Introduction

In 2005 the geographer David Harvey commented on what he termed 'the widespread appropriation of spatial metaphors' as part of 'an intense debate on the role of space in social, cultural and literary theory'.[1] The challenge of this 'spatial turn' was experienced with particular force in drama and theatre studies where space was, as Joanne Tompkins noted, 'the fundamental element of theatre that is perhaps most consistently overlooked'.[2] From pioneering work such as Marvin Carlson's *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture* (1986) and Una Chaudhuri's *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (1995) to the recent collection *Performance and the Politics of Space* (2012),[3] it has been clear that an engagement with the spatial dynamics of theatre as place, performance and play was under way alongside the full renaissance of the study of space across the social sciences in the English-speaking world. This 'spatial turn' is beginning to make possible the appropriation and development of a conceptual vocabulary through which theatrical and dramatic space can be examined, bringing into the framework of analysis translations of foundational work such as Michel Foucault's 'Des espaces autres' (1967) in 1986[4] and Henri Lefebvre's *La production de l'espace* (1974) in 1991.[5] These have been invaluable in contributing to an awareness of the social production and cultural meaning of space even if, with the exception of some fleeting comments by Lefebvre, they seldom engaged directly with theatre. At the same time, however, the broadly structuralist Parisian intellectual climate that produced Lefebvre and Foucault also impacted directly on theatre criticism, specifically through the work of Anne Ubersfeld whose *Lire le théâtre* (1977) was translated in 1999.[6]

In mapping Irish theatre we draw on such theoreticians as the coordinates by which we explore space as it is inscribed in and produced by plays, places and histories of performance, and the culture in which they exist. At the same time, theatre space has always been the preserve of practitioners, and in the twentieth century it was an area of increasing experimentation from the

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work of Oskar Schlemmer at the Bauhaus in Berlin during the 1920s to Peter Brook's 'Theatre of Cruelty' workshops at the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1964. Brook's famous declaration 'I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage'[7] was the basis for a three-month journey to Africa in 1972 where he put his theories into rigorous practice. 'We got out, unrolled our carpet, sat down, and an audience assembled in no time.' For Brook, the carpet was made meaningful as a place of performance when somebody took off a pair of dusty boots and put them on the carpet: 'first of all there was the empty carpet – there was nothing – then a concrete object . . . Through the boots a relationship was established with the audience.'[8]

Brook's radical experiments had been anticipated half a century earlier by W. B. Yeats who, rejecting the conventions of the theatre of his day as forcefully as Brook, realised that his theatre 'must be the ancient theatre that can be made by unrolling a carpet or marking out a place with a stick, or setting a screen against a wall'.[9] Making a case for Yeats as 'a major figure in early twentieth-century avant-garde theatre',[10] Michael McAteer suggests that we can begin to consider Yeats in the context of work such as Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* (1896), a play that Yeats saw on its legendary opening night in Paris, when the frame of the proscenium arch was effectively shattered by its infamous opening line: 'Merdre.' In the proscenium arch theatre, the audience looks at a stage world from the vantage point of a darkened and inviolate auditorium. As Bruce A. McConachie argues, this was 'a means of transforming the assumptions of Cartesian philosophy into theatre architecture and viewing experience' with the result that 'people believed they could gaze objectively at passive objects'.[11] Yeats's famous reaction to *Ubu* – 'What more is possible? After us the savage god' – was a prophetic realisation that this stable world was ending, in society as much as in the theatre. 'Feeling bound to support the most spirited party,' he wrote, 'we shouted for the play, but that night at the Hôtel Corneille I was very sad, for comedy, objectivity, has displayed its growing power once more.'[12] His subsequent commitment was to the culturally radical but increasingly theatrically conservative cause of the Abbey, but as is clear from his 'Open Letter' of 1919 to Lady Gregory, the success it achieved with its predominantly realist peasant plays had been for him 'a discouragement and a defeat'.[13] Yeats's presence at the premiere of *Ubu* locates him at a crossroads in European theatre, when choices were being made between a spatial relationship in which the boundary between the stage and auditorium was becoming ever more fluid, flowing finally into the streets beyond, and one in which the space of society was contained within the representational frame of the stage.

The road not taken by Yeats led from Jarry to Antonin Artaud, whose Theatre Alfred Jarry anticipated 'a new notion of space utilised on all possible levels and in all degrees of perspective in depth and height',[14] on to Peter Brook, whose 'Theatre of Cruelty' was named in homage to Artaud, and from Brook to attempts to achieve Artaudian intensity in a range of performance practices, not least in site-specific works. This trajectory may seem remote from the mainstream of most twentieth-century Irish drama, which has largely held to the spatial integrity of the proscenium arch framing some version of a realist set. However, it is precisely by reading this tradition against the grain, by concentrating on the spaces of Irish theatre rather than on its words or characters, that we can begin to rethink Irish theatre in the light of the theatre theorists and philosophers who not so much chose to problematise space, but who found that they were no longer able to treat space as something that was simply 'there'.

The development of European theatre after Jarry is well documented, but its relevance to our project lies in its impact on thinkers whose concepts, while not always concerned directly with theatre, were profoundly spatial. For Tompkins, Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* is 'the foundational text' in the study of space,[15] while for Chaudhuri he is one from whom 'a geography of theater' has taken 'its inspiration'.[16] Lefebvre may be, as Michal Kobialka claims, 'generally credited with altering the course of spatial studies',[17] but it is not often remembered that Lefebvre's own thought and practice had roots in performance art in so far as he was connected with the Situationist International. As he recalled in 1997, 'I knew them very well. I was close friends with them. The friendship lasted from 1957 to 1961 or '62, which is to say about five years.'[18] Their 'construction of situations', which were opposed to the passive society of the spectacle, emerged from the cross-pollination of avant-garde groups in post-World War Two Europe and gained notoriety as an influence on the Parisian *événements* of May 1968. As Martin Puchner summarises their stance, 'they wanted actively to destroy the theatre and replace it with something new'. This was something they shared with Artaud, who was one of the 'major axes along which the Situationists' struggle with and against the theatre occurred'.[19] This line of association and influence linking Jarry, Artaud, the Situationists and Peter Brook locates Lefebvre, one of the foundational thinkers in our analysis, within a trajectory whose ideas were both theatrical and profoundly spatial.

In what follows, we will take our bearings from work including Lefebvre's theory of a 'spatial triad' and Foucault's idea of 'heterotopias', but also the historian Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* (places of

memory), and the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan's distinction between space and place. All of these bodies of theory contribute to a model for understanding the physical and cultural spaces occupied by theatre in a society, enabling an analysis of the ways in which the theatre is not simply shaped by existing spatial formations, but itself produces space. In this respect, when Anne Ubersfeld writes that 'the theatre is space',[20] we can understand her assertion in the context of a complex web of relations that flow both ways between stage space and social spaces.

Our mapping of Irish theatre examines this relationship between a society and its theatre through an analysis whose development is both thematic and chronological, moving from the national validation of the set of the peasant cottage in the early twentieth century through to site-specific performances in the opening decades of the twenty-first. In the first two chapters, 'Making space' and 'Staging place', we introduce the spatial theories and cultural concepts on which we draw throughout, a diverse but coherent range of positions embracing elements drawn from the Marxist materialism of Lefebvre to Tuan's experiential humanism, as well as aspects of phenomenology, Ubersfeld's theatrical structuralism, and performance theory more generally. We also outline the set of socio-cultural beliefs and assumptions underpinning the development of the metonymic representation of the nation through a set which increasingly owed more to conceptions of a national ideal than to its social realities. Against this wide-ranging and historically informed backdrop we set a series of chapters which chart the establishment of an Irish sense of stage space – and its various vicissitudes – taking our bearings from a selection of landmark plays and performances, working towards a perspective in which they, and formally similar works, can be seen in new configurations when subjected to a theorised spatial analysis.

Accordingly, Chapter 3, 'Spaces of modernism and modernity', examines the stresses to which the 'certain' stage space of realism was subjected in the maelstrom of modernity, taking in the spatial experiments at the Gate Theatre, and focusing in particular on Yeats's rejection of the realist stage space and Samuel Beckett's dramas set in the ruins of that once confidently inhabited set. Building on this engagement, chapters 4 and 5, 'The calamity of yesterday' and 'The fluorescence of place', move into a consideration of the specifics of theatrical time and space as they are affected by the impact on the Irish sense of place of the collapse of what Lefebvre calls 'l'espace de "bons sens"'. The plays covered in these two chapters range from Synge to Beckett, Yeats to Friel, and the chapters include discussion of contemporary playwrights such as Martin

McDonagh and Sebastian Barry to illuminate understanding of the crucial
shifts in Irish theatrical space as both set and theme.

Chapter 6, 'Theatre of the world', extends our analysis into the global
space of international tours, particularly that of *Playboy of the Western
World*, in productions across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries
ranging from New York to Beijing. Chapter 7, 'Theatre of the street',
closes our study by engaging with site-specific productions which return to
the theatre of the local and, as in the work of Louise Lowe and ANU, do so
within the Dublin streets adjacent to the Abbey – a spatial continuity and
theatrical disparity which serves to underline the complex narrative of the
Irish sense of place and its multiple realisations and productions in
theatrical space.

What follows is part of a self-consciously spatial turn in Irish Studies,
evidence of which can be found by going no further than the titles of
books such as Gerry Smyth's *Space and the Irish Cultural Imagination*
(2001), the edited collections *Ireland in Proximity: History, Gender, Space*
(1999) and *Ireland: Space, Text, Time* (2005), and, within Irish theatre
studies, implicitly in Patrick Lonergan's influential *Theatre and Globaliza-
tion* (2009) and more recently in Helen Heusner Lojek's *The Spaces of Irish
Drama* (2011).[21] However we have a more ambitious territory to map as we
have been working towards a theory of theatre space. From the outset, we
were conscious of resisting the temptation widespread among theatre
theorists: to produce a unified, universalist theory based on what must
necessarily be a selective and culturally limited experience of theatre
performance. The theatre event insists upon its own particularity at every
level. By situating our speculations in the specificities of Irish theatre, and
of Irish theatre culture, we are acknowledging from the outset that our
theoretical position is embedded in a theatre practice with its own history
and assumptions. At the same time, we harbour the hope that the theoret-
ical approach we have taken will allow others to navigate the space of
theatres in different places using a conceptual map on which we have tried
to sketch the contours of a newly unfamiliar shoreline.

Making space

> I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across
> this empty space while someone else is watching him, and this is all
> that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged.[1]

To begin with the word: *theatre*, from the Greek *theatron* (θέατρον), means
'the seeing place' and 'at the very basis of the phenomenon of theatre as it
is found in a wide variety of cultures is the assumption of a particular
spatial configuration suggested by the word *theatre* itself – a place where
one sees'.[2] David Wiles puts it succinctly when he writes: 'Theatre is pre-
eminently a spatial medium, for it can dispense with language on occasion
but never with space.'[3] However, Henri Lefebvre begins *The Production of
Space* with a warning: 'Not so many years ago the word "space" had a
strictly geometrical meaning: the idea it evoked was simply that of an
empty area.'[4] The commonsense notion that space was simply an 'empty
area' – the notion that Lefebvre challenged – has begun to have a particular
resonance for theorists of theatre, in that it echoes Peter Brook's influential
definition. Since its publication in 1968, Brook's opening to *The Empty
Space* has often been taken to encapsulate the fundamental essentials of
dramatic performance. However, as spatial theory has developed over the
subsequent decades in the work of figures such as Lefebvre, Yi-Fu Tuan,
Edward Soja, Doreen Massey, and others, the concept of an empty space
has become increasingly untenable. 'Theatre only "in all innocence" can
occur in an empty space,' as Alan Read puts it.[5]

Between the recognition that theatre is fundamentally a spatial form,
and the parallel recognition that space can no longer be treated as an empty
receptacle, it is time to begin thinking spatially about Irish theatre. In the
early 1990s, Read could still observe that 'the theatre image's presence in
time and space has, until recent work, been neglected'.[6] If that balance has
been redressed elsewhere, in an Irish theatre in which the playwright
continues to be the dominant artist, analysis – and the theorisation of that

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analysis – still finds it difficult to go beyond the word. From the outset, this raises a problem. 'Any search for space in literary texts will find it everywhere and in every guise,' cautions Lefebvre, 'enclosed, described, projected, dreamt of, speculated about'.[7] He goes on to argue that in beginning to think spatially, we run the danger of confusing very different forms of space, and hence he insists that we need to disentangle and demystify space by distinguishing among three basic concepts: space as physical, space as mental (including logical and formal abstractions), and space as social.[8] For Lefebvre, the distinction among these three categories is not in their form, or in their ontological status, but in their mode of production, a point that he states as a foundational principle: '(Social) space is a (social) product.'[9]

Lefebvre goes on to define three understandings of space – sometimes referred to as his 'spatial triad' – that can form the basis for a theory of theatre space. The first element is 'spatial practice', which is sometimes glossed as 'perceived' space, the commonsensical, 'everyday' space in which we live, and in which social life exists. This can be distinguished from 'representations of space', 'which are tied to the relations of production and to the "order" which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes'. Also sometimes called 'conceived' space, this is the space of planners, of cartographers, and, to some extent, of theorists of space themselves. However, Lefebvre complicates what could be a fairly straightforward binary opposition of spatial relations – the perceived as opposed to the conceived – by differentiating these two categories from what he calls 'representational space', which he later refers to as 'lived' space, but which is ultimately more complex than either term suggests.[10] For Lefebvre, 'lived space' 'embodies complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life, and also to art (which may come eventually to be defined less as a code of space than as a code of representational spaces)'.[11]

Lefebvre's influence on a later generation of social and cultural theorists has contributed to a 'profoundly spatialised historial materialism',[12] alert to the view that space is never simply 'there', never truly empty, but is produced through human agency. However, his influence on the theorisation of theatre has had less impact than, for instance, Judith Butler's work on performativity, or other theorisations of the body. Lefebvre has informed David Wiles's historical work on performance spaces,[13] is cited by Gay McAuley in her *Space in Performance* (2000),[14] and is a key influence on Alan Read's *Theatre and Everyday Life* (1993), the title of which signals the impact of Lefebvre's theorisation of 'the everyday'. However, Lefebvre's

own comments on theatre are fleeting, if suggestive: 'Theatrical space certainly implies a representation of space – scenic space – corresponding to a particular conception of space (that of the classical drama, say – or the Elizabethan, or the Italian). The representational space, mediated yet directly experienced, which infuses the work and the moment, is established as such through the dramatic action itself.'[15]

In these few sentences, we get a sense of the potential complexity that Lefebvre's model brings to the theatrical event, and of its place within other spatial configurations, rippling outwards from the theatre building, to the city, to the national space, and beyond to a wider world. Lefebvre's is not a structuralism that offers the sterile pleasure of nomenclature, of naming inert objects. Instead, his is a dynamic theoretical model, in which the three modes of producing space – the perceived, the conceived and the lived – interact, moment by moment. This makes it profoundly theatrical. For Lefebvre, space is produced not in the past tense but in the present continuous, just as happens in theatre. What is more, the production of lived space is participative, a process that involves not only performers, but also the audience. An audience, as Herbert Blau puts it, 'is not so much a mere congregation of people as a body of thought and desire. It does not exist before the play but is *initiated* or *precipitated* by it; it is not an entity to begin with but a consciousness constructed.'[16]

The constitutive presence of an audience in the auditorium makes it possible to see the production of space in the theatre as a subset of the wider social production of space. However, there is at least one major difference between the production of space in the theatre and that which occurs in the wider society: in the theatre, there are strict spatial boundaries, defined according to explicit criteria; within those boundaries, a space is produced, but it only endures for the clearly defined duration of the performance. One consequence of this is that spatial production in the theatre must take place at an accelerated pace, with an intensity and focus that usually exceeds the rhythms of spatial production in the everyday world. As a result, theatrical performances are, as Bruce A. McConachie puts it (borrowing a term from Joseph Roach), 'condensational events',[17] a concept that recognises the two-way flow from performance to the world outside, while at the same time acknowledging the intensity that is one of the definitional qualities of performance (and, as we will argue in Chapter 4, constitutes one of its attractions). In Ireland, however, this condensational quality is not always confined to the stage, but is shared by key moments in Irish history, particularly the 1798 Rising, Robert Emmet's 1803 rebellion (of which there were at least ten stage versions between 1853 and 1905) and the Easter

Rising of 1916. 'When the Easter Rising began,' observes James Moran, 'some bystanders believed they were witnessing the opening of a play.'[18] Hence, the concentrated, intensified production of space in performance is reliant upon spaces produced outside of the theatre; however, in a particular society or historical moment, those socially produced spaces may have already been the subject of intense, non-theatrical condensational spatial production, which alerts us to the difficulties of always tracing spatial boundaries of the theatrical precisely. To put it simply, a space may already appear theatricalised before it appears on stage.

The very existence of a designated 'theatre' (whether in the sense of a building, an institution, or a temporary site) is the product of a culturally specific set of spatial understandings. At the same time, once a space for theatrical production has been constructed, the real physical limitations of that space will have a formative effect on what takes place there. An extreme example can help to make this case: in 2007, the Performance Corporation, an Irish company specialising in site-specific work, staged a play, *Lizzy Lavelle and the Vanishing of Emlyclough*, in a sand dune on the Mayo coast. The nature of the performance space – the shifting movement of the sand, the cauldron shape created by the dune, the metaphorical connotations of sand – all played a constitutive role in the resulting performance, physically and conceptually. At the same time, audiences watching the play brought to the venue a set of expectations concerning the nature of theatrical space, which they were able to apply to a sand dune, a space in other respects utterly dissimilar to a conventional theatre build-ing. The kind of interaction between the perceived space (the sand dune), the conceived (theatrical space), and the lived (the experience of taking part in a performance) may not be as obvious or as explicit as in a conventional proscenium arch theatre: but it happens in all theatre nonetheless. Indeed, the complexity and interpenetration of these various productive forces have been the focus of a small, but growing body of work, notably that of Herbert Blau and Marvin Carlson: 'The way an audience experiences and interprets a play, we now recognise, is by no means governed solely by what happens on the stage. The entire theatre, its audience arrangements, its other public spaces, its physical appearance, even its location within a city, are all important elements of the process by which an audience makes meaning of its experience.'[19] For the past century or so, it has generally been assumed that one of the conceptions of space that Irish audiences bring with them into the site of theatre (along with the concept of theatre space itself), has been the space of the nation. 'The starting point here is the assumption', argues Christopher Murray in his *Twentieth-Century*

Irish Drama: Mirror Up to Nation, 'that in the Irish historical experience, drama . . . and theatre . . . were both instrumental in defining and sustaining national consciousness' – to which it might be added that the reverse was also generally assumed to be true.[20] Again, as with the idea that there might be such a thing as an empty space, the idea of the national theatre has been subject to a critical debate, characterised by the idea that such a thing should not, in theory, exist – even if it clearly does. For Loren Kruger, 'the idea of representing the nation in the theatre, of summoning a representative audience that will in turn recognize itself as a nation on stage, offers a compelling if ambiguous image of national unity, less as an indisputable fact than as an object of speculation'.[21] If the idea of a national theatre constitutes a 'conceived space' saturating every pore of the national territory, the locations of 'perceived' sites of performance are not so evenly distributed. Theatre buildings are generally solid, substantial structures, which require concentrated populations, roads, public transport and legislation – in short, all of the apparatus of a functioning state, which is rarely constant through time, or distributed evenly throughout the national space. Thus, whether considered diachronically or synchronically, the parallel maps of the conceived and perceived spaces of a 'national' theatre will always have points at which they do not match.

This is particularly true of Irish theatre. Like most theatre histories, the history of Irish performance spaces is discontinuous, marked by shifts and changes over time, which nonetheless leave their traces. Possibly because theatre requires a relatively stable urban society, the first Irish theatre building cannot be dated earlier than 1635,[22] relatively late for a Western European country. That first theatre was an indoor Caroline platform stage in a building on Werburgh Street, just beside the colonial administrative centre of Dublin Castle, to which it was closely bound with ties of patronage. The Werburgh Street theatre lasted only a few short years, closing as a result of the political tensions leading up to the War of the Three Kingdoms in 1640. Following the Restoration, the first proscenium arch theatre in Ireland (and one of the first in the British Isles) opened in Smock Alley in 1662. Once again, located in what is now the western end of the Temple Bar district, this theatre was in what was then the nexus of power: Dublin Castle was only a few hundred yards to the south, the shadow of Christchurch Cathedral fell from the west, Trinity College, Dublin was a short distance to the east, and the Courts were visible just across the River Liffey. If maps of Ireland from the time marked the area surrounding Dublin as 'The Pale', defined by the reach of a centralised state, Smock Alley Theatre was at its geographical epicentre. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, that