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INTRODUCTION

THE REST IS HISTORY

CHRISTOPHER COLLINS AND MARY P. CAULFIELD

If the past is a foreign country then it has been colonised. This is a book about remembering events of past time that are located in the gaps and the fissures of the architecture of Ireland's historical consciousness. The fertile ground that this book seeks to find is the historicisation of memory so that it can pluralise Ireland's historical imagination. This methodology of pluralisation is very much dependent upon confronting memory and history with its double: forgetting. In highlighting memories and histories that resist the spotlight of homogenous, progressive, historical narratives, the essays in this book use memory and history to pluralise the historical consciousness of theatre and performance in Ireland. Winners write history. This is a book about the losers of history.

Memory and history may be opposed but this book seeks to find fertile ground between memory and history. It is important to consider, then, how memory operates in relation to history. Memory is concerned with the present tense. It is not interested in being written into a narrative because those that remember valorise it. History is concerned with the past tense; it situates memory in historical context. However, memory is not simply history's Other. Performance in Ireland is continually marked by the performativity of memory and, in reception, collective memory becomes collective history. As Emilie Pine points out, 'Irish culture presents the past in ways in ways that are accessible and salient to an audience with no direct or lived experience of the past which is being represented.'¹ There is a relationship of productive exchange between memory and history in Irish theatre and performance. Consequently, the essays in this book manipulate memory into being represented by history and they also manipulate history into being represented by memory.

Writing in June 2012, Fintan O'Toole wondered why, 'if Ireland has changed so much, why hasn't theatre kept pace?' O'Toole concluded that 'Irish theatre is deeply conservative'.² It could be argued that the history of Irish theatre and performance is equally conservative. Not because, as O'Toole points out, the style and the form of theatre and performance in Ireland isn't keeping with

¹ Emilie Pine, *The Politics of Irish Memory: Performing Remembrance in Contemporary Irish Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 3.

² Fintan O'Toole, 'If Ireland has changed so much, why hasn't theatre kept pace?' *Irish Times*, 30 June, 2012, 46.

the times – because it is – but rather as we seek to demonstrate here, the conservative nature of Irish theatre is due to its conservative historical narrative. In part this is a problem with pedagogical methodologies at secondary and tertiary level; students are spoon-fed hackneyed history that summons a cyclical historical iterability. But there is also something much more essential than this: the desire for human beings to consistently buy into cultural industry of the historical imagination without pausing to consider how collective memory collides and colludes with the historical consciousness of Irish performance; as Richard Terdiman has suggested, ‘even memory has a history’ and it is ‘how a culture performs and sustains this recollection [that] is distinctive and diagnostic’.³ In finding the fertile ground between history and memory, all of the essays collected here seek to liberate the history of Irish performance from its conservative historical consciousness.

Ireland’s enfranchisement under the logic of modernity is a continual point of consideration in this book because, as Paul Connerton has argued, ‘modernity has a particular problem with *forgetting*’.⁴ Irish modernity has a particular problem with amnesia that is, a partial loss of memory or even worse, a total loss of memory. However, this postulation alone does not make the amnesia that characterises Irish modernity particularly Irish. What is peculiar to Ireland’s relationship to modernity, memory and history is the pluralisation of the historical consciousness. Capitalism articulates modernity and The Great Famine (1845-9) propelled Ireland into a modernity articulated by the institutional logic of capitalism. In doing so, the historical consciousness of Gaelic Ireland became collective memory. Irish theatre-makers directly responded to the historical disjuncture that arose from an abrupt political, social and cultural modernisation articulated by capitalism’s material conditions by using performance to pluralise the historical consciousness. Memory became the consciousness of the collective that stood outside of historical time. In short, the memory of Gaelic, pre-Famine Ireland did not disappear because performance processes memorialised it.

The history of modern Irish theatre and performance is predicated on memory, rather than history. Pierre Nora’s discussion of *lieux de mémoire*, sites ‘in which a residual sense of continuity remains’, and *milleu de mémoire*, ‘settings in which memory is a real part of everyday existence’⁵ is one way of considering Ireland’s structural relationship with modernity as a condition of being haunted by the affects of amnesia. In its genesis modern Irish theatre can be understood as praxis of *lieux/milleu de mémoire*. Not only did certain playwrights represent residual cultural memories of Gaelic Ireland as praxis of pre-modern beliefs, (for example, *caoineadh* in J.M. Synge’s *Riders to the Sea* [1904]), but these memories were given material presence through the restoration of behaviour in performance. At the dawn of modernity theatres in Ireland were *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) and performance was *milleu de mémoire* (environments of memory) because memory negated the processes of forgetting that is concomitant with the amnesia summoned by

³ Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (New York: Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 3.

⁴ Paul Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1. Emphasis in original.

⁵ Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, Volume I, *Conflicts and Divisions*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 1.

modernity. However, the whole point of capitalist modernity is that its history is one of selective remembrance because it is ruthlessly progressive. As Fintan Walsh has suggested, with respect to contemporary Irish theatre practices: 'one of the criticisms of Irish people often heard during the boom years was that we suffered from collective amnesia about the past, in the giddy rush to get ahead'.⁶ At this juncture, Irish theatre and performance at the dawn of capitalist modernity chose to expose modernity's peculiar problem with forgetting by giving representation to those memories that were partially or totally lost to the historical consciousness. The history of modern Irish theatre and performance, then, is predicated on memory, rather than history. This dialectic of memory and history continually played out across Ireland's capitalist transition from modernity to postmodernity is a point of return for the essays in this book. Our concern, then, is primarily temporal. How does theatre and performance in Ireland engage with time? And why is it that 'that old common arbitrator Time' forgets certain performances?⁷

ONCE UPON A TIME...

Memory and history are temporal phenomena but they interact with time in two very different ways. Since Albert Einstein's Theory of Relativity, it has become increasingly important to postulate multiple temporal schemas. Time is not absolute. Spacetime can only be relatively measured in relation to the motion of the measurer and the motion of measurable. From a historiographical perspective, the temporality of the past is unstable because the historian is always shifting in his/her perception. History is the memorilisation of past time but memory, on the other hand, is perception of past time and it resists processes of memorilisation. The past is marked by time but, in one sense, the past is never finished because it is always present. If the past is continually present as memory then it is equally important to identify those histories that have been forgotten by the homogeneity of progressive historicism. Walter Benjamin has argued that 'history is not the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now'.⁸ But rarely is this historical/cultural materialist understanding of history accepted by the hegemony of progressive historical time. According to Benjamin, progressive historicism is empty because it is a model of historical time that is essentially bottomless, since historical event after historical event can be stacked into it; this articulation of historical time is unaffected by the horror of history, accounting for progressive historicism's homogeneity. It is the historian's task to 'brush history against the grain'⁹ leaving others to 'be drained by the whore called "Once upon a time" in historicism's bordello'. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that memory is just as highly selective as historical narratives. From this perspective, forgotten histories are just as powerful as collective memories because they are anathema to the progressivism of historical time. It is true

⁶ Fintan Walsh, "The Power of the Powerless: Theatre in Turbulent Times", in *That Was Us: Contemporary Irish Theatre and Performance*, ed. Fintan Walsh (London: Oberon Books, 2013), 12-13. Walsh's reference to the 'boom years' is an index for Ireland's so-called Celtic Tiger economy, circa 1994-2008.

⁷ William Shakespeare, *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, eds. John Jowett, William Montgomery, Gary Taylor and Stanley Wells (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 769.

⁸ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zorn and ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1999), 252-53.

⁹ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zorn, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1999), 248.

that all history is predicated upon the identification of the trace, but a forgotten history is an identification of the trace that resists the homogeneity of time.

Subterranean history lies cheek-by-jowl with collective memory because they are the aporetics of historical time. Time is the essence of all things, but as Martin Heidegger has suggested, our being-in-time (*Dasien*) is relative to spacetime. Just as a clock that is buried underground moves slower because it is closer to the earth's gravitational pull, so too do those histories and memories that remain buried move in an alternative temporality; it is interesting to postulate how memory and history anachronistically affects the present when they are restored as behaviour in performance. It is not that the received history of Irish performance is unstable. But it does reflect the commodification of time as a measure of linear productivity that is just as imaginary in its authenticity as the narrative of fiction. It is time for an alternative temporality of Irish performance that is commensurate with the relativity of space's relationship to time. It is time that the space and place of the archive is pluralised. In short, it is time for alternative endings in the fiction of Irish performance history to recreate memories of the future past. Some of the essays presented here consider neglected histories and minority pasts. Others take memory and remembrance as their point of concern. As a collective whole, all of the essays are testimonies to the past as either history or memory and it is by means of performance that memory and history are able to productively interchange in order to facilitate the *épisteme* of history in Ireland. In order to reflect the anachronism that memory and history summon, the chapters in this book are not arranged chronologically. Nevertheless, the chapters are bracketed by two major concerns: legacy and heritage and recollection and remembrance.

LEGACY AND HERITAGE

[ESSAYS IN THE BOOK PRIMARILY ABOUT FORGOTTEN HISTORY RATHER THAN FORGOTTEN MEMORY.]

POSSIBLY INTRODUCE: KERR, JOHNSON, MURPHY, ARRINGTON, GREENWOOD, SACK, O'BRIEN]

The first seven essays in this book are thematically linked by their consideration of legacy and heritage in relation to performance in Ireland. The history of Irish theatre and performance is conservative because it is a symbolic site of legacy and heritage **[introduce Johnson, Arrington, Sack].**

Often where there is performativity of legacy and heritage there is a significant temporal disjuncture: nostalgia. Svetlana Boym considers nostalgia to be 'the ache of temporal distance and displacement' that can be restorative or reflective. Restorative nostalgia authorises the memory of home (*nóstos*) whereas reflective nostalgia seeks to authorise the processes of longing (*álgos*), rather than the memory of home. **[introduce greenwood, murphy, o'brien and kerr,]**

RECOLLECTION AND REMEMBRANCE

**[ESSAYS IN THE BOOK PRIMARILY ABOUT MEMORY, RATHER THAN FORGOTTEN HISTORY. POSSIBLY
INTRODUCE: LECOSSOIS, JAROS, PINE, COLLINS, CAULFIELD,]**

[I'll introduce myself] As Collins suggests, the phenomenology of forgetting is an alternative way of considering the memories of performance and the performance of memory because it is from the threat of forgetting that memory is rendered.

CONCLUSION

**[NOT AN ACTUAL SUBTITLE BUT A WAY OF SEPARATING THE OTHER POINTS MADE IN THIS INTRO
FROM THE CONCLUSION]**

If, as Joseph Roach has suggested, 'one important strategy of performance research today is to juxtapose living memory as restored behavior against a historical archive or scripted records'¹⁰ then these essays should be considered as performances in and of themselves that collide and collude with Irish memory and its imagination of historical time.

As Paul Ricoeur has argued:

the interweaving of history and fiction in the refiguration of time rests, in the final analysis, upon this reciprocal overlapping, the quasi-historical moment of fiction changing places with the quasi-fictive moment of history. In this interweaving, this reciprocal overlapping, this exchange of places, originates what is commonly called human time, where the sanding-for the past in history is united with the imaginative variations of fiction, against the background of the aporias of the phenomenology of time.¹¹

¹⁰ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 11.

¹¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 3, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988), 192.