

Remembering Derry: Sophocles' *Electra* and the space of memory

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'There clearly seems to be something in the nature of dramatic presentation that makes it a particularly attractive repository for the storage and mechanism for the continued recirculation of cultural memory' (Carlson 2003, 8).

'What happens when history becomes a story? What happens when the drama becomes a story? What happens when the scholar narrativizes her own knowing? Narrative structures affect the constitution of events and their interrelationships' (Case 1992, 424-425).

Introduction

On 14th January 2008, BBC Radio 4's cultural discussion show, *Start the Week*, had an interesting line up of contributors. Tom Paulin, the Irish poet and critic, was there, promoting his latest book on poetry; Judith Weir, the composer, was there, celebrating her thirty year retrospective; Simon Goldhill, Professor of Greek at Cambridge, was there, discussing how to stage Greek tragedy today. Thirty five minutes into the programme, the conversation turned to the contemporary relevance of Greek tragedy, and to the way in which the 'otherness' of the imaginative dramatic space of ancient Greece can be so much more affecting than a modern, recognisably real setting. 'Tragedy gets under your skin', said Goldhill, 'by not being about everyday life and the politics you know. If you set a play in Ireland and talk about the Troubles in Ireland in that period, you're always going to get half an audience saying "Well it's not like that for me." You set a play in ancient Greece and put it on in Ireland at the same time, you can have an extraordinary effect.' And to prove his point, Goldhill related the following story:

Simon Goldhill: Fiona Shaw tells a wonderful story of producing Sophocles' *Electra* in Derry a week when 18 people were killed – it was a very, very serious week. They played the play absolutely straight. She has an Irish accent, the lead actor has an Irish accent which made the connection. The audience on each night refused to leave. They said "We will not go without...we have to talk about this..."

Tom Paulin: And they didn't applaud either...

Simon Goldhill: They didn't...Absolute riveted attention, because the play is about the psychological trauma of desire for revenge and this play spoke so strongly to its audience because it was set in Ancient Greece ...

This paper takes this story of when *Electra* played in Derry as its starting point, to examine the operations of space and memory in performance reception. Ostensibly, the anecdote is one about the cultural importance of imaginative, dramatic space in the collective memory of the audience: the locale for Carlson's 'repository' (Carlson 8). Ostensibly, it is a richly satisfying story: proof, if proof were needed, to Classicists and performance theorists alike, of the uncanny and transcendent power of tragedy - of Greek tragedy - to speak to audiences across time, space and culture. Yet the story is troubling. The story raises several significant questions about the nature of 'space' and the interrelationship between it and the cognitive and affective processes of meaning construction. The story forces me to ask the questions: What is 'the space of performance'? How does one categorise it? Is it a physical space? An imagined space? And how can physical factuality be reconciled with fictional remembrance?

From the perspective of empirical observation, defining 'the space of performance' seems so simple: as simple as Bentley's equation of drama equalling 'A impersonat[ing] B while C looks on' (Bentley 150); as simple as Brook's empty space becoming a bare stage if called as much, and if walked on by a performer and observed by an spectator (Brook 11). This seeming simplicity is, however, deeply deceptive. It so easily belies the complexity of the subject; just as my selective use here of Bentley and Brook so unfairly skates over the richness of their arguments. In the seeming simplicity of a man walking into a space, being observed by another, there are layers and layers of meaning and signification; layers and layers of phenomenological slippage and mimetic permeability. Attempts to define the parameters of the space of performance are fraught with complications. Trammelled in the shifting dynamics between the physical and the fictional, spatial analyses of performance must articulate the different conceptual levels of architectural and mimetic framing at play in the theatre. They must differentiate between the dramatic space of the play

text and the theatre space of the physical environs of the performance event. They must negotiate the vocabularies of the semiotician (Ubersfeld 1999; Issacharoff 1989), the semiologist (Melrose 1994), the phenomenologist (States 1985, 1992; Garner 1994) and the reception theorist (Bennett 1990). They must attempt an impressive juggling act of methodologies and terminologies (McAuley 2000), all to account for the polyvalent possibilities of a subject that initially seemed as straightforward as an actor walking into a space before an audience member.

In the 'terminological minefield' (McAuley 2000, 17) through which analysts of performance space need to tip-toe, there is one area less regularly explored; perhaps because it is less insistent than the methodological arguments that take up so much time; perhaps because it is so familiar as to be almost invisible: the issue of remembered space, of how the memory receives, processes, constructs and reinterprets the place (and the space) of performance. This subject has certainly been addressed: Bennett (1990) discusses it in relation to audience expectation, Melrose (1994) uses her memories of Shaw's RSC *Electra* as a model for her new semiotics, States (1985, 1992), Carlson (2003) and Rayner (2006) discuss the 'hauntings' and 'ghostings' that manipulate the memory of theatre, and McAuley et al (2006) demonstrate the importance of place and memory as key concepts in the analysis of performance. These approaches are relatively rare, however, and rarer yet in discussion of Greek and Roman drama on the modern stage. Positivist, structuralist and semiotic approaches proliferate, and discussion of the imaginative place of the remembered theatrical event is by and large left to one side. In an echo of Issacharoff's reasons for ignoring 'performance space' in favour of 'dramatic space' (Issacharoff 57), the imaginative space of reception and transmission is largely ignored as there is no apparent methodology through which to chart the actor's, audience's and scholar's spatial relationship to the memory of a performance.

This paper makes no claims to redress this omission or come up with a coherent methodology: it would take more room than I have here even to begin to tackle the myriad phenomenological issues involved in articulating memory and performance. This essay does, however, explore the possibilities that open up when we consider 'the space of performance' as not only the architectural and imaginative circumscription of the theatre's physicality and the play's dramatic world, but also a remembered, imagined place that exists in a never ending, always coming-into-being realm of sensory imagination and affect. Using as a case study the story of the RSC's tour of *Electra* to Northern Ireland, it will examine some of the effects of the memory's and the imagination's 'narrativizing' of performance. Bachelard, who, although avoiding direct analysis of performance space, writes so eloquently about the operations of place and memory, states, '[s]pace that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor' (Bachelard xxxvi). In remembering and trying to 'narrativize' the performance event, attempts at accuracy and historical factuality are confounded by, and conflated with, the affective, connotative processes through which the space of performance engages with the memory. This is a space which, as Bachelard says, 'has been lived in, not in its positivity, but with all the partiality of the imagination' (Bachelard xxxvi). This paper will argue that this very 'partiality of the imagination' has the power to extend the space of performance across time, geography and ideological boundaries, manipulating the definition of performance space in a way that engages with both the factual placement of the performance event and the historicity and cultural memory of the community that participates in that performance.

The Official Version

As Reinelt writes, 'Performance events which have their most potent incarnation in a particular venue, for a particular community of spectators ... are quite changed when moved to other, more available sites...' (Reinelt 127). The geographical specificity of a theatrical venue can have an immense effect. The connotative force of a venue's position in the social and cultural imagination moulds not just the immediate reception of a production, but also its continuing interpretation, transmission and developing historicity. The gilt of importance rubs off from production to venue and venue to production. In the case of modern Anglophone stagings of Greek drama, perhaps the most cited example of the potency of a specific venue's interaction with a play is the story of when Deborah Warner's production of Sophocles' *Electra* played in Northern Ireland. Below are three versions of this story, taken from different sources and written over the course of some seven years:

1.

In February 1992 the basketball pitch in Templemore Sports Stadium in Londonderry was covered over. On this space the Irish actress Fiona Shaw led the Royal Shakespeare Company in Deborah Warner's production of Sophocles' *Electra* ... During the week of the performances nine people, mostly Catholics, were gunned down in revenge for the murder of eight Protestant building workers a few days previously. The production had toured internationally, but no audience had ever identified with it like the people of Northern Ireland ... This audience found in Sophocles' play a devastating reflection of their own community's experience of reciprocal violence.

2.

We arrived in Derry ... in this terrible week when the whole city was in grief for nine people who had been shot between Belfast and Derry in the most awful vendettas ... We performed in an enormous sports hall ... On the first night, at the end of the play, the audience stood. In silence. They didn't clap. And the whole cast was profoundly moved. Nobody knew what to do or say. Nobody bowed. They just stood, and we stood. Word was immediately sent to *The Irish Times* which came hot-foot in the form of Mary Holland, who wrote this up as a sort of cultural phenomenon. The audience response was most unusual. They stood not for us, of course, but for themselves and for their grief.

3.

It still seems worth reporting what happened in Londonderry the week *Electra* came to town. The actors were telling a story about a school group that came to one of the performances, boys 11 and 12. One of them reading, from the programme notes, was heard to tell his friend "This play was first performed 2,400 years ago". "Oh yes," his companion is said to have replied, "So how come it's taken so long to reach Derry?"

The first is the opening to Edith Hall's detailed account of the history of British performances of *Electra* (Hall 361): a highly researched work of theatre history and Classical interdisciplinarity that contextualises Sophocles' play in the historical and social zeitgeist of four centuries. The second is a transcription of Fiona Shaw's account of the event at Northwestern University's conference on *Electra* in 1993 (Shaw, 133): the inscribed record of an oral account of first-hand narration: eye-witness, from the horse's mouth. The third quotation is chronologically the earliest: Mary Holland's newspaper article from the *Observer* (Holland 52) that first documented the story of '*Electra* in Derry'; if you like, the article that prompted the other two. Each tells the same story. Each uses the story's factuality as a means of creating a personal spin on the same 'actual' event. Each creates and elaborates a new myth of the relevance of Greek tragedy and in so doing, creates a new text in performance and a new performativity in the text.

In the many times that the '*Electra* in Derry' story has been cited in discussion of Greek tragedy in contemporary British reception, there has been a degree of consistency in the way it has been contextualised. Always this is a story of the power of Greek tragedy transcending the barriers of time and culture and breaking through the elitism of 'high art.' Always it is the story of a two and a half thousand year old play speaking with 'urgency' to a contemporary audience who recognise its themes in their own suffering (and their own suffering in its themes). Behind the narrative of this tale is another story, however, that shows how the selectivity and subjectivity of memory reconstructs the past through the retelling (and re-creation in print) of a myth; a myth that is inextricably entwined with the expansive possibilities of the space of performance. The mythologisation of *Electra* at Derry/Londonderry, demonstrates how the 'positivity of space' (the physical environs of the Templemore Sports Stadium) is replaced by the 'partiality of imagination' (the connotative force of this cultural phenomenon). Factuality is less important than the social, cultural and ideological currency of the story. The events are accurate not in their historical space, but in their imaginative situation, perpetually coming into existence in the reinvention of the reader. The author and reader reconstitute history to shape a new narrative of the past in the present, in so doing, 'narrativizing' not only the event, but their own projected interpretations.

On examination of the versions in more detail, it can be seen that there are numerous narrative structures operating in these stories. Firstly, there is the spatial dimension. Although this is an event that happened in the past, it is also one that has a specific geographical location in a city that is haunted by its violent and tragic past:

On this space the Irish actress Fiona Shaw led the Royal Shakespeare Company in Deborah Warner's production of Sophocles' Electra.

The 'space' in question is an interesting one. Derry/Londonderry has a long and violent history of Republican and Loyalist factional feuding, and has been the recurring focus for Republican anger and grief since the 'Bloody Sunday Massacre' on January 30th 1972, when British troops opened fire on a mainly Catholic civil rights march, killing fourteen men and boys and injuring twelve others. As Shaw says, '...my country is absolutely torn by these events, and it goes on being a boil on the edge of Europe ...' (Shaw 133). The very naming of this town conveys, whether wittingly or not, implicit judgements about value systems, identity and ownership: it politicises the space. Call the town 'Londonderry', and the speaker suggests Protestant-Unionist sympathies. Use 'Derry', one conveys Catholic-Republican allegiances. Even if one attempts to disguise personal

political affiliations in the naming, ideological implications will seep through, leading often to a further highlighting of the difficulties of this immensely resonant act of naming. The town's council attempted to sanitise the political connotations of the name in the 1990s, by using both names divided by a stroke ('Derry/Londonderry'). Not only did this not heal the divisions: it also highlighted the polarised nature of the town, leading to widespread derision of the compromise, and, via BBC presenter Gerry Anderson's coining of the expression, a popular renaming of the town as 'Stroke City'. However innocent the intention, there can be no such thing as an apolitical naming of this 'space': the name has too much historicity (Butler 1997). In that respect, the very choice of Derry/Londonderry becomes performative. The locutionary act of saying 'Londonderry' or 'Derry' can have the illocutionary force of suggesting a political and cultural alignment, and the perlocutionary effect of alienating one faction/incorporating another. The duality of the name enacts the polarisation of a community where individual choices are couched in terms of dispossession and enfranchisement, right against wrong, justice against injustice, and, during The Troubles, life and death.

In this context, the choice of 'naming' in the above quotations has significant connotative power. Hall and Holland use 'Londonderry', the official name (and the Protestant-Unionist title) for this officially British town. For both women, this is an interesting choice. Holland, one of the most respected journalists writing about the Troubles, had both marched behind the coffins of the Bloody Sunday dead, and had refused to name Catholic gunmen during the 2002 Saville enquiry into the shootings. Hall, who has made groundbreaking use of Marxist critique in her analyses of classical reception and culture, has clear ideological and political sensibilities that lean very far away from establishment British politics. Yet whatever personal and political affiliations they might have, the act of naming has given this space an autonomous life, with a connotative force that seeps through even the seemingly stable medium of documentary inscription. In contrast to Holland and Hall, the Irish actress Shaw conjoins Eire and Northern Ireland in talking of 'my country' and uses 'Derry', the Catholic-Republican name. So too did all publicity material for the tour.

Whatever the intention, the perlocutionary effect of these different acts of naming is to create different voices in these narratives that work independently of their original authorial intention; suggesting a voice of 'establishment' narrative in Holland and Hall, juxtaposed to a voice of 'non-establishment' story-telling in Shaw. The written texts, those intended for publication and commissioned and sanctioned by the institutionally authoritative base of *The Observer* and the Oxford University Press, carry establishment authority that links them to the officially prescribed nomenclature of the town. Subjective authorial allegiances, although implicit and unavoidable, are not owned. Shaw's spoken text, however, which is written to be said and only later transcribed for publication, contains a personal performative in the figure of the speaker. As we read, we see and hear the performative act of the *Irish* woman, speaking about her experiences in her country. In the unapologetic revelling in the subjective, 'reality' in the story becomes passionately anarchic. Here, the actor, however establishment she might be as member of the Royal Shakespeare Company and recipient of many mainstream theatrical accolades and honorary knighthood, is nonetheless positioned as the liminal figure outside the authority of academic objectivity or official approval; something apparent in her reception at the Northwestern conference at which she was speaking (March, 78 n. 39; McDonald 1996, 159-160; Ewans, 74). She is the empathiser with the underdog; the one who can move vertically in a horizontal class structure. The illocutionary of Shaw's 'Derry' is complicity. She asks us to share her overt, passionate, personal conviction, which is carried implicitly in 'Derry'; to *feel* the effect of the story, rather than simply to hear it.

Shaw's telling creates another theatrical 'text' that blends together the words of Sophocles, the experience of performance and the power of memory to reframe events. The physical 'space' of the performance in its social context is crucial in this tale. Holland and Hall both contrast the sports hall/stadium with the tour's other venues. Hall says 'the production had toured internationally'. Holland comments that 'the production had arrived in Londonderry soon after its visit to Paris where it played 11 sell-out performances at the Théâtre Bobigny.' Shaw is slightly more colourful in her description:

We played in London, and then in Paris, in Bradford, in Glasgow, and finally, but most importantly, we played it in Derry in the North of Ireland ... In London, it was exciting to be in the Riverside, with a much bigger audience and people truly enjoyed the performance ... next we took the play to Paris, which was very interesting ... They were very, very quiet at Bobigny. Then, at the end, people would come up throughout the front of the auditorium and they would say, "Madam, merci - [sob!]" (Shaw 132-3).

All three writers place Derry/Londonderry as a major contrast with the tour's previous artistically recognised and culturally important venues. This has a double effect: it increases the importance of the production *per se* (this production has been internationally fêted and has been invited to prestigious venues); it also focuses on the impoverished liminality of Derry/Londonderry as a site for this new 'text'. McAuley highlights venue location as an indicator of the cultural and social importance of theatre:

The location of the theatre building necessarily makes some statement about the way theatre is perceived by society more generally and by its practitioners (whether or not they have any real choice about where they practice): is it part of high culture in association with art galleries and concert halls in any other in association with other commercial activities, or an outpost of culture in the deadly environment of freeways and concrete apartment blocks inhabited by the working class in many cities, is it part of leisure culture or tourist culture or (a theatre on a university campus) the world of education? (McCauley 2000, 46).

In 1992, Derry lacked even the designated theatre space of the council-run arts centre or university campus building to accommodate the demands of the production. The fact that these performances are taking place in a city with no appropriate theatrical space, that it is necessary to adapt a sports hall to suit the production's needs, that, in Holland's words, the production programme is 'festooned in expressions of almost grovelling gratitude to companies and charitable foundations whose sponsorship had made the tour possible', create a sense that this is a town and a community whose status is uniquely liminal; secure in their own factional identities but outsiders from the norm. They are not the fashionable Parisian audiences ready to brave the metro trip to the trendily *outré* Bobigny; nor the theatrical cognoscenti of London's Riverside Studios' audience who will battle with the Hammersmith line. These are 'ordinary' people; a point emphasised by Holland: 'You read articles in which the idea that bringing the classics to "ordinary" people can enhance their lives is dismissed as sentimental and patronising left-wing rubbish'.

The uniqueness of the space and the situation of these performances form a new site for the elaboration of an heroic text of performance. The performative force of this site creates 'a sort of cultural phenomenon' (Shaw 133), which turns the mundane appearance of the working actor into the spiritual presence of the liminal scapegoat, embodying and expiating the sins and pains of the society. There is a nobility, a heroism in the performance contract into which the audience and the company enter in Derry. It is a raw preparedness to examine the depths of individual and communal grief through the conduit of the drama. Individual suffering becomes collective, as the collective watches the impersonation of individual suffering. Holland describes one woman in the audience who 'thought of Mrs Kelly whose son was killed on Bloody Sunday and how they would find her several years afterwards lying on his grave in the cemetery with earth smeared on her face.' The audience's connection to this two thousand, five hundred year old enacted tragedy transcends cultural and chronological barriers and speaks with a universal significance; holding the mirror to their own experience. As the two boys in Holland's articles exemplify, the pertinence of a two and a half thousand year old play is as clear to an eleven and twelve year old as it is to the older members of the audience.

So this is the story, then, of a performance of Sophocles' *Electra* that takes on an extra dimension and becomes a uniquely meaningful theatrical experience. In so doing, it becomes an heroic text, slipping into theatrical mythology, adapting its factual, spatial and temporal specificity to reflect its different currency. The events of the story simultaneously solidify and become permeable: fixed in time and place, yet open to all those little variations that morph and manipulate myth. In this story, Sophocles will always be playing in Derry/Londonderry with the Irish Fiona Shaw as *Electra* and the Northern Irish John Lynch as *Orestes*, on an indoor football pitch which was also a basket-ball court, in a stadium which was also a sports hall, for one performance only that was also four performances, to an audience who didn't clap but gave nightly standing ovations, in an auditorium where everybody stayed afterwards to discuss the play but two little boys left debating their programme notes. All three versions have small contradictions and anomalies; and in between those small differences, a new text of performance is created and perpetuated, in which the connotative space of the imagined and remembered venue becomes much more important than the material presence of Templemore's physical architecture. With each retelling, both the past is fixed and something new is created. Bachelard claims that 'Memories are motionless, and the more securely they are fixed in space, the sounder they are' (Bachelard 1994, 9). The 'space' of that/those Derry performance/s 'fixes' the experience, so that even if memories of the event try to move, changing and adapting with shifting time, the connotative force of the performance's site will anchor the remembrance in an unchanging social arena of pain, injustice and on-going social unrest. *Electra* finds its home in Derry/Londonderry's situation.

The Unauthorised Version

The mythologisation of this performance event brings with it some pressing questions about the nature of how one 'narrativizes' space and performance. So much of the force of the 'Derry *Electra*' story comes from the connotative resonance of its taking place in a factionally divided city, that the actual circumstances of event become, to some extent, redundant. Crudely speaking, the 'heroic text' of the 'Derry *Electra*' gains its credibility through its authorising frames and social resonance, not its factuality. It is an exercise in the creation and propagation of cultural memory. Holland, Shaw and Hall replay and recreate the event, weaving together the canonical gravitas of Greek tragedy with socio-political historicity of a city's sufferings. Framing this story is the authoritative interplay between the authorizing voice of newspaper print, academic publication and the personal and experiential voice. In Shaw's case, the fact that she was there, that in this story, she is both the narrator and the participant, lends her version added weight. Contrary to usual academic expectations, the subjective voice of her personal reflection gives her authority: an authority that is increased by her artistic standing and cultural status ('... Irish actress Fiona Shaw *led* the Royal

Shakespeare Company ...'), her authentic voice (she was there), by its documentation in Dunn (ephemeral speech channelled into an edited publication), by its citing in Hall (becoming an academic reference), and also, retrospectively, by the earlier relation of the events in Holland.

The 'Derry *Electra*' story has now become 'canonical' in the academic field of reception studies of Greek tragedy. It is, however, only one side of the story; one, albeit dominant, narrative in the attempt to find an authorising frame for the documentation of this performance event. The authenticity of the Derry 'phenomenon' is proved by the first hand of Shaw's being there, and by the ongoing citation of its cultural significance in academic sources. There are, however, other versions of the same event that lack the authorising power of Shaw and those who cite her. 'Being there' is not enough, in itself, to 'authorise' the story. And this is where the issue of the scholar's 'narrativizing' of her reading and analysis becomes so important to own; together, too, with the question of personal voice narrative in academic writing (Hallett & Van Nortwick; Casanave & Vandrick).

My reasons for writing about the Derry phenomenon are complicated. I am interested in the issue of space and memory in performance; I am committed to the argument that Greek tragedy is still relevant in contemporary society; I need to get my publication points; but I also have other agenda, a more personal stake in this story. And my agenda have all to do with my sense of my place in the scheme of things, as someone who was once an actor and is now an academic. I read these accounts of *Electra* in Derry with temporal ambivalence (somewhere between the past and the present) and with spatial confusion (simultaneously inhabiting the here and there); and that is because I was there, at the Templemore Stadium in February 1992. As an understudy and Chorus member in Warner's *Electra*, I inhabited that same space as Shaw, breathed the same air as the audience; and yet my understanding and memories of that space are very different from the versions we have seen. My authorising frame is much less interesting, much less significant, and much less part of 'a sort of cultural phenomenon' than Shaw's. As I retell the story of *Electra* in Derry, the fact that I was there confuses rather than clarifies the event. My version has none of the weight of Shaw's. My memory of the audience response is quite different from her memories. Banally - and bathetically - my interaction with audience members was answering questions about appearing in *Red Dwarf* and *The Bill*, not discussing Sophocles. Unlike Shaw, I remember nightly applause (polite, not ecstatic and certainly not 'silent'), a hesitant partial standing ovation and the company bowing. There were audience talk-backs, but that is regular practice in many theatre companies. The peculiarity of playing in a sports stadium was no more anomalous than the strangeness of performing in a transport museum the week before, or a converted tram-shed the week after (since Derry was the penultimate, not the final, venue in the tour). For me, as for several other members of the company, Derry/Londonderry became interesting in *retrospect*, when the experience had been re-framed by journalists and academics. Sue Colverd (who played Chrysothemis) and Kate Littlewood (of the Chorus) similarly had no recollection of the silent standing ovation, but found the new frame of the story kept the memory of the production alive. In Colverd's words,

Silent standing ovation in Derry? ... no, mate, this is a myth. Can you have one, anyway? Wouldn't it be a silent standing silence? It's like Nijinsky's 12ft leap through the window in the "Rose" - when some-one spoke about it once he said "Did you see it?". They hadn't and then he said "Then how do you know I leap 12 ft?" (if this conversation is true of course). Katie [Kate Littlewood] remembers the atmosphere in Derry being electric and a standing ovation one night but no silence ... But it is a great story and people want to believe that these things happen in the arts. Of course the truth about Derry is the power of the play for some of the people watching in the intense silence of the piece; not what they did or didn't do at the end. (Colverd 2003, pers. comm., 23rd April)

My aim in contrasting my own very different reminiscences and citing those of Colverd and Littlewood, is not to question the factuality of events. I do not doubt the veracity of Shaw's memories of the 'Derry *Electra*', and I do not doubt for a moment that the extraordinary silence at the end of the play is what she remembers. It is not, however, what I remember; and these discrepancies in the way we remember space and events pose interesting interpretative questions. In contrasting our memories, I aim not to question truth and factuality, but rather, to show interpretational possibility; demonstrating the way in which the narrator's personal situation impacts so much on the understanding of the full resonance of performance space. The manner in which a performance event is immediately and retrospectively received is inevitably entwined with the spatial boundaries of its participants' and its recipients' sense of identity:

All reception is deeply involved with memory, because it is memory that supplies the codes and strategies that shape reception, and, as cultural and social memories change, so do the parameters within which reception operates. (Carlson 5)

Shaw's experiences of that week were coloured by a connection to her sense of nationhood and religion, by a recollection of her own personal grief (Shaw 1996), and by her interpretative frame as the performer who had been the channel for so much pain during the play. Mine was shaped, much more mundanely, by my excitement as an inexperienced young actor who is finally 'on', and by naivety about the extent of the sectarianism of Northern Ireland. Colverd's and Littlewood's are undoubtedly shaped by

their own context: experienced and sensitive professionals, friends of Shaw, but with none of the connections to the social, geographical and political elements that were so telling in Shaw's recollection.

Through the story of *Electra* in Derry, we see simultaneously the ways in which both the interplay between memory and space is selective and idiosyncratic, and the reframing of memory can construct a communal experience. Once *Electra* is seen as part of a 'cultural phenomenon' that can have such relevance and applicability to contemporary society, the currency and urgency of both the dramatic text and its theatrical enactment gains importance. The play is not merely an esoteric art form. It is revitalised as a work of political comment and societal interaction. McAuley suggests that this reinvention of a play's relevance to a new audience is a phenomenon created by the interaction of the actor and spectator within the shared space:

The mark of the great performer is that he or she is not only able to stimulate the audience to produce such huge amounts of emotional energy but is able to channel it and, in so doing, to augment it, "fling it back, intensified." As these two remarkable descriptions of performance make clear, energy does not simply emanate from the performer but is produced through the relationship between performer and spectator, and this can only occur when both are present in the same physical space (McAuley 2000, 124).

The extraordinary power of Shaw's performance as *Electra* was felt in venues throughout the two months of the production's tour; but her personal situation in relation to Derry channelled that 'emotional energy' to that audience in that space in a uniquely affective way.

For all that individual memories of the Derry experience might be at odds with each other, they nonetheless come together in an acknowledgement of the cultural importance of a specific play in a specific environment during a specific week of such appalling, politically motivated carnage. The mythologisation of the performance as something uniquely pertinent to that audience, at that time, in that place, is as important as the performance itself: it serves a social purpose of giving voice to communal and individual trauma through the reframing of memory. In the melding of Derry's past and present communal tragedy with the fictional tragedy of *Electra's* grief, the performances in Derry took on the ghosting of which Carlson speaks (2003): a ghosting of past historical events, of shared grief, of the on-going desire for revenge. A ghosting created by the connotative resonance of Irish accents from the North and the South; and a ghosting made all the more piquant by the performance space itself - a gymnasium built for youthful bodies, and a physical reminder of the youth which has been lost. As Carlson says:

...every play is a memory play. Theatre, as a simulacrum of the cultural and historical process itself...has always provided society with the most tangible records of cultural memory, but, like the memory of each individual, it is also subject to continual adjustment and modification as the memory is recalled in new circumstances and contexts. The present experience is always ghosted by previous experiences and associations while these ghosts are simultaneously shifted and modified by the processes of recycling and recollection (Carlson 2).

The play of space in the story of *Electra* in Derry is also the play of memory: two mirrors held to face each other, reflecting a past situation to a future and future one to a past, in an endlessly repeating process of reception and transmission, that constantly changes the parameters of space and memory, making the 'partiality of the imagination' a much more reliable gauge of the past than the 'positivity' of space.

I started this paper by citing Simon Goldhill's radio appearance on *Start the Week*. In conclusion, it seems only right to end with the same, since Goldhill's discussion of Derry was not the primary reason for my using the reference. Kicking off the whole show was Harriet Harvey Wood, A.S.Byatt's co-author on the recently published book, *Memory: An Anthology*. Shortly into the discussion, the host, Andrew Marr, asked Harvey Wood to comment on false memory syndrome, in particular, George Bush's erroneous recollection of seeing the first plane fly into the World Trade Centre:

Andrew Marr: If it's the case that we can't trust our memories, is that a pessimistic, reactionary view of human nature. If don't trust anything we remember - we believe that memory is mostly lies - we have very little to stand on.

Harriet Harvey Wood: I don't think it matters provided you know it. The problem is that so many people think there is such a thing as an exact memory, and I don't think there is.

As Andrew Marr points out, memory is 'a form of storytelling: the story is more important to us almost than the veracity of what we've actually experienced.' That is true to a point, but storytelling and veracity are not mutually exclusive, and in the

complexities of remembering and interpreting the past, there is no simplistic polarisation of the true and the fictitious. The story of 'Electra at Derry' retains currency not because of the factual specifics of what happened on those nights in February 1992, but because it has morphed to form new truths: that certain plays in certain places have profound resonances that go beyond the expected role of theatre; that a community can be brought together by the power of performance; that the place of performance is political, making the Derry sports hall as charged as the theatre of Dionysus. When memory and the 'partiality of the imagination' engage, a new space of performance is constructed with a new 'actuality of experience', and storytelling and veracity go hand in hand.

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