

ANU productions and the performance of otherness

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Abstract

Taking my lead from Ric Knowles's analysis of interculturalism 'from below' (Knowles, 2017, 2), the focus of this essay is on the representation of 'otherness' in three productions of Ireland's multi-award-winning company ANU Productions: their 2014 play *Vardo* about 'travellers' in an inner-city community; their 2016 play *Sunder*, in which contemporary Chinese characters were placed in a centenary production about Ireland's failed revolution; and in their 2019 production, *Faultline*, where a previously unknown Black British singer emerges from the Irish Queer Archive. ANU Productions' intercultural strategy contests monocultural constructions of Ireland, by throwing spectators, without exposition, into often historical scenes featuring characters from other worlds, nations, races and ethnicities. These characters, by their very visual and aural presence in performances ostensibly of monocultural historical experiences, refract and at times challenge essentialist tendencies to write histories of nation. ANU's focus has always been on 'others', the bystanders to history, on those absent from historical constructions. But in their folding of the present into the performed past, a folding the company calls 'NOW THEN NOW', new 'others' emerge as bystanders, inviting us to stand by them as well.

KEYWORDS

ANU productions, history, interculturalism, Ireland, Nation, otherness

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1 | INTRODUCTION

Since 2013, Ireland's ANU Productions has featured an intercultural performative strategy in their site-specific and site-responsive reflections on Irish historical centenaries. Even though the performance of the Irish historical past, at face value, might preclude intercultural representation in the heretofore monocultural society that was Ireland pre-1990s, ANU's performative strategy continues to collapse time and thus insert both the contemporary spectators and migrant actors into a past that is very much present. And it is in the present moment of the performative sphere of the spectator, who, being immersed in history, is often accompanied by, acts as witness to, or simply stands by characters/actors who have been buffeted into the sites of history by contemporary migration's impulses on the multiple routes to Ireland, along the waves of educational, economic or conflict migration. Examples of this are to be seen in their 2014 play *Vardo* whose premise was the history of the Irish travelling community but whose performance of the past in a site-specific community in contemporary inner-city Dublin featured East European people-traffickers, as well as an African asylum seeker eking out a living in harsh circumstances. Similarly, in one of their centenary productions about the 1916 Rising, *Sunder*, a contemporary Chinese woman was found in one scene hiding alongside a historical figure of the failed revolution. The question for me is not 'was she there in 1916?', but is she pointing to the world city that was Dublin at a time when nationalism and the history of nation conjoined, and its historical interculturalism overlooked? And in their 2019 production, *Faultline*, a celebrated African American singer who had relocated to Britain emerges from the State-held Irish Queer Archive and materialises in performance as a queer Black British singer to point to contemporary concerns of the intersectionality of gender, sexuality, race and nation. It is as if the nationalist narrative of Irish history has been refracted to reflect the transnationalism of the contemporary cosmopolitan city that Dublin has become in the third millennium. And so there emerges a new interculturalism that takes its place beside and inside the history of nation, inserting itself in performance to contest historical erasure, and layering over the past an intercultural performativity to complicate and destabilise fixed notions of identities.

ANU Productions' focus has always been on 'others', the bystanders to history, on those absent from historical constructions. But in their folding of the present into the performed past (in what they call a 'NOW THEN NOW' configuration of a parallel present and past), new 'others' emerge as bystanders, inviting us to stand by them as well. Some are hidden underground in cellars where LGBTQ+ citizens found solace in each other's company while their sexuality was illegal (*Faultline*). Some of them speak directly to us as individuals in very public spaces, seeking out spectators as allies in a performance where the glaring eyes of mistrust, suspicion and at times prejudice, point as much at the spectators as the actors. A single spectator alone with an actor of colour in a bus station (in *Vardo*) is placed in affective solidarity with the performer, and made to feel the suspicion of the surrounding scenography of (dis)embarking passengers, that performer and spectator are up to no good. And in Dublin's Moore Street, a historical site of the last failed performances of the 1916 revolution (the location of *Sunder*), is by day a contemporary market of cheap fruit and vegetables, scooped up from the nearby wholesale market, to be sold from mobile market stalls to and by Dublin's inner-city inhabitants. By evening the surrounding restaurants come to life to serve cheap Chinese and Korean food, a globalised layering over of history in darkness, but pointing to the erasure from history of the multiple stores managed and operated by earlier global citizens. These bystanders to history, as seen in a contemporary light, are not actual bystanders at all but active participants in the global city who have been brought to the fore by contemporary historians of postcolonial Ireland (see Ferriter, 2013, 2010; Roddy, 2013). Their physical and aural presence now not only points to their erasure, but also troubles Irish postcoloniality configured solely in relation to its former place in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, without salient reference to its own missionary Christian colonialism that deemed race and ethnicity as 'other' and performed as 'otherness'. By 'otherness' I am thinking particularly of the situatedness of characters or actors in contemporary Irish performance who stand in a state of exception from historical narratives, who may have been buried, overlooked and forgotten in archives, or whose presence and action in history may never have been archived at all. This otherness of ANU Productions is not strictly intercultural at first glance as most of their work in

Ireland has been based on both state archives but also on oral histories of communities through times of postcolonial revisionism, social deprivation and historical erasure. But it becomes intercultural, as we shall see, in moments in performance when visibility and aurality take a turn away from a monocultural past to perform in the present.

2 | INTERWEAVING THE INTERCULTURAL WITH THE NATIONAL

Ireland and Irish theatre has been largely absent from debates about interculturalism and performance. Instead, the focus since independence in 1922 has been on the struggling for and building of a nation. However, in the late 1990s its insularity came to an end when European banks flooded the Irish market with borrowed capital fuelling what became known as the Celtic Tiger economy (see Donovan & Murphy, 2013; Ó Riain, 2014). A building boom and a concomitant debt crisis came to a head 10 years later with a devastating financial crash. During that ten-year period of a first foray into globalised capital there was net inward migration for the first time in Ireland's short history. The principal migrant routes were from West Africa and Eastern Europe, with the attraction of high wages and generous social security. In a few short years Dublin became a global city but much more slowly an intercultural city. First forays into capturing this new interculturalism were to be found on the fringes of Irish theatre, and from within migrant communities themselves. For instance, the first African theatre group to be founded in Ireland in 2003 was Arambe Productions¹ that included white Irish actors alongside their African counterparts to speak to contemporary concerns of the day, namely racism and integration. Later the company focused on some canonical plays of Irish theatre re-imagined to reflect the new interculturalism that was evident on the ground, but which was rarely reflected on the stage.

Debates surrounding this 'new interculturalism' from 2010 onwards, turned to imagining it from below, according to the paradigm shift about the term, and what it actually means, initiated by Ric Knowles's notion of 'performance ecologies' (Knowles, 2010, 58). My use of the term 'intercultural' in an Irish context, is situated within what Charlotte Mclvor and Justine Nakase term the 'third wave of interculturalism' (Mclvor & Nakase, 2020, 221). This third wave essentially emerges in societies 'from below', counteracting the hegemonic interculturalism of largely European directors of the twentieth century (Mclvor and Nakase's second wave) in their postmodern bricolage of 'Eastern' or Asian cultural forms for their supranational touring circuits fuelled by global capital.² Charlotte Mclvor's four books, *Staging Intercultural Ireland* (2014) edited with Matthew Spangler, a monograph *Migration and Performance in Contemporary Ireland* (2016), an edited collection of essays titled *Interculturalism and Performance Now: New Directions?*, edited with Jason King (2019), and her most recent edited collection of essays with Daphne P. Lei, *The Methuen Drama Handbook of Interculturalism and Performance* (2020), form a body of work that charts intercultural theatre from its origins in migration to its manifestations in a variety of cultural spaces including theatre. Lei's introductory essay to the latter co-edited book focuses our attention on being in the third wave of interculturalism (as coined by Mclvor at the end of the book) and that third wave includes 'decentralization, connecting dots, internet performance, interculturalidad, new pedagogical and performance methodologies, trans-indigenization, and oceanic interculturalisms—present a new ecology of minoritarian-centred intercularisms' (Lei & Mclvor, 2020, 4). For the purpose of my focus here on ANU Productions and Irish performance, trans-indigenisation and new performance methodologies are key aspects of my focus.

One of the most useful chapters in Lei and Mclvor's book, for my purposes in this essay, is that by Marcus Cheng Chye Tan on Peter Brook's 2015 production *Battlefield*. Tan lays out how interculturalism as manifested in theatre through the body of an actor cannot eschew race and thus 'remains a material confrontation of an Other' (Lei & Mclvor, 2020, 16). Tan searches for new ways of thinking about interculturalism that move beyond materialism and identitarianism, if that is ever possible, thinking about the term 'interweaving' as configured by Erika Fischer-Lichte (2009) in performance cultures 'that neither negate or homogenize differences but permanently destabilize and invalidate authoritative claims to authenticity' (Lei & Mclvor, 2020, 16). Tan goes on to offer a way of escaping the visibility of the intercultural and thus its identitarianism, by considering the possibility of listening

to it instead. The acoustemology of the intercultural in performance was first put forward by Tan in his book *Acoustic interculturalism: Listening to Performance* (Palgrave, 2012), and here the notion of listening to interculturalism breaks new ground, and offers me a possibility of thinking through how ANU Productions' representations of Irish history in a radically globalised Ireland, are performed, not only visually, but aurally as well. And thus I will focus my analysis on three of their productions, *Vardo* (2014), *Sunder* (2016) and *Faultline* (2019), which in their differing ways destabilise visually and aurally fixed notions of nation and race from below, and offer an intersectionality to otherwise monocultural histories by collapsing the present into the past.

3 | VARD0: THE VISIBILITY OF DIFFERENCE

Vardo (2014) was the last in ANU Productions' tetralogy of performances (The Monto Cycle) that told the history of one-quarter square mile of inner-city Dublin, from its early twentieth-century locus of drugs and prostitution in colonial times, to its postcolonial puritanical 'cleansing' in the form of a 'Magdalen laundry', and to the persistent poverty and neglect of the area as fertile ground for nefarious drug lords to decimate a whole generation. *Vardo* was set in the present with a premise of telling the story of the travelling families who lived in the area, indigenous Others, socially marginalised in wider society, but with hopes and dreams and also beliefs and superstitions. But to get to that point in the story audiences of four, often separated in pairs and even separated again, were led interactively through a series of scenes of street life of people living on the margins until they arrived at Busáras (Dublin's central bus station)—a liminal space at the best of times. In performance in that space, individual spectators, not knowing who was an actor, encountered people from different nations and races journeying to and from the capital.

One of two characters encountered by spectators in the bus station in *Vardo* was a Nigerian man in his thirties who sat down beside a lone waiting spectator. The man was clutching a smartphone and seemed a little agitated. He began to speak and tell the story of his liminal immigration status, working in a care home for the elderly while living in a Direct Provision centre with other migrants, and waiting for his immigration status to be regularised. While waiting he is not allowed to leave the country. The man played by Kunle Animashaun, who had been through a similar set of circumstances himself in real life, told the story of how he had been unable to go back to Nigeria to prepare the body of his father for his funeral. Ironically he spends his days bathing elderly Irish men in a care home, something he should be doing for his father. It is a moving story told intimately, using his mobile phone to show imagery of the funeral back home which he was only able to access by means of video technology. Going home would have rendered his asylum application void and returning to Ireland then would be impossible.

Visually Animashaun was striking for his height and for being the only Black man in the bus station both times I saw the performance.³ Striking up a conversation with a seemingly random stranger attracted the suspicious looks of those waiting for their bus connections. In the first performance he spoke to me in a central seating area and looks from passengers were fleeting and unconcerned. But in the second performance he addressed me in a small waiting area where his tall presence was heightened; all the seats were taken by passengers with tickets waiting for their bus journeys around the country so he was forced to tell me his story standing up. Very quickly I could feel the searing gaze of the unknowing spectators on both of us, which I interpreted as one predicated on race, although in hindsight the use of the mobile phone during the scene might well have signalled to the unwitting bus travellers that we too might be involved in criminal activity. Whatever the thinking, the judgemental gaze was unmistakable and slowly I turned left, bringing Animashaun with me so I eventually blocked him with my body from the gaze of the onlookers. Now, his migrant narrative was just for me in the safety of the performative frame I had created. But the experience left me really unsettled for days afterwards as I had just experienced the silent but unmistakable gaze of bus travellers with apparent racist hues. I considered what that might mean to the Black actor, Kunle.

The chosen site, Busáras, the major bus terminal in Dublin and the whole of Ireland, was significant not only for placing the liminality of characters in a real-life scenography beyond performance, but also because it heightened the sense of precarity of the lives of migrants. If we see the judgemental eyes of the bus travellers all around the performance as human if not social scenography, then the actual transaction between the individual migrant and the largely Irish spectators was an initial attempt at dialogue, which Meerzon, Dean and McNeil, picking up on Zygmunt Bauman (2011), describe as 'a skill which is not only the life force of democracy and cohabitation but also something that can make the difference between us surviving together or perishing together' (Meerzon et al., 2020, 13). And while the conversations between individual spectators and actors might be muted and only half drawn, the context within which we meet is a precarious one for both of us, and that context aligns the spectator with prosthetic allegiance to the predicament of the characters in the drama, but also with the parallel predicament of the actor/migrant in their very precarity, fraught with judgement, endangered by potential verbal and physical violence and possible arrest (despite the photos of the actors being given to the Garda (Police) station next door), in the very social spaces that constitute the geography of the routes into and out of a global city. Such an intercultural encounter does not share histories and artistic practices, but in fact engenders the will to action in the spectator, to protect difference when subject to a hostile gaze, and then use it to resist the often endemic social production of ignorance.

4 | SUNDER: AN INTERCULTURAL HISTORY?

As *Vardo* showed spectators the characters of inward migration and led them through the vista of a globalised city, how can contemporary theatre makers present the history of that city before migration and globalisation lent it an intercultural drive? *Sunder* was the first of a triptych of productions to remember and reflect on the centenary of the failed 1916 'Rising', a revolutionary uprising during Easter week of Irish nationalists against British colonial rule. The ultimate failure of the rebellion led to the execution of its leaders swiftly turning the tide of popular opinion directly in favour of the revolutionaries. How to represent history of a past that has been so mythologised, and in the site-specific fabric of a city such as Dublin? And how to represent the city when it has changed so much in those 100 years in material, cultural and intercultural terms, and especially since the neoliberal drive of recent governments has been to sell property to international developers ignorant of the significance of Dublin's 'lieux de mémoire' (sites of memory; after Pierre Nora, 1984)?

The principal headquarters for the rebels during the week-long Rising was the General Post Office, an imposing building on then Sackville and now O'Connell Street, the biggest 'boulevard' in the whole city. As the week of battle progressed the GPO came under extensive shelling from the British military and so the rebels decided to vacate the premises on the final day and made their preliminary escape at the back of the GPO and across Henry Street (now the major shopping street of Dublin's north side) and into Moore Street. Their progress along Moore Street was achieved by tunnelling through the side walls of the terraced houses, where they held out before their eventual surrender. Moore Street clearly is a site of memory of the Rising, as it was the last site of the 'provisional government' self-instituted after the Proclamation of an Irish Republic some days before. But by 2016 it had taken on a wholly different character. Bordering its west side is the ILAC Shopping Centre, and to the east many of the houses linked to the rebels remain unoccupied, and the street has been taken over by market traders, mostly women selling cheap fruit out of prams and makeshift stands. It is a street made lively by the women traders shouting out the prices of the fruit, and by shifty individuals selling illegal cigarettes. The street trade is barely legal, and some of it completely illegal, but it has played a huge part in keeping healthy Dublin's inner-city residents. In 2016 its character changed again as new migrants opened up fast-food Asian eateries, food stores targeting the tastes of the biggest migrant population from Poland, as well as phone repair and accessories shops, again staffed by the new migrants. The street now reflects the inward migration that was concomitant with the economic boom of the late 1990s and early noughties, and Ireland's place in a globalised world, a globalisation

regulated for the most part by a desired state of mercantilism of successive centre-right parties that governed the country for its first 100 years.

ANU's production began on the first floor of the ILAC Shopping Centre adjacent to Moore Street. The ground floor existed only for the major retail stores on the perimeter of the shopping mall, and the first floor of the Centre was occupied by the City Library of Dublin City Council. Outside the front door of the library is a small viewing platform beside an elevator and a staircase down into the Shopping Centre. And this is where *Sunder* began. The show was durational across the day, with four spectators at a time working their way at half-hour intervals through the performance, whose scenes were being played rotationally for various combinations of the group of four, inside the shopping centre, directly across from the contested site of the Moore Street memorial, in a fast-food restaurant and in an Asian food store. On the first-floor balcony four mobile phones were placed, one for each spectator, and the first character from history, Sean McLaughlin (played by Craig Connolly), one of the first exponents of urban warfare whose reference of encouragement to us as we set off on our journey, 'Death or Glory', linked his contemporary appearance to his character in history.

My phone rang. The voice belonged to a woman with a strong Belfast accent: 'Hello? Can you hear me? Listen to me very carefully. You are being watched. You need to get to the ground floor. Make sure you are not being followed. Do it now.' Instantly my anticipation was heightened. Who was this woman, where was she, and who was watching me? Was she watching me? She instructed me to exit the building onto Moore Street. As I was leaving the building she told me she was Winnie (played by Louise Mathews) and she needed me to witness. Was this Winnie Carney, secretary to rebel leader James Connolly? I emerged onto Moore Street opposite the building site and the commemorative building wrap to commemorate 1916. Winnie continues: 'I was there. I was there then. I was there. And now, so are you.' The use of both tenses was the familiar trope of ANU Productions, the living history trope of actors and spectators being 'NOW-THEN-NOW'; not so much in collapsed time but in both times, in an interwoven shared place.⁴ Winnie told me to focus on the Polonez store beside the building site opposite: 'Where the Polonez store stands, once stood Dublin's first Skin Hospital'. She speaks of what is visible so that we not only look at it but imagine its past as well. She continues: 'What you cannot see, or smell, is the decomposing bodies of 11 dead horses [...] all of this is invisible now.' What I could see was a street of international food stores, and people from all over the world. What I couldn't see, and Winnie reminded me, was that underneath all this bustle of commerce at the lower end of the market (the 'pound' shop Dealz guards the entrance to the Ilac on Moore Street), were few signs of the significance of the houses of Moore Street in the creation of the Irish Nation.

Winnie urges me to turn right and walk down towards Henry Street calling out the names of the families who occupied the houses in 1916, now walled off in builders' hoarding and wrap, counting down from 16 to number 10 at the end of the block where Moore Lane begins and where the rebels entered the terrace. She calls out the family names: 'the Plunketts, the Nortons, the Tierneys, the Gormans, the Roches and the Doyles. All gone.' I arrived at number 10 where I was told that upstairs under the bed were all 13 members of the McKane family. But number 10 in 2016 was a fast-food restaurant called Buffet 79. Outside the shop there was a sign that the food is Chinese, but inside the staff were south Asian and the food was a fusion of cheap carbohydrates, from chips and rice to prawn crackers. The actor playing Sean McLaughlin bought some food and we sat down to hear his story and journey into history as the various characters from history in the last days of the Rising took us on a tour of the back alleys and streets, showing what was there and what is there no more. The moment of historical importance has a site, but the site is invisible and there is nothing by way of commemoration. What is visible though is the intercultural city with its people and cuisine that layer over history. As my tour of the back alley finishes, I am directed to number 56 Moore Street where the history would continue.

I walk into a small Asian food store with Asian customers and staff of various nationalities. But at the bottom of the back stairs is an unnamed woman in a white coat who speaks to me in German, 'Kommen Sie mit', and I follow her up the stairs. Once upstairs she leads me into a room that is from another time with wooden chairs scattered at all angles through the room, some appearing to defy gravity. There are also two tables and two women from the past frozen in time (played by Una Kavanagh and Niamh McCann). To an eerie soundtrack they begin to move,

one in a foetal position while the other makes sounds of severe physical distress. I move further into the room as the two women writhe on their separate tables and suddenly become aware of a recorded male voice speaking Chinese. I connect the voice first to the Asian food store below, but amidst the recording I hear distinctly the words 'Glasnevin Cemetery' and I surmise that this might well be an account in Chinese of the Rising, as Glasnevin is where many of those who died during the Rising are buried. The recording seems to be on a loop and I can hear Henry Street, Moore Street, and Parnell Street being mentioned and the latter name clearly indicates the Chinese recording in the present; before the partition of Ireland, Parnell Street was called Great Britain Street. In fact, the recorded voice was that of Wei Feng, my then PhD student at Trinity College, who was listing the names of the people who had died in this section of the battle of Moore Street, providing details of their injuries that led to death as well as details of where they were buried. I follow another character from 1916 called Charlie (played by Ste Murray) into a neighbouring room. It contains carcasses of meat (mostly pigs) strung up. The man takes off his military jacket of the rebel army. We are in the storeroom of a butcher/victualler, of which there were many in Moore Street at the time of the Rising. There is a stack of tins of peaches. Charlie opens one with a ring pull, a sign situating him in the present, though still wearing his nineteenth-century clothes. He eats the peaches with his hands, straight from the tin. He turns around on the spot surveying the room and so do I. I see a black and white television sitting on a chair. Though there is no volume I can see a truck exploding beside a large department store and realise this is a recording of the Provision IRA's bombing of Manchester's Arndale Centre on 15 June 1996 that left injured over 250 passers-by. But also hiding behind the door through which I entered I saw a young, silent Chinese woman. What was she doing in this scene, all alone among the vestiges of Irish history? My mind raced to her possibly being trafficked here illegally but connecting back to the voice of the Chinese man in the previous scene, perhaps she was the contemporary resident of Moore Street caught up unwittingly on the site of a bloody history of revolution and the subsequent trauma of remembering.

Eventually I am ushered downstairs by the unnamed Chinese woman who says the building is on fire. I pass the German woman who greets me again in German though this time with an urgency, and I rush out into the very intercultural street where passers-by would not know of or be concerned by the history being performed behind closed doors and in back alleys on a continuous loop. The intercultural present of Dublin stands at the gateway to a monocultural nationalist history. In her survey of more recent theories of 'new interculturalism' Charlotte McIvor posits: 'New interculturalism's critical approaches also repeatedly reverse, redirect, and/or complicate familiar networks or routes of intercultural exchange, exploding East/West and Global North/Global South binaries of prestige and innovation in the process' (McIvor & King, 2019, 2). To this, having experienced *Sunder*, I would add that the conflation of space and time in the production of history in a globalised city produces translations, instructions, images and sounds that provide a framing and a complication of images of the past with a very different present. This is a performance of a national history with an awareness of the contemporary intercultural lens through which we must look at history particularly when performed on material sites that are still present but have been re-inhabited. Similarly, it is something that Daphne P. Lei argues as the discourse of intercultural theatre that has been enriched by globalisation (Lei, 2011, 572). Further it is something that Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert put forward as 'the potential of interculturalism' to 'create representations that are unbounded and open, and potentially resistant to forms of imperialist closure' (Lo & Gilbert, 2002, 47). But perhaps the interculturalisation of the history of the contemporary city of Dublin does not yet match the intercultural potential of the global city of Ric Knowles's Toronto (2017).

5 | FAULTLINE AT AN INTERSECTION

ANU's 2019 production had no scenography of the intercultural city as a frame; it was performed exclusively indoors and with a back alley with blocked-off egress. The production *Faultline* used as a starting point the Irish LGBTQIA+ Archive that is deposited in the National Library, an achievement so immense for marginalised citizens,

as homosexuality was only decriminalised in 1993. The production was set in 1982, a turning point in political protest, an Irish Stonewall year, after two separate murders of gay men, and after which the Gardaí (Police) threatened the gay community to 'out' them to friends and family as their way of 'gathering evidence' for the murders. 'Faultline' also refers to the exodus of many gay men from the country. The archive's materials were supplemented with oral evidence gathered from the people who had been involved politically at the time. The setting was a basement office and club for an LGBT helpline service run by volunteers (Tel-A-Friend), on the opposite side of Parnell Square where it once existed in reality. Entering the club cut spectators off from the intercultural city to a past even more monocultural than 1916 caused by waves of emigration, but introduced another refraction of what might be considered 'intercultural'.

The 75-minute performance was played to audiences of 12 at a time, divided into three groups of four, but occasionally some scenes were played to just one spectator per group, and the groups rotated three times. The Tel-A-Friend helpline office was recreated from the memories of those who had worked there, featuring a set of phones, multiple boxes of papers simulating what would end up in the archive and a kettle for making tea. The most realistic scene of the performance was one in which a volunteer struggles to keep his composure while answering the phones, and we get to hear the type of conversation typical of the time of internalised homophobia, including to an extent that of volunteer (Paul, played by Matthew Malone). A second scene took place in the men's toilets, involving two dancers enacting a homoerotic ritual of 'cruise culture' that was both violent and tender. Such an underground cultural performance of course reflected the time when homosexuality was illegal in Ireland.

So far, so not intercultural, such was 1982 in Dublin. But then my group was ushered out into the back alley with the bins and pigeons to meet a Black woman with an English accent, taking a swig of whiskey from a hip flask. She told us her story of being a lesbian mother who is not able to see her daughter grow up. It mirrored the stories of some of the women ANU Productions had interviewed for their research. She brought us into the tiny dressing room of the club, to help her choose her costume as she was about to go on-stage to sing. And on she came, loud and proud, but as she sings to us and the other characters in the drama, her voice begins to break and falter. Hers was a brave voice built on the precarity of her sexuality at a highly judgemental time. It was a bitter-sweet ending to the performance and we were led out the back into the alley as one of the characters was taking out the rubbish from the club.

In the same way as in *Vardo*, a Black actor in *Faultline* gave voice to a marginalised personal story, but to what extent was it a migrant narrative from below and was it thus intercultural? In an interview I conducted with the company's director, Louise Lowe, and creative producer, Lynnette Moran, I learned the origins of the character and how she developed in performance. The Black singer in the club was inspired by chart-topping American singer Viola Wills, beloved of LGBT audiences, who had settled in England. One of her 45 rpm singles was found in the Irish Queer Archive. This was the jumping-off point for ANU's creators. But Viola was neither lesbian nor queer. The company had worked with Black British performer Nandi Bhebhe the previous year in their co-production with *Heart of Glass* in St Helens, Lancashire, entitled *Torch*, focusing on a women's refuge. Using Viola Wills as a jumping-off point, Bhebhe helped transition the character into the here and now and the intersectionality of queer performance in a largely white, gay male history, creating a new character, Donna Marie Douglas. Lynnette Moran explains:

Nandi's character, Donna Marie Douglas, was very much about NOW and about the politic of NOW, where actually we're talking about queer politics.⁵ We're talking about body politic and race. About being a black queer woman both then and now. We're talking about breaking apart gender norms and the black female body in performance. One of the first conversations we had was about how we'd handle the exoticization of the black female performer within an all-male gay club of the time and the subsequent fallout from that which Nandi identified within her lived experience as a contemporary performer (Singleton, 2021, 209).

This harks back to Kunle's character in *Vardo*, in the sense of his providing a migrant narrative, close to his own but not fully. Nandi also connects in multiple respects to the internationalism of Viola Wills, the original source of inspiration, but takes it further with the politics of the female Black body and queerness in her lesbian character Donna Marie Douglas, positioned as intercultural.

Listening to Nandi narrating Donna's story and singing in the club at the end of the performance takes us back to the kind of acoustemological interculturalism referred to by Tan and referenced at the beginning of this essay. Unlike Kunle's voice that is whispered in a precarious but very public space in *Vardo*, Nandi/Donna socialises and performs to acclaim in the private space of a gay male club. But both these manifestations of acoustemological interculturalism position the spectator very much as listener, dresser, fellow drinker, and ally. Listening may well be the primary interface between individual spectators and both performers, more so than the Chinese voices and characters in *Sunder* who help us into and out of a national and nationalist past and imagine it being interpreted by other cultures. The Black male performer's body and its furtive actions approaching apparent and mostly white Irish strangers, marked him as precarious in public space (in *Vardo*). But Nandi/Donna's voice and body allowed the performance of the Irish Queer Archive, which stopped at the *faultline* moment of 1982, to be transcended and expanded to interweave the contemporary politics of queerness and race, and to position an, otherwise impossible, intercultural encounter at its intersection.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ See http://irishtheatre.ie/companies/30292/arambe_productions (accessed 7 August 2021).
- ² I am thinking here of the work of Peter Brook and Ariane Mnouchkine in Europe in the 1980s and 1990s.
- ³ I saw *Vardo* first on 27 September 2014 at 3 p.m., and again on 4 October 2014 at 5 p.m.
- ⁴ 'NOW-THEN-NOW' is a term used by co-director Louise Lowe to explain how the performance of history (then) is received in the here and 'now'. It emerged over the course of the development of the Monto Cycle (2010–2014). To mark the end of the Monto Cycle, ANU Productions and Create Ireland (national development agency for collaborative arts in social and community contexts) in association with Dublin City Council held a conference entitled NOW-THEN-NOW. Lynnette Moran, director of Dublin live art festival LIVE COLLISION chaired the conference that took place over two full days, 7–8 October 2014, in Dublin City Council's arts space THE LAB which featured in the cycle of performances.
- ⁵ In many of ANU Productions' performances of history, history is presented as THEN through a lens visible in the performance as NOW. These NOW-THEN-NOW shifts in performance provide the dramaturgy of the experience for the most part. In *Faultline* Nandi/Viola provided the Black female NOW to the white male THEN.

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How to cite this article: Singleton, B. (2021). ANU productions and the performance of otherness. *Orbis Litterarum*, 76, 301–310. <https://doi.org/10.1111/oli.12325>