

'Foul, Filthy, Stink Muck':  
The LGBT Theatre of Project Arts Centre, 1966-2000

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# Introduction

'Foul, Filthy, Stinking Muck' (Hughes 1977) was just one of the more colourful outcries against the 1976 Gay Sweatshop plays, *Mister X* and *Any Woman Can*. It was a time when men could be imprisoned for simply holding hands in public; a time when women had their children taken from them for revealing their sexuality; a time before AIDS; before Ireland's first Pride march; before equal marriage and gender recognition. The 1976 presentation of the Gay Sweatshop plays was just the start of Project Arts Centre's public support for the LGBTQ community. Over the following decades, it would go on to produce many works highlighting LGBTQ issues, proving to be one of the community's strongest platforms in which to portray their stories.

This thesis investigates a number of areas relating to LGBT theatre and the role of Project Arts Centre in presenting and developing such work and creating a platform for queer voices. It focuses on four key areas, firstly it aims to catalogue the LGBT theatre of Project Arts Centre from 1966 up to 2000; highlighting a number of the more notable works with regards to their themes and historical context. It interrogates the role of Project Arts Centre both historically and currently, in terms of its position as an artist-led organisation at the forefront of producing cutting edge work. It also compares how Project's practise differs from that of other major theatres. Lastly, it intends to consider how historical practice has influenced and informed contemporary queer theatre, looking at some of the issues and approaches that contemporary practitioners adopt.

In order to understand the scope of the research, it is important to outline the parameters of what has been identified as LGBT theatre. The outlined works were selected based specifically on their themes; plays which involved a dominant LGBT protagonist or where the main plot pertains to an LGBT storyline. For this reason,

there are works by LGBT writers, directors, producers and actors that have been omitted. A number of works such as two plays by Nell McCafferty, *The Worm in the Heart* (1985) and *Sheep, Shite and Desolation* (1993) and Horizon's 1985 production of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, do not feature. Despite the authors' known sexual orientation, the works do not directly include any LGBT characters. In the case of these works, the decision to exclude them was a difficult one but had they been allowed, it would have proved more difficult to exclude other works which may have more fluidly sat within the diverse spectrum that is now understood to be 'queer'. For example, Smock Alley's *Frocks* (1985) could certainly be perceived as queer as it is predominantly performed in drag. However, once again it blurs the boundaries between what is herein defined as LGBT versus an otherwise 'queer' reading.

While there may occasionally be reference to how critics viewed the works, it is also worth noting that they have not been selected based on their merit and no personal judgement is surmised. They are documented based on their relevance to historical events, the social climate surrounding the timing of their productions and their significance to other works. To this end, there are further works that have been omitted as the prevalence of LGBT theatre advanced towards the 1990s and some works appear to have had less impact or significance.

Due to a distinct lack of diversity in the overall narratives of the highlighted works, McCafferty's plays proved the most difficult to omit. While her plays were autobiographical and looked at issues of gender, they do not appear to have addressed her sexuality. Although issues of gay-male sexuality were covered extensively, throughout the researched works there was, and arguably still is, a distinct absence of lesbian, bisexual and transsexual voices. Out of the eighteen plays documented, only two of them included a transsexual character and only one contains a bisexual character. Although there were three plays dealing with

lesbianism two were by the same author, Emma Donoghue, and the other was presented as part of the Gay Sweatshop double-bill alongside a gay-male work.

This trend of male dominance in LGBT theatre is obviously not unique to either LGBT works or to historical ones. The 2015/16 #WakingTheFeminists campaign, highlighted this disparity and called for "equality for women across the Irish theatre sector" (#WakingTheFeminists, 2019). Perhaps this patriarchal domination was the main reason for a lack of diversity in LGBT narratives but there were undoubtedly other mitigating factors. The general lack of acceptance and understanding surrounding transsexuality; the perceived ability for bisexuals to 'pass' as heterosexual; or more insidiously, the effects upon lesbian mothers of having their children removed from their care once their sexuality was revealed, may all have played a part in oppressing these voices. Although the initial genesis for this research was to investigate and document these wider narratives, this proved to be more difficult than originally thought. To some extent, by documenting, including and moreover, acknowledging the male-dominant voice within this research, it goes to highlight the importance of continued documentation and scripting of more diverse works.

This thesis evolved from research carried out as part of *Active Archive - Slow Institution*, "an extensive research initiative that delves into Project's 50+year history" (Project Arts Centre, 2019). The initial outline was to explore the history from Project's conception, as a three week festival at the Gate Theatre in 1966, up to the development of the current building, which was opened in June 2000. The *Active Archive - Slow Institution* project covered a number of areas within the arts centre's history such as; the various sites that it occupied around Dublin; the fires at East Essex St in the 1980s; and the off-site productions during the development of the current premises. The archival research which informs this thesis evolves around this 1966 to 2000 timeline. As a result, it is worth noting that works which were

produced pre 2000 are herein identified as historical, while works post 2000 are considered contemporary.

Lastly, the works researched and the comparisons made, draw solely upon events in Dublin. Although many of the performances toured, and while this may be referenced on occasion, it is not relevant to the outcome. As it is, the scope of the research has been ambitious in both the material that it has drawn upon and the areas that it intends to cover. Due to the location and respective dominant audience of Project Arts Centre, it was deemed pertinent to focus on directly comparable institutions; namely The Gate Theatre, The Abbey and The Olympia.

# Chapter 1

## Theatre Highlights 1966 to 2000

### Project and Censorship

Project Arts Centre was designed to be an artist-led organisation. Its intention was to create an environment where artists could take control of their own practice, dissemination of their work and their general affairs. It was a space in which emerging and established artists could confidently present work that dealt with contemporary, cutting edge, social issues, such as austerity, housing crises, the Northern Irish troubles, South African apartheid, abortion, feminism, and of course homosexuality (Sheridan, 2006; Houlihan 2009; Project Arts Centre 2017).

Initially presented as a three-week festival at the Gate Theatre in November 1966, *Project '67*, conducted an extensive programme of workshops, readings, plays, children's theatre, visual art exhibitions and concerts. One of the underlying themes considered by the festival was censorship. As well as conducting a teach-in on censorship, a number of living banned authors including Edna O'Brien read from their censored works. Although the sale of written material was illegal, theatre fell outside of censorship laws so presenting readings from banned texts was allowed. A legal quagmire which Orlaith McBride, current Director of The Arts Council, succinctly described as "highlighting the absurd situation whereby words that could be freely spoken in public could not be read in private" (McBride, 2016) From the outset, it was evident that Project would play a leading role in the presentation of politicised artworks.

## The Gay Sweatshop and Funding

Although theatre fell outside the official jurisdiction of state censorship, it had on occasion been prone to other means of censoring work, such as the bizarre incident of *The Rose Tattoo* which resulted in the closure of the Pike Theatre following financial losses. Funding also proved to be a powerful weapon in applying political sanctions upon theatres, as was the case with Project's 1976 presentation of the Gay Sweatshop plays, *Mister X* and *Any Woman Can*.

*Mister X*, written by Roger Baker and Drew Griffith, told the story of a man learning to live with his sexual identity. As well as dealing with society's homophobia, he also challenges the internalised homophobia of the Lesbian and Gay community at the time; posing the question of whether it is better to try to conform and blend into heteronormative society or allow your sexual identity to be openly visible. The opening scene showed three men masturbating (simulated and fully clothed) whilst discussing the people that they are fantasising about. *Any Woman Can*, by Jill Posener told the coming out story of a woman. It was based on Posener's personal experiences of dealing with family and friends. It described her proud acceptance of her sexuality and her challenge to gain the acceptance of those around her. (Unfinished Histories 2019)

The Gay Sweatshop was a UK based gay and lesbian theatre company. It was established with the objective of 'raising visibility and counteracting "the prevailing perception in mainstream theatre of what homosexuals were like, therefore providing a more realistic image for the public"' (Ray Malone 2013 cited in Cowan 2018, 413). As was the case with most of their work, *Mister X* and *Any Woman Can* were presented by an all-male and an all-female cast. Although the plays were presented in differing styles and voices, they were both understood to be some of the earliest theatre work to present homosexual experiences as lived by homosexual

people; in contrast to that of gay and lesbian characters that were included within the plots of otherwise heteronormative narratives.

Following the presentation of the plays, an orchestrated campaign by right-wing civil and religious groups petitioned Dublin City Council to remove funding from Project Arts Centre. One of the strongest arguments against issuing the funding was that ratepayers money was going to fund what Councillor Ned Brennan (cited in Sheridan 2006) described as "funny bunnies from across the water". As a result, the arts centre was denied a £6000 grant and was forced to raise the funds independently. The Gay Sweatshop returned to Dublin in January of the following year, at their own expense and performed the plays twice more, donating the proceeds to the fundraising campaign, dubbed "Project Fighting Cock Fund" (Quidnunc 1977; McHugh 1977).

A heated public debate played out over the following months. During a television debate on the *Late Late Show*, Lord Mayor, Jim Michell and Councillor Brennan defended the decision to withhold funding on the basis of uncertainty surrounding the building's lease and denied that it had anything to do with the Gay Sweatshop plays (McNab 1977). Meanwhile, in a letter responding to The Knights of Columbanus plea to withdraw funding, Chairman of Dublin City Council's cultural committee, Mr Pat Carroll wrote:

That kind of underhand censorship is the worst course open to any of us. It has no legal backing, no defined ground rules, no appointed censors answerable to parliament or the courts. Its only criteria are those of the self-appointed unwanted guardians whose only desire is to impose their views on everyone else and to sweep aside the compassionate influence of good plays on public opinion. (Pat Carroll as cited in Evening Press 1977)

By way of example of what Mr Carroll referred to as the Knights imposing "their own views", a letter from their president states: "Some of the subject matter put on in this

theatre is contrary to our ideals" (Coogan 1977). Whilst the secretary of the Society of Irish Playwrights condemned the decision claiming that it '...strikes a blow against the serious artists' right to freedom of expression and must raise considerable alarm for the future of the theatre' (Douglas 1977). As a result of the debate, and an assurance from Project that the premises was secured, the Council rescinded their decision six months later and issued the grant.

### *Bent*

After the events surrounding the Gay Sweatshop plays, it was five years before Project ventured another gay-themed work. Following successful runs in London and on Broadway, Project presented *Bent* by Martin Sherman, a former member of the Gay Sweatshop. *Bent* originally premiered at the Royal Court Theatre in London in 1979 and later moved on to the West End. It starred Ian McKellen and Tom Bell. In 1980 it was produced on Broadway with Richard Gere playing the lead role. Although the play received mixed reviews from London, they were generally favourable and tended to critique the production value rather than the theme. Its New York production, however, was received less favourably, coming under attack by many Jewish critics as downplaying the severity of the Jewish Holocaust. Sherman was himself an openly gay American Jew.

The play centred around the character of Max during the second world war. Following an SS raid on their apartment, Max and his boyfriend Rudy witness a violent political assassination. As a result, they are forced to go on the run. Eventually, the pair are captured for holding hands and are transported to Dachau. In order to receive more favourable treatment by way of wearing a Jewish star, Max denies his sexuality and is forced to beat Rudy to death and to have sex with a dead teenage girl to prove it.

In the concentration camp, Max befriends Horst, a known homosexual who wears the pink triangle. The two form a relationship however they are not allowed any physical contact. During a break in their work detail, they are forced to stand to attention. As they stand side by side, they verbally fantasise about having sex resulting in them orgasming. When it is discovered that Max has given medication to Horst, Horst is executed and Max is instructed to bury him. After lowering the body into the grave, Max jumps in and puts on Horst's coat with the pink triangle. He then kills himself by jumping against the electrified fence, ultimately dying as a proud gay man.

### Political Landscape and *The Diamond Body*

The years following the presentation of *Bent* had a profound effect on the landscape of the Irish LGBT rights movement and subsequently the themes being addressed in the plays that were being produced. In 1982 Ireland received its first AIDS diagnosis, Northern Ireland decriminalised homosexuality, and there were a number of murders of gay men but two, in particular, sparked outrage within the LGBT community.

On 20 January, RTÉ set designer, Charles Self was brutally murdered at his home in Monkstown, Co. Dublin. Although there was no prosecution made in the case, the resulting investigation targetted gay men and was seen by many as a way to 'legally' record homosexuals for later investigation and persecution (Mullally, 2017; McMahon and Walsh, 2018). The second murder occurred on 9 September when Declan Flynn was 'queer-bashed' in Fairview Park. (Flynn's murder would go on to inspire Aodhan Madden's 1988 play, *Sea Urchins*).

1983 was also a seminal year in moving closer to decriminalisation. Having lost his case in the High Court, David Norris, then a lecturer of English at Trinity College,

appealed to the Supreme Court. In this year, the Supreme Court upheld the High Court's decision, declaring:

Article 41. s. 3, sub-s. 1, of the Constitution provides:- "The State pledges itself to guard with special care the institution of Marriage, on which the Family is founded, and to protect it against attack." Surely, a law which prohibits acts and conduct by male citizens of a kind known to be [sic] particularly harmful to the institution of marriage cannot be regarded as inconsistent with a Constitution containing such a provision... It follows, in my view, that no right of privacy, as claimed by the plaintiff, can prevail against the operation of such criminal sanctions. (Bailii.org 2019)

The verdict prompted Norris to bring his case to the European Court of Human Rights, which he filed in that same year. The Court ruled in favour of Norris in 1988 ultimately resulting in the State decriminalising homosexuality ten years later, in 1993.

In the intervening years between these judgements, Project staged two more LGBT themed works. The first was *The Diamond Body* in 1984. It was a collaborative experimental work by Operating Theatre which relied as heavily on the performance as on the script, music, and lighting. The show was written by Aidan Carl Mathews with music by Roger Doyle, and was directed by Doyle and Brendan Ellis; Olwen Fouere performed the one-person role. The play centred around the body of Stephanos, a hermaphroditic owner of a gay nightclub on a small Greek island. Fouere played the part of Stephanos's male friend and lover who recounts the events surrounding his death, whereby the local community had conducted a "mass act" of violence upon Stephanos. As the events are revealed, it becomes evident that Fouere's character also had a role to play in his death (Doyle and Ellis 1984). Apart from addressing an LGBT theme, the work proved more interesting due to the approach taken to the performance. While it was not uncommon to have actors

portray characters of the opposite sex, the conventional approach was to exaggerate gendered characteristics. Fouere, however, was lauded for impressing the attributes of a man to her character and yet allowed the androgyny brought on through her own gendering to remain evident (The Sunday Tribune 1984). Fouere expressed her rationale for playing the androgynous role as wanting "...to avoid women's politicising as a theme". (Olwen Fouere 1984, cited in Hunter 1984)

### *The Normal Heart and AIDS*

The second play to be performed was *The Normal Heart* by Larry Kramer. It was first produced in New York in 1985. It told the story of AIDS activist Ned Weeks and his struggle to raise awareness of the disease, fighting government bureaucracy and social stigma. Semi-autobiographical, it was set in New York between 1981 and 1984 during the first years of the epidemic's outbreak. During the course of his activism, Weeks forms a relationship with New York Times journalist Felix who subsequently dies from the disease.

Kramer was himself, a fervent AIDS activist and one of the first to identify that the then-unnamed disease was spreading due to promiscuity within the gay community. As a result, he founded the Gay Men's Health Crisis organisation to help support sufferers of the disease and prevent the spread. His methods proved too aggressive and led to his removal from the board of the organisation. Many of these events were recorded as scenes in the play.

The play was received positively when it was shown at Project and despite being one of the most critical reviews of the production, the opening paragraph of David Nowlan's Irish Times review began:

The first thing to be said about Michael Scott's production of Larry Kramer's "The Normal Heart"...is that it should definitely be seen. The play is the first to have treated homosexuality and homosexual relationships without either coyness or sentimentality, and the first to have tackled the problem of AIDS (Nowlan 1987).

One of the main criticisms towards the play was over its relevance in light of better information and understanding of the disease. Director Michael Scott maintained that the Irish government's decision to cancel funding for AIDS campaigning due to a general election earlier that year, as the main motivation for producing the play in Dublin. He is quoted as saying:

I look coldly on the fact that in January of this year the Government Health Bureau cancelled whatever AIDS campaign they were going to have, because there was going to be a general election. I don't know, nobody knows, how many people may have been exposed to the fatal disease through ignorance, while everybody decided to have a new government. I think that's inexcusable. (Michael Scott 1985 cited in Thompson 1985?).

He also cited the Mayor of New York's statement from the same year, that there was "no crisis", as also having a bearing upon its relevance. (Michael Scott 1985 cited in Hunter 1985)

### Declan Flynn and *Sea Urchins*

As much as *The Normal Heart* was a direct response to current events, so too was *Sea Urchins*. In the year following the death of Declan Flynn in Fairview Park, four men and one youth were found guilty of manslaughter by a jury. However, they were awarded suspended sentences by the Judge on the grounds that their defence claimed that they were ridding the area of the dangers of homosexuality. It was felt

that while they had murdered Mr Flynn, they were seen to be doing a civic duty. The verdict resulted in a protest march from Liberty Hall to Fairview Park. This march is commonly acknowledged as being the city's first Pride march and the catalyst for the consolidation and strengthening of the country's gay liberation movement (Mullaly, 2017).

Six years on, Aodhan Madden's play was a direct reaction to the events surrounding Mr Flynn's death. Set on Dun Laoghaire pier, it told a similar story of a group of 'queer-bashing' youths, fuelled by cider who were given suspended sentences following their crime. The play was the first work to respond directly to an Irish event and to tell an Irish story, although it could translate universally.

### *Tangles* and Tour Funding

By the end of the 1980s, Ireland's LGBT community had made significant progress in creating public awareness of LGBT issues. The European Court's ruling in the Norris case meant that decriminalisation was on the horizon. The same year saw the establishment of the Gay Community News, a monthly newspaper dedicated to reporting on gay rights and providing community listings. Wet Paint Arts played upon this visibility by devising one of the first works to cast a somewhat positive light on homosexuality. The play *Tangles* was described by journalist, Teresa Brogan as taking '... on the issue of homosexuality in an up front, non-sensational, non-judgemental and dare I say, entertaining, way' (1990). That said, Director David Grant was keen to preempt criticism regarding a number of LGBT issues that the play did not address:

Indeed, there may be those who,...will see it as an opportunity missed... Yes, there may be many issues affecting gay people that fall outside our play. But what I have been most eager to illustrate is the mundane cruelty of a society

in which so many of its young people grow up emotionally disenfranchised, by being subtly pressured into denying who they are. (1990)

The play was devised by the company under the direction of Grant, Director of Programming with the Dublin Theatre Festival, himself a recently outed gay man (In Dublin 1990). Loosely based on Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, it looked at the struggles faced by a young man coming out. The main character, Kevin, is coming to terms with his sexuality and through a course of farcical events ends up coming out to his friends. The character of Tangles, the play's antagonist, was said to have reflected much of the bullying climate of fear surrounding homophobia of the time (Thackaberry, 1990). As the events unfold, Kevin ultimately manages to change the mindset of Tangles, allowing him to accept Kevin's sexuality.

As a youth theatre company, Wet Paint faced controversy over some of the play's content. Prior to the performances in Project, the company arranged a public meeting with 80 youth and community groups to address issues that had been flagged and as a result, revised some of the scenes (Woodworth 1990). The play's Producer, Susan Coughlan recalls how, following a run-in Project, they would bring productions to audiences in suburban areas of Dublin who may not have been able to see it otherwise. As part of this touring programme, they had previously secured regular funding from Dublin County Council. On the occasion of *Tangles*, however, the Council refused to issue the grant. They maintained that this was due to a lack of script being provided for the play and not because of its theme or due to the reservations expressed by the predominantly Catholic youth organisations. She goes on to acknowledge that as a result of the funding crisis, members of the gay community contributed significant donations and even organised a fundraiser in the George bar to enable the production to tour (Appendix A).

Mr Grant recalls that subsequent to its run in Project, one of the issues that was highlighted with *Tangles* was its lack of female or even lesbian voice. This was

redressed in the touring productions with the introduction of a second female character whose love interest is left ambiguous, to infer the possibility of a lesbian romantic plotline (Appendix B). In the original production programme, Maurice Devlin, Professor of Social Studies in Maynooth, attempted to defend the lack of female voice by writing:

...the play has as much relevance for women as for men. At its heart, in its very title, and blustering its way around the stage is the bane of women's lives; mega-machismo, a fragile, shaky edifice, desperately defended and differing only in degree from so much of what passes for 'manliness'. That its defenders are seen here to be most concerned with the threat of gay male sexuality helps to crystallize - and dramatise - the issues, but *Tangles* cannot be conveniently labelled a 'gay play' (Grant 1990)

### Changing Voices through *Sarrasine*

The 1991 presentation of *Sarrasine* shed light on another voice, one not accounted for in Devlin's analysis of gendering applied to *Tangles*. Told by La Zambinella, a 260-year castrato, he recounts the story of his once-upon-a-time lover Jean Earnest Sarrasine who assumes La Zambinella to be a woman. The mistaken identity is not unfounded as the eunuch's character is portrayed as a seductive woman (Hingerty 1991). Loosely based on a Balzac story, Eibhear Walshe described, 'The notion of gender reversal and the confusion and ambiguity of sexual identity [as] brilliantly evoked...' (1991). This work was undoubtedly one of the first to give visibility to a largely unrecognised transgender narrative.

### *I Know My Own Heart* and the Lesbian Voice

Whether Devlin's defence that *Tangles* shone a spotlight on the fragility of "mega-machismo" was a plausible defence or not, the lack of female voices or lesbian narratives was certainly not confined to Wet Paint. Glasshouse Productions were a

theatre company set up specifically to try and redress this imbalance. Established in 1990, the company focused on advancing female voice, both gay and straight, in Irish theatre. Over their six-year existence, the company produced ten plays by female writers, including three new female playwrights. They also hosted two events, *There are no Irish Women Playwrights 1* and *2*, in which they staged readings from female playwrights and hosted discussions on the state of women in theatre. The first focused on new playwrights while the second looked at works from 1920 - 1970 (Playography Ireland 2018). The second event formed part of the 1993 *Acts and Reacts Festival*. The festival took place over two venues, Project Arts Centre and The Irish Writers' Centre. It launched on International Women's Day on 8 March and ran for nearly 2 months, concluding with a ten-day run of Emma Donoghue's first play, *I Know My Own Heart* (Glasshouse Productions 1993).

*I Know My Own Heart* was the first lesbian-themed play to be performed at Project since Gay Sweatshop's *Any Woman Can*, seventeen years previous. It was presented as a one-act lunchtime play during the Festival. It was based on the diaries of Anne Lister, a Yorkshire heiress (1791-1884). She was known for her unconventionality, wearing boots, keeping her hair short, travelling unchaperoned and refusing to marry. It told the story of her three love affairs with Marianne, Tib, and Marianne's sister, Nancy. Although Marianne was Lister's true love, she was forced to marry for financial reasons, resulting in Anne having affairs with Tib and Nancy (Donoghue 1993: White 1993).

When the play went on, later that year, to be produced as a full-length play at Andrews Lane Theatre, Louise O'Shea reports that 'audience members left the theatre during the performance'. She attributes this to '...our culture's lack of familiarity and comfort with lesbian sexuality in a visible sense'. She concludes by suggesting that increasing visibility through mediums like theatre could help to

improve awareness (O'Shea 2003). Three years later, Donoghue and Glasshouse teamed up once more to do just that.

### *Ladies and Gentlemen*

In her essay, *Sapphic Stages: Irish lesbian theatre*, O'Shea writes:

Lesbian activism in Ireland... is already subject to erasure from the historical records. Erasure compounds an already present peripheral status and shapes a climate that permits silencing to continue... The acknowledgement of a lesbian history makes visible the pluralities around lesbian existence past and present and offers an enriched view of future possibilities (op. cit.).

As a historian, writer and openly lesbian woman, O'Donoghue set out to acknowledge these erased lesbian histories. Like *I Know My Own Heart*, *Ladies and Gentlemen* was based on a historical story. Annie Hindle (1854 - c.1900) was a male impersonator who became a well-known performer in England before moving to the US and making a name for herself there. Whilst touring in America she met Charles Vivian, an English comedian. In 1868, not long after meeting, they were married but separated within weeks. The pair had little or no contact after their separation and never divorced. Vivian died in 1880. Hindle had a number of female dressers over the years to help her prepare before going on stage, one of whom was an Irish girl named Annie Ryan. In 1986, following one of Hindle's performances, they convinced a minister to marry them. Hindle, dressed in male clothing, told the minister that her name was Charles and he agreed to conduct the ceremony. The couple lived together until Ryan's death in 1891 (The Sun New York 1891). The play was told by the character of Hindle as a series of memories.

*Ladies and Gentlemen* served not only to highlight lesbian experience but it also portrayed an identity and experience that could be translated to a wider audience,

namely that of transgender persons; attesting to what O'Shea referred to as '...the pluralities around lesbian existence'.

### *The Gay Detective*

While increasing lesbian visibility was a necessary pursuit, keeping all forms of homosexuality within the public realm was still vital, particularly when portrayed in a positive and perceptively 'normal' role. In *The Gay Detective*, Gerard Stembridge undertook to depict the everyday challenges of gay life in a realistic fashion, avoiding the stereotypes and clichés. Reviewers' opinions were mixed as to whether or not Stembridge achieved this. David Nowlan suggested '...it goes a great distance towards normalising a normal sexual orientation that too many societies have perceived as an abnormal deviance' (1996). Fintan O'Toole echoed, 'The play is emphatically not about male homosexuality, in that it treats the state of being gay as in itself perfectly normal and morally neutral' (1996). However, in a report for the Sunday Independent, playwright Hugh Leonard scathingly, and admittedly with some bias, wrote, 'Watching the play,... I began to wonder if I had given up enjoying myself for Lent. Gay plays make me uneasy. So-called "straight" drama... does not usually consist of two hours of simulated buggery and anal rape and blowjobs and messing and smuggling and groping' (Leonard 1996).

The *Gay Detective* in question is the character of Pat, a gay Garda Sergeant who gets promoted to plain-clothes detective in order to investigate a high profile murder at a gay sauna. The plot plays out as a crime story revealing the highs and lows of the homosexual underworld that Pat infiltrates. The threat of Pat's sexuality is used by his superior as a means of control; challenging him to reign in his sexual proclivity in order to gain the promotion. Set on the eve of decriminalisation, Pat sits within a precarious standpoint, that of law holder and lawbreaker. As a Guard, he is responsible for enforcing a law; the very law that he himself, as a gay man, is in

breach of. Kathleen Heininge identifies how this position '...would seem to be an anomaly at any other given time in history. At the moment of change, however, he becomes the symbol of... what may become a new class consciousness' (2009).

The idea of 'class consciousness' is played out in the final scenes of the play. After being informed by his superior that there will never be an investigation into the queer-bashing that he has uncovered, Pat realises that he has been manipulated. In frustration, he walks out on the investigation to be with his dying friend. An act which Heininge suggests as: '...rejecting the paradigms of either Detective or Gay, but adopting one belonging to all of humanity – best friend' (2009). Fintan O'Toole encapsulates the importance of this narrative by suggesting that: 'the play... simply use[s] gay subculture as a mirror for Irish Society. Seeing it reversed in that mirror, you pay more attention to the writing on the wall. (O'Toole 1996)

### *Poor Super Man*

Befittingly, the last LGBT themed play to be presented at Project, prior to the reopening of the new building, was *Poor Super Man* produced by the first national gay and lesbian theatre company. Originally started as Wilde Theatre Workshop in 1991, they went on to become Muted Cupid in 1992. The company's focus was on producing work by gay and lesbian writers using primarily, but not exclusively gay and lesbian practitioners (Devlin 1998).

The play centres around David, an artist who begins working as a waiter. He develops an attraction to his married boss Matt, to the amusement of the supporting characters, Kryla his single straight friend and Sharon, his transexual flatmate who has AIDS. Their reason for choosing to produce *Poor Super Man* by Canadian playwright, Brad Fraser, was because of the equality within the characters it portrayed: 'It is not a gay play, per say [sic], but a play with gay characters. The gay characters are not ghettoised nor the straight characters marginalised, all are given

equal consideration' (*op. cit.*). The choice to present work underpinned by a visible equality between its characters was a testament to the level of liberation that decriminalisation had afforded Irish society, thus celebrating the struggles of the past century.

## Chapter 2

### The Role of Project Arts Centre

#### Development Through Location

Following the success of the festival, Project '67 was offered the use of the premises above Tuck & Company on Abbey Street. The artists who had exhibited at the festival undertook to develop the space as a visual arts gallery. During the two year stay in the Tuck & Co building, the co-operative postponed the theatrical programme to develop the non-profit gallery as a space for artists to distribute their work. As a result of the sale of the building, two years later, the gallery moved to the basement of the YMCA in the Metropolitan Hall also on Abbey Street on a one year lease. The premises was converted into a multidisciplinary space, displaying visual art by day which was removed at night to allow for performance and for film works to be shown. At this stage, the Project Gallery rebranded to become Project Arts Centre. It was officially opened by the Minister for Finance, Charles J. Haughey, despite the centre not having received any government financial assistance (Houlihan 2009; Project Arts Centre 2017).

A few years later, Project temporarily moved into a disused warehouse on South King Street before finally moving to East Essex St in 1974. At the time, the site, formerly the Dollard printing works, was under the same ownership as that of the Olympia theatre and it was hoped that this would ultimately lead to a longer-term lease. True to the centre's ethos, members undertook to design the space according to the needs of artists. Plans were made to develop the old cavernous space into a multifunctional one, with a view to housing two galleries, a theatre and a third gallery/cafe bar (RTÉ 1975).

With the assistance of the Arts Council, Project was able to purchase the premises on East Essex Street in 1977, establishing it as the city's primary contemporary arts venue. It added a cinema to the space and over the following years, continued to develop and expand its broad range of programmes covering theatre, visual arts, performance, and film as well as hosting a number of festivals, proving to be invaluable to the arts community. In 1982 a fire broke out and damaged much of the building, in particular, the cinema and the foyer. This was followed by a second fire, a short while later which wiped out the office spaces (Sheridan 2006; Houlihan 2009).

Under a redevelopment scheme by Temple Bar Properties. The old building was demolished to make way for the current building, which completed the area's regeneration (RTÉ 2000). During the construction phase, which lasted approximately 4 years, Project moved its theatre and performance to the first floor of a building in Henry Place above a snooker hall, rebranding it as Project @ the Mint. To accommodate the visual arts, it undertook an ambitious series of off-site exhibitions in spaces such as car parks, hotels, factories and schools throughout the city (Houlihan 2009).

### Theatre and the Sheridans

Despite a number of funding crises, the damage incurred during the fires and the numerous relocations, Project continued to adapt and grow; all the time solidifying its position as the city's premier centre for both visual arts and theatre. From the time Project moved into the YMCA building in 1969, the theatre programme was established. Factions developed between the visual artists and the theatre producers due to the need to adapt the one space for both exhibitions and performance. From this rivalry, however, grew the seed to create a multidisciplinary space to accommodate a variety of art forms (Sheridan 2006). The co-operative began developing the visual arts and theatre performance in tandem, assigning

specific committees and directors to oversee the programming of each. The original drama committee was made up of Tom Hickey, Tom Jordan and Chris O'Neill who were later joined or replaced by Alan Stanford, Ann O'Driscoll, Lee Gallagher and Sean O'Briain (Houlihan 2009).

As early as 1970, Jim and Peter Sheridan formed a longstanding partnership with Project which would ultimately see them become co-directors of drama in 1976. Throughout their time with Project they focused on developing socially conscious works. Alongside their amateur theatre company, SLOT Players, they produced a series of plays which they wrote and directed. One of their earliest and hardest hitting works was *Journal of a Hole*, dealing with the physical and psychological abuses imposed at the Artane Industrial School. Other plays included; *No Entry*, 1976, which considered tenement life, the violence resulting from it and the resultant emigration; in the same year, *Mobile Homes* looked at the housing crisis of the time; while *The Ha'penny Place*, 1979, addressed prostitution. As well as producing their own works, they also programmed other socially engaged works such as Steve Wilmer's *Scenes from Soweto*, which interrogated the South African Apartheid regime and of course The Gay Sweatshop plays (Sheridan 2006; Playography Ireland 2019a; Playography Ireland 2019b).

Through the eighties and nineties, several artistic directors took over the coordination of Project's programming, including theatre. They continued to focus heavily on producing work by new and experimental Irish artists, whilst also presenting by international companies who were pushing the boundaries of what conventional theatre and performance could be. During this time, Project affirmed and grew its policy of supporting developing theatre companies such as Operating Theatre and Rough Magic Theatre Company in the early eighties and Wet Paint Arts in the nineties (Houlihan 2009).

## Mission

In a 1977 interview, Director of the Arts Council, Colm O'Briain proposed '...it has to be what everybody else isn't. As soon as something comes along that starts doing what Project is doing, Project must reassess its role again' (as cited in Maher 1977). A point which Peter Sheridan echoed, 'From the outset, Project always felt like it should be a thorn in the side of something. Its emblem was a cockerel, its mission was to let new voices rouse us from our slumber' (2006). While this slumbering may have ebbed and flowed at times, it is undeniable that this motivation remained at the heart of Project. This was probably most evident during the ambitious off-site phase of the late nineties where, under the direction of Fiach Mac Conghail, the site became as much a part of the work as the work itself (Houlihan 2009).

This dedication to pushing boundaries was also evident through the centre's continued dedication to presenting LGBT works. Between the years from 1984 to 2000, LGBT plays were presented over no less than 11 of the years. As well as the continued contribution to theatre, Mac Conghail introduced MaNDaNCE to the centre with the performance of *Sweat*. MaNDaNCE was a gay male dance company under the direction of Paul Johnson. Performed as a one-man dance, *Sweat* confronted the issue of HIV/AIDS through a bodily representation of the personal and political agenda (MaNDaNCE 1994). Johnson went on to become Project's first choreographer in residence in 1998, closing out Project @ the Mint with a work-in-progress of *Hope Without Fear* (Mac Réamoinn 1999; Project Arts Centre 2017).

## Chapter 3

### Other Institutions

#### The Olympia

Project Arts Centre was not unique in presenting LGBT themed work, nor was it the first. In 1968 the Olympia theatre presented Thomas Kilroy's *The Death and Resurrection of Mr Roche*, in 1970 *The Boys in the Band* and again in 1971, it presented Brian Friel's *The Gentle Island*.

*The Death and Resurrection of Mr Roche* told the story of a late-night party in a flat. During the party, the gay character of Mr Roche becomes the subject of ridicule by the rest of the apparently straight cast. Ultimately, the abuse turns violent and Roche is forced into a confined space - a metaphorical closet. When the 'closet' is opened, it appears that he is dead. A number of the characters conspire to get rid of the body and leave the flat. During this time, Kelly, the owner of the flat and main instigator of the homophobia, admits to having had relations with Mr Roche. As the play progresses, it transpires that Mr Roche is not, in fact, dead and he returns to the flat. The significance of Mr Roche's return can be argued in a number of ways. Some suggest that he was there to blackmail Kelly or to rouse his sexual curiosity, others suggest that he represents the 'fear' of homosexuality within the Catholic Irish culture of the time (Halferty 2018). However, it can not be denied that the character was devised as a subtext to the plot, rather than as a defined character in himself. David Cregan describes:

...what is most interesting about this groundbreaking play for gay and lesbian issues in Ireland is its portrayal of the open homosexual character as object. Kilroy certainly represents the social anxieties surrounding homosexual identity in 1960s Ireland, but he does so as object rather than subject. The gay character is the antagonist, the problem, the source of the necessary dramatic

conflict; an object of curiosity but nonetheless an object who is defined by the ideas and opinions of others around him rather than through his own articulation of self or experience (2009).

This manner of representation of gay characters was echoed in *The Gentle Island*. The play is set following the mass emigration of the Island of Inishkeen. All the island's inhabitants have left except for the Sweeney family. Shortly after the Islanders' departure, tourists Shane and Peter, arrive from Dublin. Due to an apparent lack of sexual intimacy in her marriage, Sarah Sweeney makes advances on Shane. When he denies her she runs away. Later she reports to her father-in-law that she has seen Shane and her husband naked together. When Shane returns, Sarah ends up shooting him and he and Peter return to the mainland to seek medical attention. When her husband returns the following day, there is no mention of what she has witnessed (Halferty 2018). This lack of confrontation regarding sexuality was seen to mirror the 'don't-ask-don't-tell' attitude of society at the time. Once again, however, we see the gay character as an object rather than an autonomous character.

The approach taken to the characters in *The Boys in the Band* was significantly different. Set in 1960s New York, Mart Crowley's play portrays a similar scenario to that of *The Death and Resurrection of Mr Roche*, in so far as it is a group of men socialising at a party in an apartment. As the play unfolds arguing breaks out among the group. The difference, however, is that the roles are reversed. The characters are all gay with the exception of Alan, who in part, becomes the focus of ridicule. As well as conveying an array of gay-male characters, each displaying their own archetypal traits of homosexuality, it also addressed the difficulties and insecurities of what it meant to be gay at the time (Clement 2018; Brantley 2010).

## The Gate: Micheál Mac Liammóir and Hilton Edwards

In a document drafted by Gay Sweatshop to the UK Arts Council, recommending policies on gay and lesbians in theatre, suggested that there was a misconception that gay men and women were afforded refuge from societal homophobia under the umbrella of the theatre. It went on to argue that it was also not the case, despite common perception, that gay men occupied a 'privileged position' within theatre (Appendix C). However, Hilton Edwards and Micheál MacLiammóir, founders of the Gate Theatre, directly contradicted this argument. Despite being openly gay and often referred to as partners - a term commonly understood to extend beyond business, although not outwardly spoken about - their contribution to Irish theatre and arts was widely acknowledged and publicly applauded (RTÉ 1978; RTÉ 1968; Walshe 2009).

In 1960, MacLiammóir wrote and performed his one-man play *The Importance of Being Oscar*, based on the life and works of Oscar Wilde. Despite both Wilde and MacLiammóir being known as gay men, the play was criticised for downplaying Wilde's sexuality (Walshe 2009). Although many of MacLiammóir's works can be interpreted through a queer lens, it wasn't until his 1973 play *Prelude in Kazbek Street* that he scripted a gay character. In the play, Serge yearns for a long-term male partner. His potential companion arrives in the form of a man engaged to marry a woman (Playography Ireland 2019c).

## The Abbey Theatre and Frank McGuinness

The Abbey (incorporating the Peacock stage) also undertook to tell the story of Oscar Wilde, however, unlike MacLiammóir, both works admitted his sexuality and

his relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas. The first, *A Trinity of Two* by Ulick O'Connor was staged in 1988 and focused on Wilde's trial at the Old Bailey where he was accused of having a relationship with Douglas (Playography Ireland 2019d). The second, *The Secret Fall of Constance Wilde* was yet another work written by Thomas Kilroy to openly deal with homosexuality. He adopted a different approach to Mac Liammóir and O'Connor instead, telling Wilde's story from the perspective of his wife, Constance. The play considered her relationship with Wilde and his lover in light of the public visibility of the trial (Playography Ireland 2019e).

These were far from the only LGBT works that the Abbey presented prior to 2000. Significantly, the Abbey was the first major theatre to stage work by Muted Cupid. In 1992, the newly titled company, presented Gertrude Stein's, *Lucretia Borgia*. Throughout the rest of the nineties, it went on to produce two works by Michael Harding, *Ceacth Houdini* in 1994 and *Sour Grapes* in 1997. In the same year, it also produced *Melonfarmer* by Alex Johnson. However, the Abbey's biggest contribution to LGBT theatre was its long-standing support of Frank McGuinness.

Paul Halferty recognises McGuinness as '...one of Ireland's most significant gay playwrights...' (2018). Among McGuinness's most notable works, *The Factory Girls*, 1982, tells the story of a group of women fighting the closure of a factory in Donegal. Within the group of women are a lesbian couple, Vera and Rebecca (Halferty 2018). The 1985 play, *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching to the Somme*, is supposedly narrated by the gay character of Pyper (Rea 2009) and *Innocence*, 1986, *Carthaginians*, 1988 and *Dolly West's Kitchen*, 1999 all purport to employ gay characters within the narratives. Whilst David Cregan asserts that McGuinness was '...the first Irish dramatist to rescue the Irish homosexual from the assigned status of object...' instead, promoting them '...to the self-defining position of subject' (2009). The argument against this is that many of the lesbian and gay characters that he scripted, could be interpreted with some ambiguity and be washed over. This was

certainly the case with the Abbey's first staging of *The Factory Girls* (Frank McGuinness as cited in Cregan 2011).

### Difference in Project's Approach

Where Cregan supports the idea that McGuinness elevated homosexuals to 'subject' rather than 'object', in McGuinness's eyes the Abbey hampered this voice. This was undoubtedly one of the ways in which Project differed from the other institutions. By allowing the artists' voices to be heard as they were intended and by not censoring work, as in the case of Gay Sweatshop, Project advanced the LGBT movement in a way that the other theatres couldn't. Barry Houlihan suggests that from the outset, this was down to the differing agendas within each theatre:

The Abbey had its own in-house production company and adhered strictly to its own mandate of Irish written and Irish language plays. The Gate had a broader European ethos while still embracing Irish original theatre. Project was to be a new departure for Irish theatre and for Irish creative art in general and was a very real catalyst for change in Irish society from the 1960s onwards (2009).

The 'change in Irish society' that Houlihan refers to indisputably included the LGBT liberation movement. By focusing on artist-driven work that was not limited to, but still included Irish works, Project allowed for a broader range of voices to be heard from its stage. Phillip MacMahon, Director of THISISPOPBABY Productions, describes it as:

...a place for radical investigation...a place where contemporary companies of all kinds have been able to experiment and grow. So if you look at...the Abbey and the Gate...they're not places where that early investigation is [possible] (Appendix D).

One of the major advantages of allowing Project a relative level of freedom in what it presents is in its model of presentation as well as production. Where the Gate and the Abbey are, what Cian O'Brien calls 'production houses', the work that they produce is required to generate a guaranteed income. Project, on the other hand, operates a number of different programming strategies. Whilst it produces and develops work in conjunction with artists and developing companies, it also provides a space for established companies to present already developed works, minimising the financial risk incurred by Project (Appendix E).

## Chapter 4

### Contemporary Practice

#### Project's Legacy

The backbone of Project's programming strategies is still the interest of the artist. Although it has grown in size and commercial viability over its more than fifty-year history, it still focuses on supporting professional artists in the early stages but also in presenting works that it hopes might somehow disrupt and challenge conventional perceptions of what art should be. Cian O'Brien, Artistic Director of Project, describes:

I think the role of Project is around creating opportunities for artists to represent the world around them in a contemporary body. So I suppose the idea of the history of Project behind us allows us to present may be messages that aren't seen or heard by artists who aren't represented in mainstream culture (Appendix E).

Writer and director Una McKeivitt attests to how Project created such an opportunity for her:

Without Project Arts Centre I wouldn't have a career. Back in 2009 they hosted *Project Brand New* and gave a whole generation of new theatre makers access to a professional theatre space. No one else was doing that (Appendix F).

McKeivitt's play that featured as one of *Project Brand New* plays was *Victor and Gord*. A work based on the real-life experiences of best friends Vickey, "Victor" and Aine, "Gord". Although not specifically about Victor's sexuality, the fact that she is lesbian is acknowledged. McKeivitt's second and more notable work was *The Big Deal*.

Based on interviews, diary entries and email correspondence, the play told the story of two transgender women undergoing gender transformation; one undergoing surgery, the other awaiting it. Delivered in a documentary style, it generated an intimacy between the actors and the audience that a more conventional drama style, may not have done (Keating 2011). Originally presented in Project as a work-in-progress during the 2010 *Queer Notions Festival*, it had its full premiere at the Kilkenny Arts Festival and returned to Project in November 2011. McKevitt describes the underlying themes of her work as dealing with '...relationships and how they're impacted by the circumstances of our lives'. She describes how the challenges of gender and sexuality redefine relationships and how these experiences informed her early work (Appendix F).

### Queer Notions and THISISPOPBABY

In 2009 and 2010 Project hosted the Queer Notions Festival. The Festival was devised by THISISPOPBABY in conjunction with Calipo Theatre Company and aimed to showcase a number of new Irish queer theatre works alongside established queer performers such as David Hoyle and Panti Bliss. It also hosted a visual arts exhibition curated by Tonie Walsh and screened the documentary *Before Stonewall*. The Queer Notions ran in conjunction with the 2009 Dublin Pride Festival. In light of the 30th anniversary of the Stonewall riots and the increasing commercialisation of Pride, Fintan Walsh posited that it 'capitalize[d] on the festival's performative spirit to bridge the distance between the event's political roots and its changing cultural significance (2009).

THISISPOPBABY is a Dublin based production company, staging theatre, festivals, and club nights. Established in 2007 by Phillip McMahon and Jennifer Jennings, it aimed to disrupt conventional notions around what theatre should be, making it more accessible to a younger, broader audience. McMahon describes its overall ethos as dealing with 'outsiders' (The Irish Times.com 2012). They define their

sensibility as queer, seeing it as a term that extends beyond sexuality and into the future (Crawley 2009). It takes many of its leads from clubbing nightlife with their first performances of their inaugural work, *Danny and Chantelle (still here)*, 2007, taking place in the POD nightclub. McMahon explains that later that year Fiach MacConghaile brought the show into Project and since then almost all of their shows have been presented or developed there.

### Contemporary Works

Since the mid-2000s, Project has amassed a vast catalogue of LGBT/queer works, many under the auspices of THISISPOPBABY but not exclusively. In 2009 and 2011, Project co-hosted a number of works as part of the Gay Theatre Festival. Also in 2011, as part of the Fringe Festival, it presented Sonya Kelly's second play, *How to Keep an Alien*. The work cast a comical eye on the serious and distressing task of a lesbian couple's struggle with Irish immigration laws. Initially as a work-in-progress during the 2010 Queer Notions Festival and again in 2011 as part of the Fringe Festival, Project presented Neil Watkins, *The Year of Magical Wanking*; a hard-hitting autobiographical work, addressing sex abuse, porn and drug addiction, and AIDS. In association with the 2015 Marriage Equality, Project presented Amy Conroy's 2010 play, *I heart Alice heart I*, a coming-out love story of two women in their mid-sixties.

### Panti and the Marriage Referendum

Since 2007, (with the exception of her first) Project has also presented all of Panti's one-person stage shows, both as works-in-progress and as completed works.

Panti's stage presence played an integral role in bringing about the vote for same-sex marriage in 2015. As a direct result of the increased visibility that the stage had afforded Panti, Rory O'Neill was invited on to RTÉ. After mentioning, on-air, a number of people whom he identified of being homophobic The named persons threatened legal action on the grounds of defamation resulting in RTÉ

paying out compensation to the tune of €85,000. Public outrage ensued, dubbing the episode 'Pantigate'. As a result of this event, Panti was invited on to the Abbey stage to present a speech following one of their shows. The speech was rousing and emotive and immediately went viral. Although Anne Louise Gilligan and Katherine Zappone's legal battle had paved the way for same-sex marriage to be tabled politically, Panti's voice and presence challenged people publicly. Attesting to the power of theatre but not least the impact that Project has had upon social change.

## Conclusion

Since the 2015 marriage referendum, Project has continued to present work addressing LGBTQ issues; constantly finding new voices, ways to present and issues to consider. In 2017, as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival, it presented Shaun Dunne's *Rapids*. In light of the current rise of HIV and AIDS, it documents the stories of affected people across a broad range of communities, including gay men. THISISPOPBABY's 2018 production of *I am Tonie Walsh* saw the life-long activist recount his personal experiences of Irish LGBTQ history, including the devastating loss of life that the community experienced during the eighties and early nineties due to the outbreak of AIDS. Also in 2018, Project Presented *Fat Blokes*, a devised show by Scottee, looking at bodily identity and insecurities within the gay community. There is still an obvious need to expand the narratives beyond the dominant male voice but this is as much a call to theatre-makers as it is to Project.

Through the examples outlined, I feel that the impact of Project on the LGBT community is evident. From highlighting the AIDS epidemic to documenting 'queer-bashing' to giving lesbian histories a voice and to demonstrating homosexuality in a normalised light, the works that Project has chosen to present have perpetuated and reflected the move towards LGBT liberation.

Partially through its model as an arts centre but more significantly through its continued commitment to producing and presenting work with the artist at the forefront, it has spoken in a way that no other theatre institution in Dublin, if not Ireland, could. It has been clearly documented how this practice has lasted throughout Project's fifty-plus year history. Despite its many turbulent years and the ever-changing face of funding policies and cultural demands, Project has survived and even thrived to become an establishment that few can measure up to.

Through staying true to its founding principles but adapting, it has delivered a diversity of work which continues to push boundaries. There are a substantial number of works that were not addressed in this document and perhaps should have been, but what has been uncovered goes a long way to supporting the view that Project has played a vital role, not just to the LGBT community but to Irish society as a whole.

# Appendices

## Appendix A

Extract from a conversation with Susan Coughlan, 28 February 2019.

H T: ...You kind of mentioned funding and I saw in the program that there was a mention about funding.

S C: Yeah,...I was saying to you that one of the funding routes that Wet Paint had at the time was through the County Council, so that was pre-three local government authorities, you just had Dublin Corporation and Dublin County Council at the time. We were making the argument that people couldn't get into the city for Dublin Theatre Festival so stuff needed to go out and this is when Tallaght and Blanchardstown and places like that were cultural deserts... So we used to get funding each year, for a few years, to bring shows out. We would have the slot in Project for at least one week of Theatre Festival, so our show would be there and then we would tour it. So it was normal for Dublin County Council to fund that tour but with *Tangles* they withdrew funding because we couldn't give them a script and they weren't comfortable with that. The way we worked, when we went on tour, we already had our audience booked in so the way that worked was, when we were devising the show we would have these evenings when youth workers would bring in... the kids they were working with and we would workshop scenes and the kids would say "that wouldn't happen, that would happen, that works, I hate that, whatever" and they be part of it. So they would have already have had an interest in how it was going to shape up. There were a number of organisations that ran most of the youth clubs around Dublin. One of those was called Catholic Youth Council, so they blacklisted the show and they instructed all the youth groups not to come but they ignore that and they did come.

... ..

S C: ...about funding, one other thing. The gay community was then amazing... Basically, I had to find a way into that world, knowing nothing... I can't remember - somebody knew

somebody who mentioned somebody's name... I think he was a solicitor or something and said go ask him, and I think I wrote him a letter. I said look, we're doing this show and the money has been pulled and we don't have enough money to produce it. He got friends immediately who all coughed up money... it was really significant. So that all happened, quiet as you please and then The George did fundraising stuff. I've no links to how that happened or precise memory. It rallied anyway, this whole thing that we knew nothing about- and then they came to the show in their droves of course as well.

## Appendix B

Extract from email from David Grant to Susan Coughlan, 23 May 2019.

I know Lisa's character was lesbian, but I don't think we made that big a deal out of it. I do remember she was very resilient and took no shit from Tangles.

I think the male emphasis at the time was partly because only that was illegal, a context that is hard to imagine now. (If you remember, Queen Victoria refused to believe in lesbians).

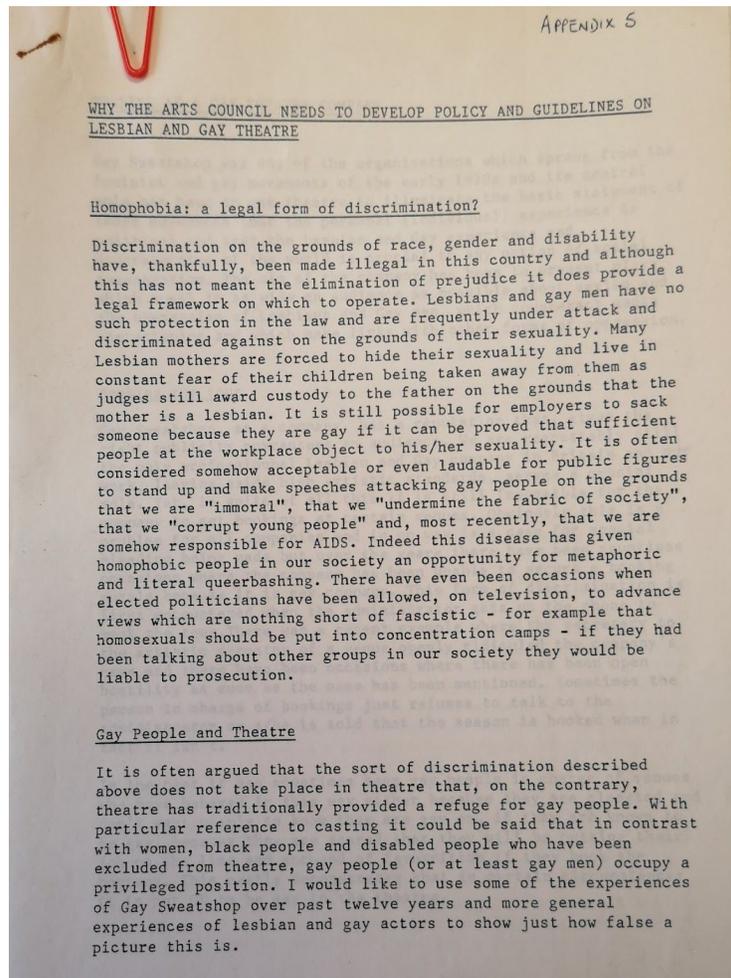
But dramaturgically, a second female character opened up a lot more plot opportunities. I do remember liking the fact that neither Fergus (David's character) or Lisa's character (Mandy) were in any sense victims.

It would have been too simplistic trying to role a meaningful response to lesbian experience into Tangles (even if I'd have know how!).

## Appendix C

### Copy of document by Gay Sweatshop to the UK Arts Council

(Available from the Irish Queer Archive at the National Library of Ireland, c.1985).



## Appendix D

### Extract from Interview with Phillip McMahon, 24 April 2019.

HT: From your perspective as a theatre maker, what effect do you feel PAC has had on the landscape of contemporary Irish Theatre? How do you feel this differs from other theatres, such as The Abbey?

P McM: It's hard to put into words the impact the Project has had because if you look back at the place being closed down because of gay sweatshop playing there, it has always been a place for radical investigation. It's also been a place where contemporary companies of all kinds have been able to experiment and grow. So if you look at all the theatres, I guess the other examples are really the abbey and the gate because other places kind of have smaller Studios but they're not places where that early investigation is - allowed is the wrong word - but they can't hold that kind of thing because they have to have bums on seats. there was a sense that one time that you would graduate from Project to somewhere like the Peacock or the Abbey. but now it's really that project can hold a certain kind of work, it has its own audience. the audiences there are getting younger, so it is an exciting space. I think it doesn't have the barriers that the abbey and the gate have for audiences.

HT: I understand that you have always had a close working relationship with The Abbey and that this has helped to shape your career, particularly early on. Would you say that PAC has also played a role and if so, how?

P McM: Yes, a massive role. Certainly, me and the company have worked with Project, with two Artistic Directors there, Willie White and Cian O'Brien. Both of whom have been massively supportive of the company. Willie in the early days - *Danny and Chantelle* was our first ever show, we performed that at Dublin Fringe Festival, it won the spirit of the Fringe - Willie took it from the POD nightclub into the Cube. So that was the beginning, the first show was the beginning of a relationship with Project and really, bar a couple of things at the Abbey, everything has played there. And even if you look at what we did at the Complex last year Project was one of our partners there and Cian O'Brien is one of the founders of THISISPOPBABY.

So, in the beginning, it was basically collecting friends to put on a show. It was Jenny, myself, Cian and Louise Kiely, who's now a casting director. So there's always been a good meeting of minds there, and of course, I sat on Project's board for a few years as well.

We did queer notions there for 2 years. And even *Alice in Funderland*, the development of that all happened at Project Arts Centre, including the work-in-progress, the public showing.

So yeah, it is kind of the home of our work really and the Abbey has been a fantastic support but given the nature of a National Theatre, you never get to be bed down there in the way that you do in Project. So we were Project artists for a number of years, for 10 years our post went to Project. They've been great at brass tacks, nuts and bolts artist support. There's a desk on the middle floor... it's 1 desk, you'll have THEATREclub sitting at one end and Una McKeivitt on the corner and we'll be on the back corner in the early days. So it really was a home for the ideas and an incubation space, I suppose.

... ..

The group of companies, I'm thinking of Una, Brokentalkers, THEATREclub, Drunk ensemble; there's a gang of companies that came up together. So people would go, "They're all of the same generation in some way", but their needs are always so different. For instance, we've always had a producer and other companies would be going "Oh God, what does a producer do? Well, we do everything ourselves". So worried company is asking of Project Arts Centre at any given time is probably entirely different.

## Appendix E

Extract from conversation with Cian O'Brien, 11 April 2019.

C O'B: There is no limit to what we present. When you're making a programming decision there are many many factors that come into it but particularly one that has... because there are some of our programming decisions that don't have any financial risk for us, you know where it's a box office split and we're putting on a show from a small independent company and so there's no real financial risk there you're providing an opportunity. If we're spending money to bring a company in from outside Ireland, something like Scottie with Fat Blokes, there's many decisions come into that process but the cost is what the impact the work will have on artist community, the impact the work will have on our audience, will it sell. Other times you feel the work will have a disruptive element so we have this programme we do

with *The Fringe*, called *Neighbours* where we bring international works in and we co-present them in Project. And so in the first year of that programme/initiative which was 2017, we did a piece of work called *MDLSX* by an Italian company called Motus, which was basically a staged reimagining of the Jeffrey Eugenides novel *Middlesex* which was about an intersex person and it's told through a really really contemporary, experimental video, dj set. So there's an amazing soundtrack of songs and they are telling their story through this and it's a merging of the story of Cal from *Middlesex* and the story of Sylvia the performer. And then we also brought in Lucy McCormack's *Tripple Threat* which is a re-telling of the Old Testament, one of the testaments, where she uses her body and in a very explicate way through it. So you bring work like that in in places where we didn't know if they would sell, they did in the end, they all sold out in a week, but also the idea was that we'd bring in works that would disrupt the artistic community and be like, this is work that you're not really seeing that is being made here. So *Fat Blokes* is similar to that for me, the impact is and we couldn't bring it in September. That was a big show that we have done at *The Fringe* but we couldn't do that. But then with something like *Watt*, you bring something like *Watt* because this is probably one of the few times that Barry will perform the role again, I mean he is fit and healthy, but there will come a time when he will stop performing. But also it's a chance for us to bring a less diverse audiences in but who will pay money for tickets and so the surplus that we're making at the box office will go towards the loss we make on other shows.

H T: In terms of *Watt* [Barry McGovern version of Samuel Beckett play, showing at the time in Project]. Looking at the likes of *The Gate*, that's very typically something that would have been produced in *The Gate* but the #WakingTheFeminists movement and the turnover of Selina Cartmell [Director of the Gate] and the work that she's developing in *The Gate* now. Do you feel that there may be more of a market for Project to co-produce or present [more conventional] work?

C O'B: Weirdly, this was originally a Gate production so it was originally put on by the Gate and when Tom [Creed], the director was asked to bring it back, the Gate said: "no, bring it back yourself, we're not in a position to take it on". So I think with the Gate it's an interesting challenge because if you look at the model, the financial model of the Gate, it's quite complicated because you have to sell 80% or 85% of tickets in order to balance the books so

it immediately changes the type of work that you can present. If you're doing something like *The Great Gatsby* or *The Snapper* it's something that allows you to do that, whereas if you base it on the new plays like *The Children* or *The Beginning*, which have been on for the last couple of months, they're not sellers. It's really a real challenge for them... So I also think that and I don't know this, this would be me and my opinion, but when you take over from someone else in a role like that, in a producing house... When I started at Project, I replaced Willie White and he'd been there over ten years and it's interesting to think he made a huge mark here and he was here as director during a time when Project had significantly more resources, so the challenges faced by the organisation were different. There was a huge amount of international programming, there were a lot more companies producing work in Ireland as well on a regular basis. Whereas, the situation shifted dramatically in '11, '12, '13 through the years of recession. So I do think there's a difference in a place like Project, where I feel, we have this responsibility to a wider sector of independent artists which The Gate doesn't have or The Abbey.

... ..

H T: What do you understand Project's objectives are, in terms of the work it produces?

C O'B: I think there's a difference let's say between when you read the founding documents vs now. I think now what Project exists to do is to present contemporary culture, contemporary art in whatever form that takes, to an audience whether that's here in the centre or whether that's in Venice or wherever. I think the role of Project is around creating opportunities for artists to represent the world around them in a contemporary body. So I suppose the idea of the history of Project behind us allows us to present maybe messages that aren't seen or heard by artists who aren't represented in mainstream culture. That doesn't necessarily happen all the time, but that is what I think is our responsibility. Obviously putting on Barry McGovern in *Watt* is not doing that, but that's allowing us to do it another time. The financial success of that allows us to take risks in other ways.

## Appendix F

### Extract from questionnaire response from Una McKevitt.

Q: Do you feel PAC has been advantageous to your career and if so, how?

U McK: Oh yes. Theatre can a lonely place and very overwhelming at times and Project have always been there for me since the very beginning as a place that makes me feel less lonely and overwhelmed.

I'm not in company structure, very few theatre artists now are so that means on some level you have to try and run "business" yourself whether you've the capacity for that or not. Project provide massive administrative [sic] support for me especially in terms of money management, payroll, auditing etc...They are also always there to support my work and provide advice and guidance any time I look for it.

Q: From your perspective as a theatre maker, what effect do you feel PAC has had on the landscape of contemporary Irish Theatre?

U McK: Without Project Arts Centre I wouldn't have a career. Back in 2009 they hosted *Project Brand New* and gave a whole generation of new theatre makers access to a professional theatre space. No one else was doing that.

Q: A number of your earlier works such as *The Big Deal*, *S.O.S.* and *Victor & Gord*, addressed issues around sexual identity, gender diversity and gender performance. Do you feel that these themes differ from those of your more recent works and if so how?

U McK: ...I'm very interested in relationships and how they're impacted by the circumstances of our lives and I think that's probably there in all my work. Gender and sexual identity can be a challenge for existing relationships and can put them through a process of redefinition so I think I was drawn to those experiences early on especially in the noughties when our society was changing rapidly.

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