theatre is gay" when he returns home to shoot a film in Belfast. The queerness of theatre in the Loyalist imaginary originates as much in the idea that it is an unproductive pursuit than in its attribution to the supposed religious theatrics of the "other side". As Wallace McDowell has argued, theatre undermines the centrality of certainty to Ulster Protestantism: "In religious terms, this certainty has been based on a personal relationship with Christ and, in social terms, on a work-related identity founded on the proceeds of the industrial revolution (and often

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[473] Stacey Gregg, Unpublished Interview with Alexander Coupe, 29 March (London, 2018).
[474] Singleton, *Masculinities and Contemporary Irish Theatre*, p.165.
[475] Quoted in Susan McKay, *Northern Protestants: An Unsettled People* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2005), p.117.

of deliberate exclusion of Catholics from certain jobs or progression in jobs)."[476] Identity takes shape in the pursuit of spiritual and economic ends – the biological and material reproduction of Ulster Protestantism – the vehicle of which was of course the heterosexual family unit. To paraphrase David Savran, theatre is perhaps "the queerest art" because (in its Brechtian forms at least) it depicts identity in the making and revels in the artificiality and, above all, impossibility of successfully embodying the norm.[477]

Like Peter Quigley, Gregg believes that people should have the right to fail. In interview she maintains a refusal to dismiss those who "get it wrong" as mere failures and links this to her own experiences growing up as a queer person in Belfast:

> It really bothers me when people from an educated, bourgeois background eviscerate someone who has a good intention but they have used the wrong language. And I think I am probably particularly sensitive to that because I'm queer and language is very sensitive around those things. The older generation often get it wrong but that doesn't mean they are bigots.[478]

Queerness, for Gregg, involves a suspension of judgement that foregrounds the messiness and inefficiency that operates at the heart of *all* experience, particularly where that experience is affected by inequalities of class and education. She is not therefore interested in merely opposing heteronormative and capitalist conceptions of success and efficiency; rather, she focusses on how failure might unmake such concepts and open up a field of possibility for shaping futures beyond neoliberal modernity and ethno-nationalism.

Gregg's interest in the capacity of theatre to model these possibilities took shape at a time when the criticality of the arts was increasingly under threat due to the direct and indirect political and economic pressures, some of which have already been outlined above. One term to feature increasingly in cultural policy documents, however, relates specifically to the art of failure (and the failure of art): excellence.

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[476] Wallace McDowell, "Overcoming Working-class Ulster Loyalism's Resistance to Theatricality after the Peace Process", *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 23.3 (2013), pp.323-333 (p.327).
[477] David Savran, "Queer Theatre and the Disarticulation of Identity", *The Queerest Art: Essays on Lesbian and Gay Theatre* (New York: NYU Press, 2002), pp.152-167 (p.161).
[478] Gregg, Interview with Alexander Coupe (2018).

The various contributors to *Ambitions for the Arts: A Five Year Strategic Plan for the Arts in Northern Ireland 2013-2018*, a twenty-one page document outlining the "fundamental purpose" of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland's (ACNI) funding provision, deployed the term fourteen times. In his forward to the report, Bob Collins, the Chair of ACNI, emphasised the particular importance of excellence in the context of continuing funding cuts to the Council's allocated budget:

> The search for excellence is at the centre of every artist's life. It is essential to recognise its value and to support its achievement. Our principle is excellence in all and excellence for all.[479]

The body of the report sustained this theme, outlining the importance of "investing in artistic excellence"[480] and praising the ability of individual artists "to innovate, to challenge preconceptions, to broaden and enrich our lives, to create work of international acclaim, to transform the familiar, is fundamentally rooted in a search for excellence."[481] The hopefulness of such a "principle" seemed to reside in its capacity to transcend measurements of value aligned with either Unionist or Nationalist ideologies. But the vagueness of excellence obscures other embedded assumptions that are worth exploring in more detail.

As the historian Robert Hewison has outlined in his detailed study of cultural policy in the United Kingdom between 1997 and 2012, the word entered into common usage in policy documents during New Labour's reorganization of the conditions of arts funding. The ACNI, existing as it does thanks to the largesse of the British state, should be located within this particular historical trajectory, although the cultural policy in Ireland would also follow a similar economizing agenda after the 2008 recession. Hewison argues:

> Cultural policy became part of economic policy. Culture was an industry, and its products a commodity. But as a means of production it proved difficult to manage. Artistic judgements are not easily made by committee, and creativity does not occur according to a five-year plan. […] New Labour's answer was to duck the aesthetic questions, and install a regime of

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[479] Arts Council Northern Ireland, *Ambitions for the Arts: A Five Year Strategic Plan for the Arts in Northern Ireland 2013-2018* (Belfast: ACNI, 2013), p.4.
[480] *Ibid*. p.10.
[481] *Ibid*. p.9.

targets, funding agreements and measurement intended to make the economic and social outcomes of their cultural investment predictable.[482]

In order to enlist support for this instrumentalisation of the arts, policy documents began to deploy seemingly incontestable terms such as excellence. As Bill Readings has noted of the word's use in higher education policy, "excellence has the singular advantage of being entirely meaningless."[483] It is a word that sounds positive (as with normality, who would be against excellence?) but its precise qualities can only be fixed in relation to a specific standard. This allows excellence to absorb radically diverse forms of art (performing arts, community arts, visual arts, literature) and conceptions of social use into a standard that is not specific to any qualities they share. Excellence allowed policy makers and institutions to signal their appreciation for aesthetic quality without naming the standard against which that quality would be judged, a vagueness that enabled them to side-step accusations of elitism and connoisseurship.

Hewison defines cultural capital in bracingly optimistic terms as "a mutual creation that uses the resources of shared traditions and the collective imagination to generate a public, not a private good."[484] He does so in order to argue that lurking behind the language of excellence is an ideological commitment to privitising and commodifying this shared wealth; what he calls "cultural capitalism". On the surface this move seemed a worthy attempt to unpick some of the inequalities in access to cultural knowledge, experience and production set out by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu in his famous study *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Bourdieu argued that hierarchies of taste extend and entrench the social power of the bourgeoisie by conferring social status on those individuals who have access to legitimized bourgeois culture. Barriers to accessing legitimate culture based on social status and freedom from economic necessity reinforce the exclusivity of high culture.[485] In order to combat such a situation, New Labour replaced hierarchies of

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[482] Robert Hewison, *Cultural Capitalism: the Rise and Fall of Creative Britain* (London: Verso, 2014), n.pag., ebook.

[483] Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1996), p.22.

[484] Hewison, *Op. Cit.*, p.

[485] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trn. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

taste with supposedly benign and plural market values (economic impact, contribution to post-industrial social regeneration, the generation of employment, the broadening of participation) organized under the vague heading of excellence.

In Northern Ireland, it was under the aegis of excellence that the arts could be absorbed into the broader cultural, political and economic project of normalisation. Cultural pluralism seemed to offer a powerful means for positing a state apparatus that transcended and mediated between exclusivist understandings of Nationalist and Unionist identity. The Agreement's provision for "parity of esteem" was extended to an understanding of cultural diversity. The state's role was to promote artistic excellence by ensuring equal access to the arts, a role that aligned with the neoliberal ideal of the state as guarantor of equal access to the market. This commitment to cultural diversity and inclusivity provided a mechanism through which difference could be managed and potentially overcome. Some have noted that this inclusive cultural policy resulted in a flourishing community arts sector.[486] Initiatives including the New Belfast Community Arts Initiative and the ACNI funded Re-imagining Communities programme, helped both Loyalist and Nationalist communities erase public signs of sectarianism, most notably murals, while offering the means for them to celebrate the non-violent aspects of their respective cultures.

Despite these initiatives, however, the language of excellence tended to gloss over failure. As far back as 1998 Bill Rolston had warned that the 'two communities' model of parity overlooked "the real diversity and conflict within each 'tradition'", including, of course, class and gender inequalities.[487] By the time *Shibboleth* reached the Abbey stage in 2015, both the Arts Council Northern Ireland (ACNI) budget and the budget for the Irish Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure had been substantially reduced. This was in line with the logic of austerity adopted by the Conservative Party in the United Kingdom and by both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael in Ireland following the 2008 Financial Crisis. The ACNI cuts were particularly stringent, as Paula McFetridge, artistic director of Belfast's Kabosh Theatre

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[486] For a positive assessments see Catherine Nash, "Equity, Diversity and Interdependence: Cultural Policy in Northern Ireland", *Antipode*, 37.2 (2005), pp.272-300; Hélène Hamayon-Alfaro, "Sustaining Social Inclusion Through the Arts: the Case of Northern Ireland", *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, 37.1/2 (2011), pp.120-137.
[487] Bill Rolston, "What's Wrong with Mutliculturalism?", *Op. Cit*, p.270.

Company, noted: "We had planned for the possibility of a 20 per cent cut, but there was no way on this earth that we thought 44 percent was coming."[488] In Ireland the squeeze on the arts budget was less severe, but its degradation by 2015 prompted Fintan O'Toole to call for and Irish artists strike.[489] The sense that the arts was surplus to other more essential of government spending was combined with an ideological tendency, shared by governing parties in both Westminster and Dublin, to regard the subsidization of theatre as contrary to the logic of economic self-sustainability and profit-seeking. Because the arts could not produce "surplus value" it was increasingly deemed surplus to requirements, unless it could justify itself in economic, rather than aesthetic, terms. The arts were increasingly justified by their capacity to attract revenue from tourism and foreign investment. And as budgets tightened, the link between production companies and businesses (expected to fill the funding gap) became increasingly intimate, as exemplified in the ACNI-funded organization Arts & Business Northern Ireland (ABNI). Significantly, the ABNI have encouraged commercial businesses to use the expertise of actors, directors and producers to enhance staff training and productivity.[490] The comments of its chair, Joanne Stuart OBE, sum up the overarching logic of cultural captialism: "a vibrant arts and culture sector is good for business and society in general. It leads to a more productive society, and helps to define Northern Ireland as a sophisticated business location."[491] A situation has emerged in which the arts are expected to do the work of representing Northern Ireland's excellence and normality while adapting to a system of economization and marketization that had failed to deliver either to Northern Ireland working class and queer communities.

The question remains as to the effects on artistic production of such a shift in policy and rationale. In the UK Justin O'Connor has noted that the broadly democratizing and anti-elitist impetus behind of the "creative industries" constituted an important

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[488] Quoted in Jane Coyle, "The Arts Are an Easy Target", *Irish Times*, 7 April (2015), p.10.

[489] Fintan O'Toole, "Why it's Time for Irish Artists to Go On Strike", *Irish Times*, 3 Jan. (2015), p.8.

[490] One ABNI project involved the c21 Theatre Company collaborating with the Doyle Shipping Group to produce a health and safety video featuring workers at their Belfast office. According to company's director, they wanted a video that would "both showcase our commitment to health and safety to our customers and could also be used to train new employees as part of our 'Tool Box Talk' induction series". See https://www.artsandbusinessni.org.uk/business/staff-engagement-and-development-case-study/case-study-doyle-shipping-group-belfast-ltd-and-c21-theatre-company [retrieved 3/3/2019].

[491] Joanne Stuart, "The Heart of Creativity", *Belfast Telegraph*, 27 Jan (2015), p. 5.

rejoinder to the high-culture view of art's supposed "Aristotelian aloofness" from commerce.[492] Culture cannot simply be opposed to necessity and instrumentality: the two, as Stacey Gregg was well aware, are deeply enmeshed. However, he argues that "the dominant tendency has not been the 'culturalisation of the economy' nor a marriage of equals, but the ever-increasing reduction of cultural values to those provided by 'the economic'."[493] Similar arguments have been made in relation to Ireland's belated adoption of the British model following the 2008 financial crisis. As Alexandra Slaby has noted, "[u]ntil the mid-2000s, Irish cultural policy was essentially focused on the delivery of public service of culture. […] It was only in 2009, however, that Irish cultural policy became explicitly economized".[494] Others have argued that this process of economisation can be read into theatrical form itself. Nicholas Ridout notes that theatre workers are subject to the same pressures of regulation, precarious employment, and wage-suppression as any other sector. With the exception of some Brechtian theatre, the end product of actorly labour – the play or performance – tends to be presented in such a way as to suppress the arduous work and failed attempts that goes into producing work of excellence.[495] In the Irish context, Lionel Pilkington has associated this suppression of labour with the continued privileging of certain theatrical forms, specifically those that present – with effortlessness, efficiency, flexibility and professionalism – a sentimentalised and commodified version of Irishness.[496] The very form and style of theatre, then, has been colonized by those neoliberal sub-categories of excellence implicit in the language of arts funding. As theatre and performance increasingly offers its services in bodily discipline to businesses, and as business offers to theatre its categories of economic excellence, the scope for critique narrows.

Gregg's difficulty in getting *Shibboleth* produced sheds some light on the impact of the economisation of culture upon theatrical output both in and about Northern Ireland. Following a lack of interest either north or south of the border, Gregg, like her

[492] Justin O'Connor, "After the Creative Industries: Cultural Policy in Crisis", *Journal of Law, Social Justice & Global Development*, 1 (2016), p.4.

[493] *Ibid.*, pp.5-6.

[494] Alexandra Slaby, "Whither Cultural Policy in Post Celtic Tiger Ireland?", *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, 37.1/2 (2011), pp.76-97 (pp.83-84).

[495] Nicholas Ridout, *Stage Fright, animals, and Other Theatrical Problems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.100.

[496] Lionel Pilkington, "The Pitfalls of Theatrical Consciousness", *Kritika Kultura*, 21/22 (2013/2014), pp.1-10.

contemporary Spallen, decided to adapt to conventional tastes. In 2011 she wrote *Perve*, a thematically concise exploration of moral panic about the impact of pornography on the sexualisation of children. The play received its première at the Abbey Theatre that year, a success that Gregg herself put down to the fact that it was "a paint by numbers realist play" that was "very sparse" and "the most commercial thing [she had] written up until that point". [497] Tracing a young filmmaker's misguided attempt to make a documentary about responses to the false rumour that he was a paedophile, *Perve* eschewed the ambitious thematic scope, geopolitical specificity, and Brechtian form of *Shibboleth*. That it got accepted to the most prestigious platform in Ireland seemed to suggest that, with power-sharing entering into its most stable period, there was little appetite in the Republic for experimental plays that were critical of austerity's role in normalisation.

Outside Ireland, the viability of experimental work increasingly depended on preexisting markets for familiar theatrical forms. Gregg's second play to be produced was far more formally and thematically ambitious than *Perve*. *Lagan* (2011) added a Brechtian twist to the popular Irish monologue form by staging a series interweaving plots in which characters voiced, in the form of direct address, their own internal commentary on their dialogic encounters. Set in Belfast, the play was a critical assessment of contemporary life that built on the themes in the nascent *Shibboleth* script. However the play was produced not in Northern Ireland or Ireland, but at the Oval House Theatre in London, a strategic move on Gregg's part designed to increase the likelihood of her more complex work getting produced closer to its intended audience. Not only did the play use of multi-rolling lower production costs, but it also appealed to the marketability of the monologue as a form internationally regarded as synonymous with Irish literary theatre.

The situation in Northern Ireland was complex. In contrast to the Abbey Theatre, the Lyric Theatre showed a significant commitment to new writing about Northern Ireland, producing work by Gary Mitchell, Rosemary Jenkinson, Tim Loane and David Ireland. But the work produced there demonstrated a preference for the kind of formal economy and thematic efficiency advocated for by the ACNI. In 2011 their

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[497] Quoted in Fiona Coleman Coffey, *Political Acts*, p.187.

drama officer Gilly Campbell declared that austerity meant that theatre companies would have to "make tighter, more focused and strategic applications" and would have to "work harder and to deliver much for value for our buck."[498] The new writing produced at the Lyric employed small casts, realist performance styles and offered variations on familiar forms: comedies of manners (Loane's *The Civilization Game* [2012] and Ireland's *Can't Forget About You* [2013]), black comedies (Gary Mitchell's *Demented* [2014]) and history plays (Jenkinson's *White Star of the North* [2012]). None of these plays explicitly addressed the failure of austerity and all featured the kind of realism and formal economy that Gregg would intentionally eschew in *Shibboleth*.

Shibboleth employed Brechtian theatrical techniques to reveal the way capitalism and patriarchal nationalism pass off their impoverished political horizons as the apotheosis of realism and normality. When discussing the genesis of the play, Gregg is clear that "unsettling the contract with an audience" is central to its political intent. She believes that under certain conditions theatre invites its audience to see critically rather than take for granted what is being depicted before them. "I don't want you to just sit back and be told something", she declares, "You need to acknowledge the artifice of this moment and then work a little bit harder in thinking about why we are here."[499] Politically radical performance makers should work against what Brecht decried as the "culinary character" of theatre that simply fed the audience an image of reality without encouraging them to critically engage with it.[500] He decried the illusionistic and individualistic qualities of naturalist drama as supporting *bourgeois* morality at a time when industrialised capitalism was challenging and subordinating individuality in novel and unprecedented ways. Rather than producing an organically complete work of art, he employed a range of devices – episodic structure, stage machinery, projections, musical interludes, tableaux, acting style – to entice the audience into adopting a critical and analytic attitude toward social phenomena that usually passed under the veil of normality. Central to this "Epic Theatre" was the use of *Verfremdungseffekt* to reveal the social character of existence in a manner that raised the possibility of alternatives. "What is natural", he argued,

[498] Quoted in Michael Quinn, "Art Beyond its Borders", *The Stage*, 20 Oct. (2011), pp. 6-7.
[499] Stacey Gregg, Unpublished Interview (2018).
[500] Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, p.64.

"had to have the force of what is *startling*. […] People's activity had to simultaneously be as it was and be capable of being different."[501] Brecht concentrated in particular on the role of acting techniques in conjuring *Verffremdungseffekt*. In contrast to the immersive principles of Konstantin Stanislavsky and Lee Strasberg's 'method acting', the actor was to adopt a self-conscious style in order to show behaviour's social character. "There is no A-effect", Brecht wrote in *The Messingkauf Dialogues,* "when the actor adopts another's facial expression at the cost of erasing his own. What he should do is to show the two faces overlapping."[502] Rather than presenting a complete character to the audience, or losing themself in their part, the actor was to show their character as caught up in a process of transformation that was open to comment and alteration. This mode of presentation is marked by a doubling, dialectical function. By revealing the interpretive process, the actor gestures towards those actions not taken and decisions made for a character to become who they are. For Brecht, it is precisely by failing to pull off the received standard of 'good' acting, a standard in which the interpretive agency of the actor becomes invisible, that the fallacious idea that social norms are achievable, desirable or inevitable could be challenged.

Following this model, *Shibboleth* dispensed with the slick façade of conventional realism for over-the-top, crude and often comic stylings that flouted all theatrical moderation and modesty. It was precisely in overstepping austerian standards of theatrical success that the play made strange the way such standards limit political possibilities. Exaggerated or over-the-top acting can reveal how the fulfilment of a particular social role involves physical discipline, so much so that the role seems to stymy, contain or otherwise foreclose human creative possibilities. Just as Brecht's Epic Theatre responded to the social and economic upheavals of his own time, so *Shibboleth* pivots precisely upon the dialectic of physical discipline and creative abandon to show that, in austerity-ridden Northern Ireland it is capital, in collusion with ethno-nationalist sentiment, that threatens to absorb those creative energies that might otherwise reshape society for the better.

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[501] *Ibid.*, p.256
[502] Bertolt Brecht, *The Messingkauf Dialogues*, tr. John Willet (London: Methuen Drama, 2002), p.76.

Shibboleth is fundamentally a play about the betrayal of hope in post-Agreement Belfast. It centres on the contradiction between the modernizing discourse of economic development and the continued expansion of so-called "peace lines" separating working class Catholic and Protestant areas. As the centre of Belfast was refashioned as an exemplum of the North's normalisation, walls proliferated at the working class urban periphery: whereas in 1998 there were nine, by 2015 this number had increased to forty. The first thing the audience at the Abbey heard at the outset of the play was a recording of the 2013 speech US President Barack Obama delivered at the Waterfront Hall in Belfast (a section of which is quoted at the beginning of this thesis). In it he declares that people caught up in war across the world are watching Northern Ireland: "They're studying what you're doing. And they're wondering, perhaps if Northern Ireland can achieve peace, we can too. You're their blueprint to follow. You're proof of what is possible – because hope is contagious" (6). This declaration of optimism is quickly drowned out by "*deep, timeless hum*" (6) of the ten-foot wall placed centre stage – a seemingly immovable object in the face of such progressive narratives (figure 3). This juxtaposition poses the question: what, for the characters depicted onstage, has *really* changed since the Good Friday Agreement? And if the answer is nothing, then why is this the case?

Shibboleth depicts how the hopes and dreams of working class people are captured and made available for consumption and profit in the rapidly neoliberalising city of Belfast. The object cause of this betrayed hope is capitalism, a process to which those onstage are expected to attach themselves in return for the promise of a financially stable life and 'post-conflict' future. The focus of the play is a group of bricklayers – Alan, Stuarty, Corey, Mo and Yuri – who through their profession find themselves deeply enmeshed in the spatial reorganization of Belfast. Gregg captures them just as their hopeful fantasies have begun to fray. Their job is to extend a so-called "peace all" in their own community, an area that is divided along sectarian lines between "themens" and "ussens". It is a task they begin before the audience with a degree of cynicism. Alan, the closest thing the play has to an optimist, is questioning: "'peace-line' is a bit of a joke, like callin prisons 'peace houses" (17); Stuarty is world-weary and realistic: "Could be a palace or a Peace Wall, s'long as the coins end up in my hand hey" (18). All are aware that political discourse is replete with double meanings. "You lads should be proud," a local councillor declares in the seventh scene of the

play, "You're part of history. There's scaffoldin and cranes glitterin the city line. Hotels, spas, boutiques, Nando's. Few years ago ya couldn't get yourself a latte in Belfast City" (60). "History" here expresses the double-temporality of uneven development: the sectarian division that persists in working class communities so that the city centre can be presented as a sign Northern Ireland has discovered, on Obama's words, "how to move beyond the heavy hand of history" (6). As the play makes clear right from the beginning, it is the containment of social division in the urban periphery that makes the city centre appear safe for leisure and consumption.

Gregg gives the Wall a persona of its own, voiced by the opera singer Cara Robinson (figure 4). As the play unfolds, her songs punctuate the discussions of the bricklayers, both feeding off and stoking their economic worries. She gains strength every time the men turn their frustrations against those that are different to them, whether that be the migrant worker, the Polish-born Yuri, brought in to replace a former colleague, or the anonymous "themens" who live the other side of the divide. It is through through her interactions with other characters that the Wall theatrically expresses what Brecht called the "social *gestus*" of the play; that is, the basic governing logic that coordinates social behavior.[503] Brecht argued that, when represented though *Verfremdungseffekt*, any stage action or effect could articulate "the social relationships prevailing between people of a given period" in a way that "allows conclusions to be drawn about the social circumstances."[504] In *Shibboleth*, the effect of Robinson's singing on other characters expresses both what is alluring and dangerous about sectarian social divisions. Though such divisions seem to promise protection from the pressures of capitalism, they bind working-class men to a form of masculine identity that perpetuates that very system. This *gestus* is expressed in the Wall's interactions with Mo, the smallest and youngest member of the group who, like Pauline, struggles to look after an ailing relative. His (unseen) mother has dementia and, in the absence of the state, he has taken on the burden of her care. On top of this Mo is also oppressed within the macho hierarchy of the bricklayers. Throughout the first five scenes of the play, jokes are made at his expense and his frustration grows. Yuri, keen to bridge the divide of nationality drawn by the other

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[503] See Patrice Pavis, *Dictionary of Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis*, tr. Christine Shantz (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), p.164.
[504] Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, p.187; p.168.

workers, concocts a prank at Mo's expense, the result of which is an intensification of xenophobic feelings. "We can't get the pay cos they're livin ten to a house and cheaper labour than us and back on an EasyJet", he angrily declares (53). Robinson's Wall provides the only listening ear. In the sixth scene of the play, after singing of her desire to "TO GROW. TO DOMINATE. TO PROTECT" (55), she asks Mo to sing of his hopes and dreams:

> MO   Wall, wall.
> All I want is a juicy bone
> A warm house
> A master's hand across my back
> A woman's hand perched on my genitals
> That's all
> That's all
> (57)

The prevailing social *gestus* consists in this encounter; though the *Verfremdungseffekt* of a musical interlude, it illustrates how reactionary and sectarian forms of nationalism promise to protect the men precisely in order to manipulate particular circumstances of competition to the benefit of Belfast's urban elite. The Wall appears to Mo as a patriarchal fetish: the maternalised nation that promises to nurture those men who defend it, and redirect the violence they face against unnamed others. Later it emerges that the Wall is being extended in order to protect a new development of luxury flats, a project a local Councillor justifies in explicitly neoliberal terms: "It might seem strange to be building lush city apartments one week and this wall – er, residential barrier extension – the next, but everyone'll feel the trickle-down benefits" (61). The *gestus* revealed by Mo's interactions with Robinson is that far from producing solidarity, a respite from struggle, and protection from vulnerability, patriarchy and sectarianism are used to appropriate and exhaust Mo's physical capacities.

A similar dynamic plays out between the Wall and Corey, the second youngest bricklayer, where the gendered dimensions of this appropriation are given further emphasis. This was most evident in the acting style adopted by Rhys Dunlop in the role. In the early scenes of the play he performed both to the audience and the Wall, rehearsing his part by striking macho poses:

| COREY | Muscles bulgy from the lifting, the gravysweatin, whiteringed weatherbeaten, manly manual labour, taught Adonis/ muscles |
| | (16) |

Such exaggeration denaturalizes the mastery of physicality and effortless expression expected of professional performers and bricklayers alike. But the very source of his sense of dignity and excellence – the macho identity of the labourer – intensifies his social and economic marginalisation. In the seventh scene of the play the bricklayers converse with a local councillor from their community. She has been sent to answer their questions about the validity of extending the wall through the local school and it quickly becomes clear that the project is designed to protect a new development of luxury flats. The Councillor declares: "I know it must seem strange to be building lush apartments one week and this wall – er, residential extension the next, but everyone'll feel the trickle down benefits" (62-3). The encounter briefly unites the bricklayers in consternation – they begin the chant "The walls should come down" (62). Here the bricklayers, Corey included, glimpse how the Wall uses sectarianism to exploit their physical and creative capacities. However, the situation quickly deteriorates into sectarian point-scoring; the men begin to chant "look out for the lads" (63) and Corey explodes in anger: "Back in my day the men were in charge – now they get their balls handed to them on a lazy Susan!" (64). This thwarted moment, and Corey's turn towards misogyny, depicts masculinity as an form of ensnarement that redirects the resentment that arises out of economic violence. Capital uses patriarchal nationalism to dangle the promise of success, only to further contain working class men within forms of subjectivity that serve processes of capital accumulation, the material benefits of which fail to trickle down. Perhaps even more so that *Tuesdays*, *Shibboleth* uncovered how the political and economic process of normalisation intensified, rather than allayed, Northern Ireland's hetero- and gender-normative tendencies.

That between 1998 and 2015 suicide rates in Northern Ireland had risen by 8 percent, a figure in which men from the most deprived areas were disproportionately

represented, sharpened the despair experienced by the play's younger characters.[505] Mo's story in particular emphasised the intense pressure of heteronormative measures of success upon seemingly gender-conforming men. The pressure to prove himself leads Mo into several failed attempts at flirting with Yuri's Belfast born daughter, Agnieszka. When, in the eight scene of the play, she appears to have been beaten up, it is Mo who inevitably gets the blame, despite the fact that Corey is the perpetrator. He is viciously attacked in reprisal, and with no-one remaining to support him, he decides to take his own life. In the twelfth scene of the play a mouth appears in the brickwork of the Wall that, by this stage, has been completed. In a shocking twist, it opens up and bodily consumes the unfortunate Mo. This image hones the dialectical tension Gregg wishes to present to the audience: capitalism colludes with ethnonationalism to consume the very sources of labour it promises to nurture and protect. Nowhere in Northern Irish theatre is there a sharper manifestation of Marx's famous dictum: "Capital is dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks."[506]

It would be easy to dismiss this tragic conclusion as overly deterministic if it were not for Gregg's Brechtianism. That the Wall has been built before the spectators' eyes invites them to recognise its contingency – that it was built by the hands of those onstage. Indeed, throughout the play Robinson only interacts with the men as a spectral presence, a product of their imagination conjured out of the depths of despair. In an early scene, the bricklayers uncover a mysterious stone suspected of being the grave of a man killed by the "other side" during the Troubles. The discovery prompts them to cease work and embark on a long conversation about the origins of the Wall:

> STUARTY   I'll tell you what they are, they're ancient earthly lines that runs all round the world under the earth and they're energy lines. Mystical straight-running line we can't comprehend, and over thousands of years men have been drawn to them and natural elements formed around them. (59)

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[505] Victoria O'Hara, "Number of Suicides Up 8%, with Disadvantaged Men Most at Risk", *Belfast Telegraph*, 25 November (2015), p.12.

[506] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy Volume 1*, trn. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1976), p.342.

The interplay between the bombastic Robinson and this description lays bare the process of reification that Jameson identified as a feature of the "well made play".[507] Sectarian identity appears normal precisely because the traces of production have been erased. *Shibboleth* emphasises what Brecht called the "not – but" structure of decision-making by reintroducing these traces: the audience is invited to wonder the decision that each character *did not take*. For example, responding to the Councillor, Corey decides does not unite with his colleagues in class solidarity but turns towards the Wall, masculine individualism, sectarianism. Robinson, the Wall, even Corey's *gestic* acting all open up a space for spectators to consider those uses of human sensual and creative capacities that do not conform to the efficiency and economy required to be regarded successful, useful, or normal.

In interview, Gregg suggest that the performing arts might play a role in modelling such alternatives, but only by failing to live up to the strictures of the "well-made-play":

> I'm not interested in tidy, formal, stiff performance. And I think especially if you are representing young people there's an even greater onus to be true to that sense of possibility and potential and spontaneity and mess; beautiful, glorious mess.[508]

Gregg is interested in shaping theatrical form around those whose creative passions had yet to be moderated by, or otherwise rendered useful to, established ideas of success, excellence and normality. Linking back to Gregg's remarks on the queerness of theatre with regards to her Ulster Protestant background, the play itself features characters whose desire to dance and play-act place them at an oblique angle to 'straight' subjectivists, desires and affiliations. The struggles of Alan (one of the bricklayers) and Ruby to raise their only child, Darren, parallel Corey and Mo's descent into violence and suicide. Both decide that they will send Darren to the local integrated school. When Alan reports this to his workmates, Corey retorts that: "They'll probably get them doin' all sorts of gay stuff down there – rugby, drama" (30). However, the Abbey production Darren body popped and twirled in the

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[507]Jameson, *Op. Cit.*, p.11.

[508] Gregg, Enpublished Interview (2018).

background of many of the scenes. As the Wall was being built, he traversed its boundaries to play with children from the 'other side'. He even entered several scenes in a mixture of masculine and feminine clothing – an infectious presence that was irreducible to the gender norms around him.

Being a child of course gives Darren licence to behave indecorously, but his "potentiality and spontaneity" conveys precisely that sense of joy other characters have lost. Yuri, for example, relates that in Poland he wanted to be a professional dancer, a dream that was cut short by the failure of the country's economy following the end of the Cold War. He recalls the hope that attended the anti-Soviet protests, and how Agnieszka, then a baby, danced as the Berlin Wall was torn down. The parallels between Darren and his daughter are clear – the former's queerness mirrors Agnieszka's defiant hybrid identifications; as she declares in the first scene of the play: "I'm bilingual, I'm bisexual, I'm bifocal" (12). These threads are drawn together in the play's closing scene when she agrees to give Darren dance lessons:

> DARREN   I wanna learn to body-pop.
>
> AGNIESZKA Right on. So you can get all the girls.
>
> DARREN   Stuff that – I just wanna be COOL. Mo said boys
>   shouldn't dance.
>   (85)

This moment stages a backwards glance to the unfulfilled promise of the 1990s – the end of the Cold War and the Good Friday Agreement – in order to anticipate an alternative to normalisation. The thwarted hope of post-Soviet liberation allows Darren, and the audience, to recover the promise of a possible future in which capital and the sectarianism, misogyny and homophobia it breeds no longer monopolises the body's creative capacities.

Much like Quigley, then, Gregg depicts artistic performance as containing queer and anti-capitalist potentialities because its immodesty and unproductiveness contravenes the economisation of everyday life. *Shibboleth* builds upon TheatreofplucK's rendering of everyday life under post-Agreement normalisation as heteronormative by begging the question of who actually gets to be immodestly creative. Read in relation to

Gregg's remarks concerning her upbringing, what Darren desires is a luxury because it prioritises pretence over honest toil, artifice over plain-speaking, and leisure over work. He defies a situation in which visiting the Abbey Theatre, the MAC, and the Lyric was a middle-class pursuit. As a working class kid, to dance is to reject a situation in which such activities are extravagances and the preserve of the wealthy, a situation worsened by the squeezing of arts funding under economic austerity. At its base *Shibboleth* expresses outrage at a process of normalisation in which the immodesty of the rich is sustained by the moderation of the desires of the poor, for it is through this moderation that existing gender- and heteronormative structures are reproduced. It is a play that refuses to leave acting to the professionals, so to speak, by endearing the audience to the potentialities of those such as Darren who desire nothing more than to dance.

It would be all too easy to write off Darren as another example of hope being invested in a speculative product of the heteronormative family unit. Lee Edelman, for example, has rightly inveighed against the "reproductive futurist" model of politics in which the symbolic child functions as a placeholder for a future, the successes of which is measured by the inadequate standards of the present. He aligns queerness with negativity and the death drive and against the reproductive, future oriented, and heteronormative politics of hope.[509] But as Halbersam has noted, such a critique not only replaces one "unbearable" position (hetero-futurity, liberal developmental progress) with its dangerously apolitical opposite ("nihilism and negation").[510] *Shibboleth*, however, demonstrates how the child can be used to develop nonlinear and counter-normative trajectories. Darren seems to those around him a queer child precisely because he fails to limit himself to the heterosexual and sectarian norms of the adults. This sense of being badly behaved was further emphasised in the acting of Charlie Farrell, the child actor who played Darren in the Abbey production. Gregg recalls that: "Hamish and I were both THRILLED by the prospect of risk and chaos child actors might bring and indeed one of our boys was a naturally gifted actor who occasionally went off book to our great delight."[511] Farrell

[509] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (London & New York: Duke University Press, 2004).
[510] Halberstam, *Op. Cit.*, p.120
[511] Gregg, Unpublished Email Exchange (2018).

delivered his particularly un-childlike lines – for example, "You've got a big hairy hole Daddy" (27) – with a knowing relish that implied not only that he was aware of what the words meant, but that he also knew why the mostly adult audience would find them amusing. His acting (like much child acting) had a *gestic* quality to it: lines that are played for laughs and clumsily delivered became figurations of the disciplinary effects of excellence upon non adult actors. The non-adult's propensity to incompetence, inability to maintain professionalism, and desire to escape directorial tyranny, modelled the kind of indifference to adult conceptions of success and failure that, in the context of 2015 Northern Ireland, represented a narrowing of political ambitions, both on and off the stage.

Overall, *Shibboleth* did not advocate a peace process based upon reform from within the system of neoliberal capitalism. Using Brechtian techniques, Gregg's show mapped how this model of normalisation helped to preserve the very gender norms, practices of patriarchal oppression and defensive sectarian affiliations it promised to render obsolete. A peace process that reduces all, including the arts, to capital accumulation, impoverishes the transformative potentiality of human creative capacities, tying people to ever more restrictive conceptions of success, failure and normality. By going above and beyond the prevailing standards of theatrical efficiency and success, the play enacted the very immodest exuberance it identified as being thwarted under conditions of economic austerity in contemporary Northern Ireland. This exuberance was often interpreted in reviews as a kind of failure, but never without a degree of ambivalence. Writing in the *Irish Independent*, Sophie Gorman remarked that: "This is a play with so much creativity – too much. But it is a play that wants to make some serious points about the North today."[512] In his *Irish Times* review Peter Crawley went so far as to declare: "It doesn't all work […] But a restless, playful approach that resists coherent identity seems to be the point here, perhaps even the antidote."[513] The sense that *Shibboleth* resisted coherence accords with Ahmed's phenomenological conception of queer as the experience of disorientation that arises out of living at an oblique angle to conventional behaviour

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[512] Sophie Gorman, "A Singing Wall with Serious Points to Make", *Irish Independent*, 10 Oct. (2015), p. 20.

[513] Peter Crawley, "Examining the Walls that Run Through Northern Irish Heads", *Irish Times*, 12 Oct. (2015), p. 13.

and inhabitance. Just as Darren's presence disrupts the easy segregation between masculine and feminine, "themes and ussens", so the play as a whole unsettled the standards of theatrical restraint associated with the "well-made-play". By traversing standards of modesty, efficiency and productiveness, *Shibboleth* reminded the audience that normalisation limits human creative capacities and desires to a set of practices and identity positions that serve the interests of the political status quo in Northern Ireland. In the alliance between Agnieszka and Darren it offered a glimpse of an alternative in which what counts as a good life is expended beyond the gender- and heteronormative strictures of ethno-nationalism and neoliberalism.
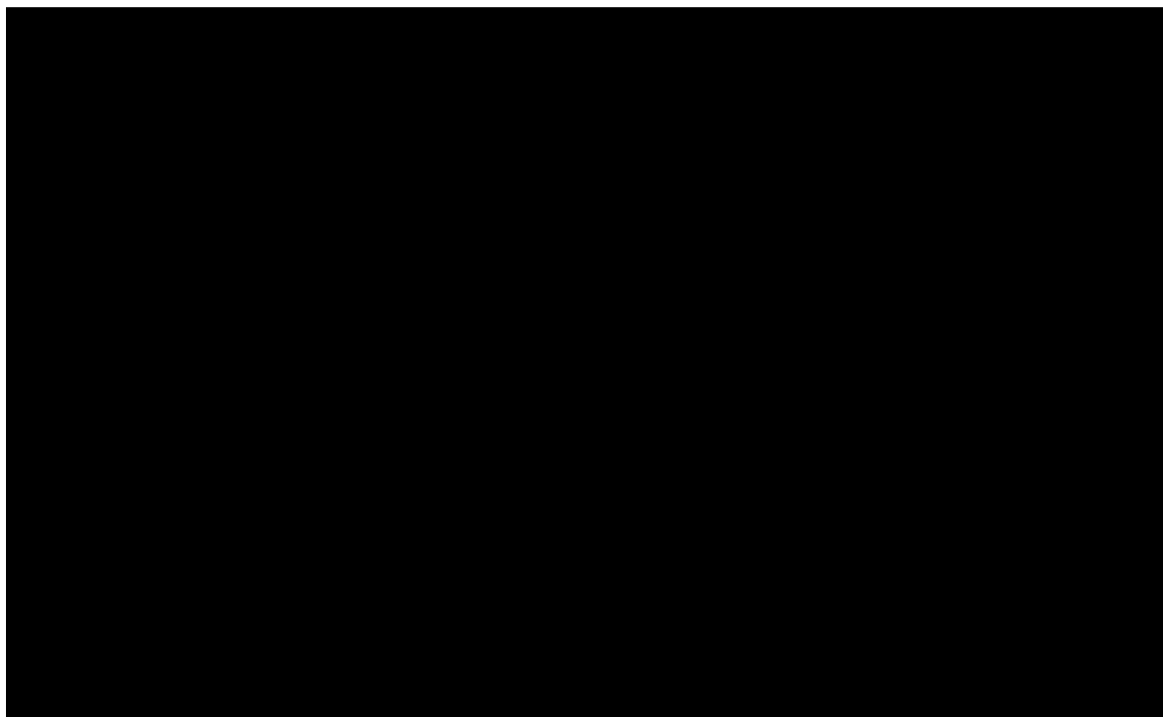
Conclusion: Love Your Queer Kids

What emerged across both *Tuesdays* and *Shibboleth* was a depiction of contemporary Belfast in which the normality was fought over and remade by competing interests and aspirations. Not only did both plays elaborate the difficulty of queer survival under such conditions, but they both used a queer, Brechtian optic to expose normalisation as an ongoing, unfinished and imperfect project, rather than an historical inevitability. TheatreofplucK's play focussed on the absences: that transgender people were the ultimate victims of economic injustice; that their victimisation stemmed from the displacement of increasingly deleterious social and economic conditions. For all its pessimism, however, *Shibboleth* marked a shift towards a reparative approach to these circumstances, as exemplified in Gregg's own faith in dignity of those working-class Protestant men who were stigmatised following the "flags protest". The analytic force of the play, like *Tuesdays*, emanated from its refusal to underwrite the success of the peace process. Its Brechtain dramaturgy made clear the interminable collusion between inequalities wrought by the neoliberal character of normalisation and nostalgia for the certainties of an ethno-nationalist past. For Gregg, the fact that peace walls and the luxury flats exist side-by-side in working-class areas of Belfast should be a source of outrage rather than liberal bafflement. But the power of *Shibboleth* emanated from that fact it maintained a sense of self-delighting exuberance in spite of neoliberalism's morbid social symptoms. Not only was such theatrical excess rare during a time when economic austerity had led to the prioritisation of the already-familiar and cost-efficient, it also constituted a broader refusal to limit political aspirations to a compromised conception of normality.

Despite the lack of political progress, however, LGBTQ+ people in Northern Ireland have begun to colonise spaces in Belfast previously considered exemplary of the successes of normalisation. In 2016 bright pink graffiti appeared in Donegal Street, which runs parallel to the MAC. Slogans included "LOVE YOUR TRANS KIDS", "LOVE YOUR QUEER KIDS" and "QUEERS REVOLT" (figure 5).[514] Revolt, of course, had a dual meaning: rebellion and disgust. The single statement contained the prospect that queer people might turn the DUP's talk of nausea and disgust into a source of political strength. As *Tuesdays* demonstrated, occupying normative identities could become means of question normativity as such, thereby allowing passers-by and the state to move beyond narrow and exclusionary conceptions of normality, familiarity and the familial. And as *Shibboleth* expressed, queer theatre and performance in Northern Ireland ultimately derives its political power – its capacity to turn people towards the pink and away from the orange and the green – from awkwardly occupying the spaces and places of normalisation, and doing so in an indecorous, immodest manner that disturbs the impoverished standards by which 'post-conflict' normality is measured.

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[514] Source:
https://web.archive.org/web/20190519173217/https:/twitter.com/ellenfromnowon/status/762696317797892096?lang=en-gb [retrieved 24/12/19].
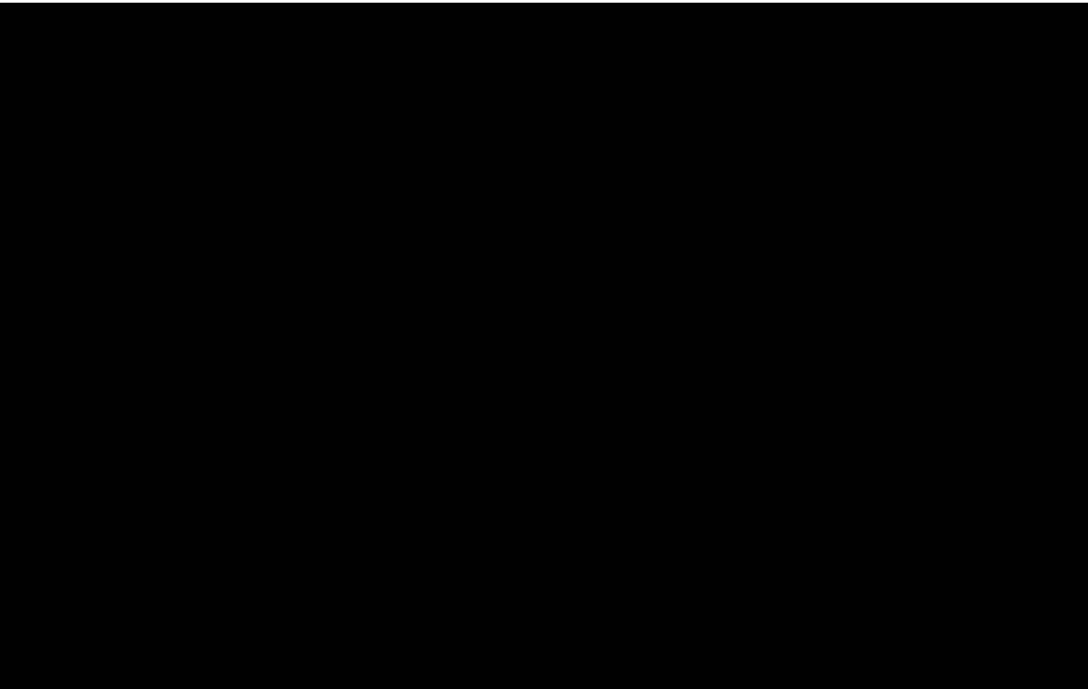
Illustrations

(Figure 1) David Ireland's *I Can't Forget About You* (Belfast: Lyric Theatre, 2013)

(Figure 2) *Tuesdays at Tesco's* (Armagh: Marketplace Theatre, 2014).

(Figure 3) Stacey Gregg, *Shibboleth* (Dublin: Abbey Theatre, 2015). Left to right: Yuri (Piotr Baumann); Agnieszka (Sophie Harkness); Alan (Andy Kelleher); Corey (Rhys Dunlop); Mo (Conor MacNeill); Stuarty(Vincent Higgins).

 (Figure 4) Cara Robinson's "Wall" comforts Mo.

(Figure 5) "Love your queer kids", Donegal Street in Belfast (2016).

Conclusion
Theatre, Performance,
Brexit and Beyond.

This is a thesis of many intersections and entanglements, featuring subjects whose performances of dissent from sectarian affiliations and conservative gender norms have called upon audiences to imagine a less violent and harsh Northern Irish society. Throughout it has endeavoured to map this struggle not only amongst marginalised men, women, queer and gender non-conforming people, but where it has intersected with class, and national identity, such that subjectivity is shown to be conditioned by shifting structures of power and patterns of vulnerability that are more complex than any identity regime can offer. Illuminating the critical possibilities that open up when inequalities of gender and class are thought together, and where economic violence is understood alongside sectarianism to be a fundamental feature of contemporary life, is perhaps the most important political gesture that these works collectively perform, for in doing so they have created a space to imagine alternatives, however modest or fleeting, to patriarchal ethno-nationalism and the embedded inequalities of neoliberalism.

This thesis finds theatre and performance that confirms Mark Phelan's assessment that "institutional theatre and performance as a cultural practice in Belfast is increasingly pressed into performing the peace, staging normality, signifying the success of the peace process in the North of Ireland."[515] Work by Joseph Crilly, the Kabosh Theatre Company, Abbie Spallen and David Ireland has conformed to the imperative to represent a liberal and cosmopolitan version of contemporary life in Northern Ireland. From this vantage point they narrate the present away from the conservative gender norms and sectarian politics of the past. We can see in their work a pattern of pluralisation and diversification that recognises a variety identities that complicate and cut across the "two communities" divide, from Crilly's homosexual Provo, to Spallen's successful female artist, and Ireland's post-sectarian, bourgeois family. Though the legacy of the 'Troubles' still looms large, taken

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[515] Mark Phelan & Des O'Rawe, "Introduction: Cities of Memory", *Post-Conflict Performance, Film and Visual Arts*, ed. Phelan & O'Rawe (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp.1-12 (p.6).

together such work signals a diminishing interest in reducing theatre's thematic scope to the Protestant, unionist and Catholic, nationalist divide.

Belfast's redeveloped cultural institutions have themselves been held up as monuments to the newfound cosmopolitanism of the region and the internationalism of its burgeoning cultural economy. The financial support of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and the MAC has provided the support for queer performance to move from peripheral LGBTQ+ venues into Belfast's most prestigious theatre spaces. Since receiving public funding in 2007, the Outburst Queer Arts Festival has broadened the space for experimental performance forms in the North; that it has featured plays by Stacey Gregg and TheatreofplucK alongside performers such as David Hoyle, John Waters and Nando Messias is indicative of a newfound internationalism that deserves further exploration elsewhere. This process of pluralisation has run in parallel with shifts in political positions and social attitudes towards a more progressive understanding of gender and sexuality.

However, this thesis also makes clear that the integration of theatre and performance into underwriting the peace has produced a new ambiguity around the politics of performance. As explored by academics such as Aaron Kelly, Colin Graham, Kellie O'Dowd and Richard Kirkland, normality has been narrowly defined in liberal and capitalist terms and set against a caricature of the region's past as divided along 'tribal', rather than political, lines. A liberal discourse of rights based upon the recognition of cultural differences has therefore taken priority efforts to redress those inequalities of dependency that structure identity in the first place. Despite the increasing recognition of women and LGBTQ+ people, both within the Assembly and in Northern Ireland's cultural institutions, it is women and LGBTQ+ people who continue to bear the brunt of economic austerity. The tendency to treat art as nothing more than an exercise in marketing Northern Ireland as a ripe for tourism and foreign investment in fact separating it from the everyday inequalities it often critiques. By dividing art from life, and conceptualising culture's contribution in economic rather than political terms, the very politicians that have failed to deliver meaningful improvements to the lived conditions of LGBTQ+ people, women and the poor are able to hold up the diversity of the arts sector as representing the region's modern, cosmopolitan and liberal aspirations. In this context, the plays of

Abbie Spallen, TheatreofplucK and Stacey Gregg stand out as self-conscious reflections upon the political consequences of institutional theatre's integration into processes of normalisation.

A consistent, but previously unidentified, tradition can be located within a variety of Northern Irish theatre and performance practices creatively engaged with gender and how its ongoing, performative construction and transformation is caught up in broader political developments, including: the renegotiation of sovereignty, militarism, nationalism; the reconceptualisation of remembrance practices; the reconsideration of modernisation and its political-economic underpinnings; and the re-evaluation of urban redevelopment and the place of the arts within it. Not only did the work of Gary Mitchell and Owen McCafferty trace the ways the peace process and Agreement provoked a crisis in those military masculinities cultivated to support the conflict, but they pointed to the political consequences of this development. In their plays, the possibility of class based, cross-sectarian solidarity gets blocked as nostalgia for a lost, uniform and fraternal state of unity prevents men from engaging with the North's messier, open-ended, and democratic heterogeneity. Likewise, while Abbie Spallen's work traces both the loosening of gender norms and the increased social mobility made available to women by Northern Ireland's emergence from conflict, it is haunted by a sense that empowerment is only available to the wealthy few and comes at the expense of solidarity with other working-class women. Across the period playwrights sought to demonstrate how the continuing prominence of identity regimes that fetishise independence deprives the Northern Irish political sphere of radical narratives of collective emancipation.

Much of the theatre and performance discussed in this thesis expresses the desire to celebrate the progress the peace process has allowed, while at the same time wanting to highlight the inequalities produced by the new political and economic dispensation. Read in relation to the materialist feminism of Nancy Fraser and Judith Butler's work on the gender politics of precarity, we can identify a broader shift, over time, away from a concern for sectarian violence to the impact of increasingly deleterious economic conditions upon the renegotiation of, and emancipation from, gender norms. Conditions of austerity, underemployment, and deindustrialisation are depicted throughout the period as leading to displaced forms of violence. Faced

with dim economic prospects, men in the plays of Mitchell, McCafferty, Spallen and Gregg attempt recuperate their failure to live up to the prevailing ideals of masculine self-sufficiency by acting out against women, queer people, effeminate men and ethnic others. In the fragile early years of the post-Agreement period, plays focussed on those with direct experience of the 'Troubles': former paramilitary men and redundant blue collar workers whose violent outbursts was metonymic of the political situation in which efforts to improve lives of women and working-class people seemed to be sacrificed to sectarian wrangling and party in-fighting. Following the advent of power-sharing between the DUP and Sinn Fein, however, it quickly became apparent that, despite being divided over cultural issues, Stormont was ecumenical in its worship of the free market. Paramilitary figures have since faded into the background of Northern Irish theatre and performance, as performance makers have turned to the failure of the peace to deliver benefits to the next generation. Though they depict Belfast as a more diverse place, with Polish migrant workers, transgender shoppers, and exuberantly gender non-conforming children, the city's property and retail boom has produced new, equally confining, and resolutely heteronormative gender regimes.

Increasingly conscious of the imperatives of the market, playwrights and artists have continued nevertheless to find performance a cultural practice in which to model, in microcosm, different ways of being together. One of the guiding aims of the thesis has been to highlight the affective and phenomenological work that experiences of vulnerability, loss and failure do, not only as symptoms of socio-economic upheaval or political exclusion, but also as strategies of resistance that open us to different forms of affiliation and solidarity. When violence happens to us against our will, it can be profoundly unsettling, privileging the safety and prosperity of certain subjects over others, and reminding us of the extent to which we are beholden to disciplinary gender norms that determine our success or failure as subjects. But many of the performances under discussion here show how such phenomena can encourage us to question those standards, and can provoke us "take stock of our interdependence" with those we previously thought distant from ourselves.[516] As articulated in Chapter 1, theatre can help us see and feel the interconnectedness and responsibility that

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[516] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life*, p.27.

patriarchal violence and masculine fantasies of autonomy seek to banish. And as Peter Quigley suggests, theatre's capacities to show subjectivity in the making reminds of the inevitability and necessity of failure. Failing to live up to the prescribed standard, or a desire move beyond it, can open us to new forms of subjectivity, attachment and ways of being together. This is the practice of epistemological vulnerability, suspended judgement, or simple wonderment so ably modelled by Johnston in *Composure*, Pauline in *Tuesdays* and Darren in *Shibboleth*. This thesis's contribution is to uncover precisely how these performances derive their power from such experiences; those moments where the emotional sense of loss and vertiginous moments of disorientation conspire to bring about relationships and networks of support that patriarchal and capitalist norms usually disallow.

Northern Irish theatre and performance is continually in search of new ways of living together, not divided by identity as it is currently conceived, but allied in the pursuit of more sustainable forms of co-existence. The work discussed in this thesis and the experiences they convey offer a guide, of sorts, on how to approach future moments of vulnerability and disorientation. It is in their call to boldly reckon with those ties of interdependency that at first seem restraining that we can locate the legacy of the 'Troubles' and its continuing relevance to contemporary politics. On the 23rd June 2016 the United Kingdom voted by majority to leave the European Union, with Northern Ireland and Scotland the only constituent nations to vote to remain. The Conservative led government's faltering attempts to negotiate a Brexit deal quickly revealed the incompatibility of English/British nationalism and the Agreement. In teasing out the interdependence of Northern Ireland's "two communities", and more broadly the socially differentiated nature of group identities, performance makers continue to remind us of the Agreement's irreconcilability with the desire "take back control".

The social discontent and sense of powerlessness fuelling the Brexit vote certainly contains dynamics recognisable from the plays and performances discussed here. For decades the English tabloid press campaigned against the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union using images of subordination and effeminacy familiar from the deeper history of British colonial rule in Ireland. As the negotiations have stalled media commentators have begun to speak of a "political

elite" whose intention to is "to emasculate the Brexit process and to lay themselves –
and by extension the UK – at the mercy of the Brussels bureaucracy".[517] Others
imagined the kind of hero Britain would need to enable the nation's dependence.
"Our timid leaders can learn from strongmen", declares one recent article in *The
Times*.[518] The very same gendered discourse of colonial nostalgia employed by
unionist leaders to resist the Good Friday Agreement in the 1990s and 2000s
underwrote the slogan used by the campaign to leave the EU: "Let's Make Britain
Great Again."

The notion of a nation diminished is in part a product of historical revision (or simply
amnesia) concerning the British Empire. Gordon Brown's statement in 2005 that
"the days of Britain having to apologise for its colonial history are over" was only the
latest iteration of a broader refusal, shared by subsequent Conservative governments,
to confront the living legacies of colonial capitalism and those racialised inequalities
that still persist to this day.[519] Six months prior to the referendum a poll found that
44 percent of those surveyed were proud of Britain's colonial history and 43 percent
regarded the Empire as a force for good.[520] The ideal of England (or Britain) as the
mother country, nurturing a multitude of dependent peoples, seems to remain
powerful in a context where the Conservative party and the right-wing press have
spent years blaming the scarcity wrought by austerity on the figure of the immigrant.
Brexit, with its key pledge of controlling inward migration, promises spiritual and
cultural redemption through the restoration of supposedly natural distinctions
between nations and peoples. However spurious, its appeal is as a palliative to the
conditions of political and economic subjection that came with the UK's neoliberal
turn.

In October 2017, as the Conservative Party negotiated the UK's withdrawal, a piece

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[517] Brendan O'Neill, "The Emasculation of Brexit", *Spiked*, 13 March (2019), https://www.spiked-online.com/2019/03/13/the-emasculation-of-brexit/ [retrieved 1/1/20].
[518] Clare Foges, "Our Timid Leaders Can Learn from Strongmen", *The Times*, 23 July (2018), https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/our-timid-leaders-can-learn-from-strongmen-3xhqhk0zw [retrieved 1/1/20].
[519] "'No Apology' for Colonial Past", *BBC News*, 15 January (2005), http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/4176805.stm [retrieved 1/1/20].
[520] Jon Stone, "British People Are Proud of Colonialism and the British Empire, Poll Finds", *Independent*, 19 January (2016), https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/british-people-are-proud-of-colonialism-and-the-british-empire-poll-finds-a6821206.html#commentsDiv [retrieved 15/05/20].

of dance theatre by Belfast-born dancer and choreographer Oona Doherty received its premier at the MAC. *Hard to Be Soft – A Belfast Prayer* can be read as offering a distinctively Northern Irish rejoinder to the resurgence of a dysfunctional English nationalism and its public expression in disciplining structures of effemiphobic repression and abjection. Spectators were confronted by a church-like atmosphere conjured by the smell of incense and a score consisting of choral elements interspersed with moments of aggressive dialogue. In the first of the piece's four episodes Doherty herself embodied the kind of marginalised young man Gregg depicted with such consideration in *Shibboleth* (figure 1). She cycled through aggressive poses that concord anger and frustration – fronting, spitting, flirting – before slowing down to face the audience, appealing to them with expressions of pain, worry and anxiety. Being pushed and pulled from either side of Ciaran Bagnall's cage-like set, her movements conveyed the sense that every effort to "take back control" rendered him more trapped, isolated and alone.

Episode II, performed by the Ajendance Youth Dance Company, traced the kind of feminist solidarity enacted in the *LABOUR* exhibition. It began with a voiceover in which a teenage girl extolled the role of make-up and flashy clothes in protecting her from misogyny, joblessness and emigration. Suddenly a group of young women claimed the stage – aggressively confronting the audience in a tightly choreographed war dance. Later in episode the dancers broke ranks to physically support one member of the group who had fallen, stricken with pain (figure 2). Here, as one reviewer put it, "women cast off oppression while men act out a troubled strut."[521] Unlike the women in Abbie Spallen's plays, it was precisely by levering their connectedness with one another that they carved out the agency that traditional gender roles deny them. Together they expressed a different way of responding to states of vulnerability, one in which minimising violence meant coming to terms with their need for the support of others.

In Episode III two middle-aged men (John Scott and Bryan Quinn) danced a duet in which they both aggressively tussled, pushing, pulling, and attempting to escape one

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[521] Seona Mac Reamoinn, "Women Cast of Oppression While Men Act Out a Troubled Strut", *Irish Times*, 24 May (2018), p.5.

another's grasp (figure 3). Doherty's performance score specifies that this struggle is rooted in "the memory of an argument" and a shared "machine schedule: the ongoing need to work": a hapless expression of the manner in which gendered sectarianism disguises class commonalities.[522] As the dance continued, however, they become exhausted, clinging onto one another, sharing, for a time, a single centre of gravity (figure 4). Just as in McCafferty's *Scenes*, this duet set out to show that the most potent assertions of independence are always at some level forms of interdependence; violence is merely a disavowal of this primary intimacy. The final episode of the piece repeated the choreography of the first, this time performed by male dancer Ryan O'Neill, thus reiterating the disastrous consequences of rejecting these occulted bonds. In the context of the second episode, however, the audience was left in no doubt which of the two was a preferable response.

Doherty's piece forms a useful coda to this thesis as it draws together many of the threads identified in performance work of the last twenty years: the return of feminist narratives of collective solidarity and resistance; the presentation of hyper-masculinity as political self-entrapment; and a heightened sense of the ties of interdependency that violence occludes. According to such interventions, the lesson of the 'Troubles' may well be that banishing those perceived to be threatening is neither possible nor desirable; that one cannot assert control, in an absolute sense, over one's enemies or oneself. It is a lesson all the more important in the context of a resurgent English nationalism intent on turning to the past and severing its multilateral relations. Such political developments affirm Kiberd's 1998 remark, written in the context of the Agreement, "that England itself might be the most deeply penetrated of all British colonies."[523] Rather than reaching for a strong-armed custodian to restore order and identity, perhaps we can come to terms with being out of control amidst great social change, so that we might learn to live beside one another, but not as one. This does not mean the complete elimination of vulnerability in some future utopia, but instead demands that we embrace the difficulty of the task, and carve out more inclusive and egalitarian spaces of belonging.

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[522] Oona Doherty, Unpublished Performance Score (2017).
[523] Kiberd, *Irish Classics*, p.629.

Illustrations

(Figure 1) Oona Doherty, *Hard to Be Soft − A Belfast Prayer* (Belfast: the MAC, 2017).

(Figure 2) The Adjendance Youth Dance Company in *Hard to Be Soft*.

(Figure 3) John Scott and Brian Quinn in Episode III of *Hard to be Soft*.

(Figure 4) The two dancers share a centre of gravity.

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