

Perchance to Dream
Dance Ireland's First Conference
08-09 December



Comhairle Cathrach
Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City Council

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This too solid flesh: dance in Ireland

Dr Aoife McGrath
Queen's University Belfast

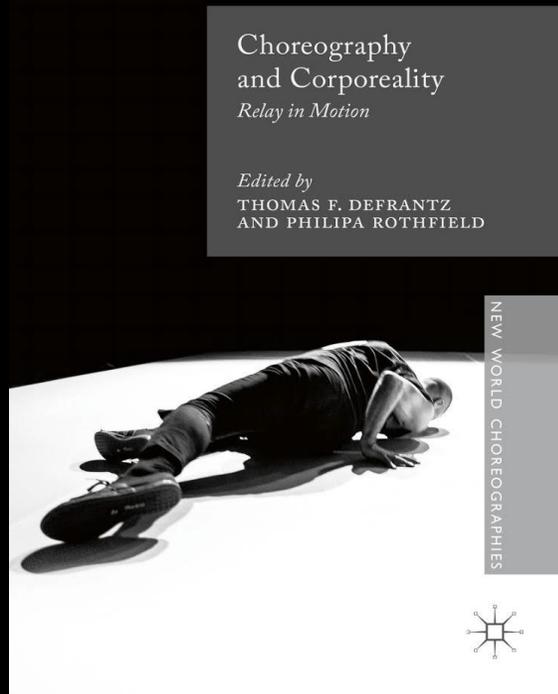


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The choreography of affect – a space of affective adjacency



- ‘a space of affective adjacency —a space in which the building of an alternative structure of feeling and an alternative economy of the body can be experienced’ (McGrath, 2016, p.194)
 - ‘In generating a space of affective adjacency [...], dance creates sites where difficult realities and hopes for future actions can exist together’ (McGrath, 2016, p.202)
- Aoife McGrath, ‘Dancing the Downward Slide: spaces of affective adjacency’, in DeFrantz and Rothfield, *Choreography and Corporeality: Relay in Motion* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2016)

DANCE THEATRE IN IRELAND

REVOLUTIONARY MOVES

AOIFE MCGRATH



In Ireland, postcolonial imaginings and mouldings of an exclusionary “Irish” corporeality have led to a culture of shame and taboo surrounding many corporeal issues, and to the structured oppression by both religious and state institutions of corporealities that do not fit hegemonic norms. Instances of performative corporeal expression, such as dance, in which the body is at once both the choreographed, inscribed body, and the experiential, sensing body, present crucially important sites for research and debate as to how to reflect, resist and deviate from these restrictive norms.

“Purging” the feminine and the foreign in the invention of an “Irish” body.



1880s British political cartoon: a masculine Britannia shelters a cowering, feminine Hibernia from the attack of an ape-like Irishman.

- ▶ ‘[...] through many centuries, Ireland was pressed into service as a foil to set off English virtues, as a laboratory in which to conduct experiments, and as a fantasy-land in which to meet fairies and monsters.’

Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, p.3.

- ▶ In an effort to control the dancing body, Irish nationalists campaigned against, ‘baneful, suggestive foreign dances such as the polka, the waltz, the Welsh dance, the Cat Walk, the Cake Walk and all foreign monstrosities.’

Cited from a letter to the Gaelic League’s newspaper *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 1906, in Helen Brennan, *The Story of Irish Dance* (1999)

The “Hobs of Hell” and the *Körper/Leib* distinction



Irish Set Dancing (ca. 1900)

‘Irish dances do not make degenerates.’

Archbishop Patrick O’ Donnell, ‘Evils of Dancing’ statement of the bishops and archbishops of Ireland in Maynooth, 6th October, 1925.

De Certeau on the bridge as the “index to the diabolic” in the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch (1453-1516)



‘[The bridge] represents a departure, an attack on the state, the ambition of a conquering power, or the flight of an exile; in any case, the “betrayal” of an order. But at the same time as it offers the possibility of a bewildering exteriority, it allows or causes the re-emergence beyond the frontiers of the alien element that was controlled in the interior, and gives ob-jectivity (that is expression and re-presentation) to the alterity which was hidden inside the limits, so that in recrossing the bridge and coming back within the enclosure the traveler henceforth finds there the exteriority that he had first sought by going outside and then fled by returning.’

Bridge detail from Bosch's *The Last Judgement*

Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p.128.

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