Seamus Heaney once described the ‘sense of place’ generated by the early Abbey Theatre as the ‘imaginative protein’ of later Irish writing. Drawing on theorists of space such as Henri Lefebvre and Yi-Fu Tuan, Mapping Irish Theatre argues that theatre is ‘a machine for making place from space’. Concentrating on Irish theatre, the book investigates how this Irish ‘sense of place’ was both produced by, and produced, the remarkable work of the Irish Revival, before considering what happens when this spatial formation begins to fade. Exploring more recent site-specific and place-specific theatre alongside canonical works of Irish theatre by playwrights including J. M. Synge, Samuel Beckett and Brian Friel, the study proposes an original theory of theatrical space and theatrical identification, whose application extends beyond Irish theatre, and will be useful for all theatre scholars.

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MAPPING IRISH THEATRE

Theories of Space and Place

CHRIS MORASH and SHAUN RICHARDS
To Ann and Lucette
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MAPS

1 Dates on which theatres first opened in Irish towns and cities, 1635–1832. The gradual and irregular spread of theatre culture outwards from Dublin in the eighteenth century can be traced in the pattern of theatre building. This period established the basic patterns of Irish theatre geography that persisted into the nineteenth century. Map by Justin Gleeson, All-Ireland Research Observatory/NIRSA

2 A contemporary geography of Irish theatre: the locations of theatre venues in Ireland as of 2013 by date of opening, showing the shift in theatrical geography since 1980; only 9 venues pre-date 1980; 12 date from 1980–9; 30 from 1990–9; 32 from 2000–7; and 13 have been built since the beginning of the economic crisis in 2008. Map by Justin Gleeson, All-Ireland Research Observatory/NIRSA

3 Central Dublin, showing locations of key theatres, and the public buildings in proximity to the Molesworth Hall, where the Irish National Theatre Society performed in 1903. The map also shows early twenty-first-century theatrical sites, including the locations of the LAB arts centre and Bord Gáis Energy Theatre. Map by Justin Gleeson, All-Ireland Research Observatory/NIRSA

FIGURES

1 Anne Ubersfeld’s distinction between the zone-A of the onstage, and the zone non-A of the offstage; adapted from L’école du spectateur: Lire le théâtre 2 (1981)

2 A typical Irish peasant realist box set from the late 1920s – almost. In many respects this resembles the stage spaces that
regularly faced Abbey audiences until the early 1960s. This play – T. C. Murray’s *The Blind Wolf* (1928) – happens to be set in Hungary, a detail that did not make the standard peasant kitchen set any less useful. Photo courtesy of Abbey Theatre Archives (National Theatre Society Ltd)

3 Tanya Moiseiwitsch’s expressionist design for Louis D’Alton’s *The Man in the Cloak* (1937) was one of more than fifty sets she created for the Abbey in the 1930s, challenging the notion that Abbey stages at the time were an unrelieved succession of realist box sets. Photo courtesy of Abbey Theatre Archives (National Theatre Society Ltd)

4 ‘Steps before the Palace of King Guaire at Gort’. Yeats’s *The King’s Threshold* (1903) hinges on an opposition between the palace and the steps. However, as this production photograph from the 1903 production in the Molesworth Hall shows, the ability to produce such spatial contrasts was constrained by the available stage space and machinery. Photo courtesy of Abbey Theatre Archives (National Theatre Society Ltd)

5 ‘Shelves of canned goods, mostly peas …’ The set of the 2011 production of Martin McDonagh’s *The Cripple of Inishmaan* (1996) looks to some extent like a classic realist set; however, the exaggeration of some details – such as the rows and rows of tinned peas – suggests a more parodic relationship to realism. Photo courtesy of Robert Day

6 ‘It’s dangerous ‘round here.’ In *World’s End Lane* (2010) and *The Boys of Foley Street* (2012), site-specific works by ANU Productions, the audience find themselves not only on the streets of Dublin, but in more than usually close proximity to the actors. This photograph from *The Boys of Foley Street*, featuring Thomas Reilly. Photo courtesy of ANU Productions

### TABLE

1 The varieties of temporal theatrical identification
Acknowledgements

One evening in Neachtain’s pub, Galway, in 2001 we decided it would be a good idea to write a book together out of our shared interest in Irish theatre and sense that something was missing in the current critical approaches. In 2010 we presented our first joint presentation of papers on space and place in Irish theatre at the International Association for the Study of Irish Literatures (IASIL) conference at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth. In the best part of a decade between having the idea and determining its actual focus, we not only turned a possibility into a never less than stimulating book project, but were progressively and continuously indebted to the unstinting support of a large number of people whose contribution, especially over the final period of its composition, has been inestimable.

In particular we wish to acknowledge the academic judgement and encyclopedic knowledge of Irish theatre of Nicholas Grene who refined our thinking in the book’s later stages, and Mary O’Byrne who read the manuscript with both speed and precision and made good what we had lost the power to see.

Friends in the global network that makes up Irish theatre studies provided the opportunity to test out our ideas in seminars and symposia and we particularly acknowledge the support of Hiroko Mikami and colleagues at Waseda University, Tokyo; Cathy Leeney and Eamonn Jordan at University College Dublin; Laura Izzara, Beatriz Kopschitz Bastos and Munira Mutran at the University of São Paulo; David Grant and Anna McMullen in Queen’s University, Belfast; Katharina Rennhak at the University of Wuppertal; Michael Brown at the University of Aberdeen; and our colleagues in IASIL. Nicholas Grene and Patrick Lonergan of the Irish Theatre Diaspora provided an important occasion to road-test some of the ideas in the congenial setting of a conference in NUI Galway; and Patrick extended a similar invitation for the Synge Summer School in 2011. Mary Trotter provided an opportunity to present
Acknowledgements

an aspect of this work at the American Conference for Irish Studies conference in Madison, Wisconsin, in 2010, in the course of which it was possible to meet one of the project’s guiding lights, Yi-Fu Tuan.

Many people gave generously of their time in providing us with material, contacts and ideas and we wish to thank specifically Gavin Quinn of Pan Pan Theatre, Louise Lowe and Owen Boss of ANU Productions, Claire Connolly, Nessa Cronin, Mairead Delaney, David Grant, Lionel Pilkington, Sinead McPhillips, Domingos Nunez, Ray Ryan, Brian Singleton, Shelley Troupe, the staff of the National Library of Ireland, and Justin Gleeson of the National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis, who provided the maps. Research Fellowships for Shaun Richards at the Moore Institute, NUI Galway and the Long Room Hub, Trinity College Dublin granted time to use archives and libraries, and we are grateful for their support. We would also like to thank our colleagues in our respective institutions for helping to make the time for this book to be written. And, once again, Cambridge University Press has shown praiseworthy commitment to the highest values of academic publishing, for which we would like to thank Victoria Cooper and Rebecca Taylor. Finally, we dedicate this book to Ann and Lucette, who are at the heart of our respective senses of place.