

THE THEATRE SHOP CONFERENCE

Friday 5 October 2001

Irish Film Centre, Temple Bar, Dublin

European City of Culture

2001 has seen four Southern Irish cities – Limerick, Waterford, Cork and Galway – bidding for selection as European City of Culture 2005. In the North, Belfast launched Imagine Belfast 2008, the campaign with which it competes against Newcastle, Gateshead, Liverpool, Bristol, Cardiff, Oxford and Milton Keynes for the prize in that year. The City of Culture phenomenon throws up all kinds of questions of a philosophical and practical nature. Bearing this in mind, Theatre Shop invited speakers from Rotterdam and Bruges, chosen cities for 2001 and 2002 respectively, as well as Belfast, to share a variety of perspective and experience.

The discussion was given added urgency on the very morning of 5 October, when as theatre practitioners all over Ireland were travelling to Dublin for the conference, news would leak that Cork had won the Irish 2005 nomination...

Introduction of Chair by Jane Daly, Co-Producer, Theatre Shop 2001.

Good morning, everybody, I'd like to welcome you all to the 8th annual Theatre Shop. I would like now to start the business of the day and hand over to Fiach MacConghail who many of you will know. Fiach is a film and theatre producer, was the Artistic Director of the Project Arts Centre and has contributed enormously to the development of a lot of performance companies in this country. He was also the director of the Irish participation in Hanover 2000, again which offered a platform in showcases for a lot of companies, and he is currently Programme Manager with the Irish College in Paris who are working to create an Irish Educational and Culture Centre there, so Fiach is absolutely perfect to chair a session on European City of Culture, something which I think offers enormous opportunities for us in the North and South. Without further ado, I'll hand you over to Fiach and I'd also encourage questions from the floor when the speakers have spoken. Thank you.

Fiach MacConghail, Chair

Thanks, Jane. A couple of things: it's a wonderful irony that we're having a Theatre Shop symposium in a cinema. I don't know what that says about Dublin, and about the theatre festival, but that irony didn't escape me this morning. Secondly as a Dub I want to congratulate Cork for winning the City of Culture. I heard it on the radio this morning and I know there's quite a strong Cork presence here and commiserations to Galway but congratulations to Cork. I think this morning's seminar will hopefully be more lively and constructive for Cork. We hope to visit that city a lot more often, particularly Dubs, in 2005, so congratulations there. We'll move swiftly on and I'd like to introduce very quickly to you Hugo de Greef who is the intendant or the director of Bruges 2002.

Hugo de Greef, Bruges European City of Culture 2002

Thank you. Good morning to you, I have to be very short. Next year Bruges is culture capital. We presented our programme last week to the national press and we are ready for, let's say, the realisation of the year 2002. Of course, it's very special to prepare a culture capital in a city like Bruges which is a rather small city but of course part of a bigger region. We are close to Holland, France, close of course to the South of England. It's a city with a very specific image. It has a big cultural art history and an image of being a medieval city. Our aim and our task was to work out a programme with the full respect of what the city is, to say and prove and to be active in actual art and culture and having also possibilities to give the view for the future for the city.

We did it through different points of view: there's a lot of involvement with artists. We invited quite a lot of artists to create to work for the city to set up a lot of activities in that year on different levels. We put a bigger attention on architecture because in our opinion architecture could be something that goes into confrontation and integration with the old image of the city. So we have a couple of new buildings which will be in the city, partly initiated by the City Council itself and partly initiated by our organisation, and therefore architecture for us is a little like a symbol. The third element symbolic for the work we are preparing is that all our investments in working with artists will have a lasting context so we have installed two working places, one for professional performing artists and one for young artists from different kinds of arts. Those will add to the cultural life of the city for the future.

I think it's important also that we took the attitude that we are a Cultural Organisation with the existing cultural organisations so that we are producing almost everything on the programme with existing cultural partners. It's also a very good choice that we didn't want to be a local project – although we are looking for a lot of links with local situations but always trying to bring them on another level so they could express themselves in a wider context – so it's more national projects. To our surprise, if you know a little about the situation with the Flemish and the French-speaking areas in the country, we are even supported financially by the French-speaking community, and even by Brussels, who supported financially by just confirming that the work we are doing is really the work from a locality, Bruges, but for a national situation, and of course the programme itself, if you see names of artists, it's quite a link of the local quality, national quality and international top artists who are involved together. I think it's important to mention also that I myself started in the first part of 1999 and there was a preparatory report made by someone else to do a study on the culture situation of the city and the region – an enormously strong base for us to start our work for preparing the culture capital. We are an independent organisation, kind of a foundation with a Board, and that gives us the possibility to have a freedom in decision-making and to not have to go to a lot of administration levels to make decisions on the working situation. The team itself, led by me, has very strong possibilities to make decisions on different levels. The culture capital project are supported financially by government of course, on every government level and you know there are a lot of levels in Belgium. We have a lot of support from private sponsors, one fifth of the budget is covered this way and we hope to cover one sixth of the budget through income from tickets, merchandising and things like that.

We are also one part, in fact, of the policy from the City Council to be culture capital. We make the culture programme. There are two other elements. There is a big restoration programme going on in the city with an enormous budget so if you visit the city now you'll see a lot of scaffolding around and you'll see a lot of buildings already in restoration and a number of buildings that are close to ready. Everything has to be ready for 2002. The third project which is enormously important for the total region of Flanders is the building of a new concert hall, a

concert hall of 1,200 seats and a smaller hall in the same building of 300 seats, with wonderful architecture. It has, of course, a separate budget brought together by different governments.

Fiach MacConghail

Thanks, Hugo. I think that's interesting. Certainly from my travels abroad as well and working in an international context, two factors that keep cropping up in my discussions with both institutions and artistic directors is context – local context, national context and international context all very important – and tied with that is the sustainability that whatever work being produced is produced within a kind of context that allows it to grow organically so that it seems natural to the city. Whether it is a dialogue through architecture, through the visual arts or through theatre, something I think that perhaps we could look back at Dublin 1991 with horror and learn from. To my left is Shona McCarthy, who was Chief Executive of a very good festival in Belfast called Cinemagic. She is now behind Imagine Belfast 2008, the European capital culture bid for that year. Shona, you're welcome.

Shona McCarthy, Imagine Belfast bid 2008

Thanks. Fiach says Cinemagic was such a great festival because his film won last year! I have to put that into context! The first question people might ask is why is Belfast going for this? I mean we all know how Belfast has been represented around the world. It hasn't been a positive or pleasant image and I guess you know that's probably our biggest motivation in going for this. It's a unique opportunity for our city in particular; it's a chance for us to challenge some of the received ideas of the city and to create a new time and a place for Belfast. The concept, we've been working very, very hard and trying to get a story for Belfast, a concept that has honesty and integrity, that doesn't hide from the past or try to present these cliché tourist-board images of Belfast as a great place for economic regeneration, it's a great place for investment, when the reality of it at the minute it isn't, so we're trying to put together a story for Belfast that is unique, that is exceptional and above all that is honest and has integrity, locally, nationally and internationally as well. It's probably the biggest opportunity we've ever had.

I think it's fascinating that it's European capital of culture because it gives us that opportunity to look beyond ourselves. I mean we've been accused in Belfast – and it's probably true to a very

large extent – of being massively parochial, always looking in on ourselves, always kind of looking at ourselves in a very parochial sort of context, and this is an opportunity at every level to challenge people to look outside themselves, to look at themselves as how they sit in Europe and internationally. It's also an opportunity, I think, for us to put our best foot forward for a change. I think we have a huge challenge in terms of how we've been portrayed in the media, as much as anything else, that there is a kind of almost a laziness now about how Belfast is presented. It's always, always presented for the 10%, for the really negative awful things that go on there, for the polarisation. I don't think that we've ever been presented for the 90% of massively positive, the huge creative and energy drive that there is in the city. So, above all, there is that opportunity for us to re-image ourselves, re-present ourselves and to put our best foot forward for a change in terms of our cultural life, our artistic life and the brilliant things that people when they come to the city inevitably go away with a really positive impression. So it's a fabulous opportunity in that way.

There's the usual kind of outcomes, I suppose, that we can anticipate, the economic regeneration, the cultural tourism – this notion that suddenly there's going to be bus-loads and plane-loads of people arriving in Belfast, thronging our streets, buying our products and all the rest. To be honest, I'm much less interested in that and most of the people I've talked to in the last six months are much less interested in that side of it as well. What it really is, is an opportunity for us to regain a sense of self-value, self-worth, confidence about who we are, where we're from, what's been good about the city, reconnecting people with the really positive aspects of Belfast heritage and its present as well, and presenting that and putting that forward. So whilst the other stuff, the economic regeneration, social regeneration, all that stuff is so important, really what it's about is creating that sense of Belfast as a city to be proud of at a grass roots level. Our values are kind of interesting. We've played about with words, I've never heard so many words in my life as I have in the last six months, it's been crazy and we're trying to get away from the clichés. So we decided our core word is subversive (interesting one for Belfast!), we're going to try and turn things on their head a wee bit, try and look at things a bit differently, try and encourage people, even if it's just for a day, with some of the projects we're doing, just to see things in a different way. So we're going to be challenging and passionate and pioneering and subversive – all great words.

So, practically, what have we done to date? Well, they put me in a job, it was the City Council who initiated the process. I think it was probably quite brave of them to actually choose somebody from the arts community to drive the bid – that’s probably been quite a brave thing to do. Having said that, in the last six months it’s been crazy. I’m sure these two cities that have already won the capital of culture bid, and, I’m sure, Cork, can identify with this as well, when you’re putting together a bid like this and you’ve had no precedent for it in the city, it’s just mental. I’ve spent six months talking to people, no big public campaign, no advertising campaign. Just genuine discussions, gathering ideas, I’ve got a huge ideas bank at this stage, and just really starting to get some kind of honest dialogue going about it. That six months has been incredible because I expected there to be a massive amount of cynicism and there’s a wee bit of cynicism – even with the name Imagine Belfast. One of my biggest experiments has been talking to taxi drivers because – I’m sure it’s the same in Dublin – taxi drivers in Belfast are the greatest talkers in the world. Every time I get into a taxi now, I ask what they think about this place and what I’ve been really struck by is the absolute love-hate relationship people have with Belfast, the love outweighs the hate. You can see people really feel there’s a tangible thing, this place could be amazing, we just have that next leap to take and I really think that this is the opportunity to do that in an original and innovative way.

Apart from talking, I’ve been starting to look at the infrastructural issues, the financial issues, all of that and I have to say it’s a unique moment in time for Belfast. Yes, you see on the news we’re still having problems, but we’ve had a peace process, we’ve had this window of time where people have experienced something different. There’s an energy that has come out of that, a real sense of possibility, of time for change, that I really think we can build on and make something new happen. The other sort of unique thing I think about our city is that probably no other city we’re competing with in the UK has the same connection to local government, has the same opportunities to get directly into dialogue with government ministers and say, “Look this is your challenge too, you have to support this, this has to be brave, this has to be bold”. I really think we’re getting somewhere with that. The City Council are waiting for us to say now, “This is how you can help”, but beyond that I’ve been meeting with government ministers and they’ve now set up a working group with really top representation from every single department, so they

know this isn't just about the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. We've now got someone from the Department of Trade and Industry, from Social Development, from Agriculture, for God's sake. I mean this is like an urban regeneration project and the agriculture people see that Belfast, still a hinterland as such, a major rural community, that this is a major opportunity for them as well. So I really think we're starting to get that network of really significant government as well.

I don't want to say too much more but probably the real opportunity in Belfast too is to raise the level of debate, to just get the discussion up there – what is the culture in our city, what do the arts mean to our city – and to have honest conversations with ourselves, to create an opportunity for dialogue which I really don't think we've had probably in the last 30 years. Belfast has always been presented as a really kind of male-dominated city with a really heavy political agenda so this is the time for a new dialogue, for a new conversation with ourselves and a conversation that will spread out to the rest of the world as well. In many ways, the last thing I want to say is that the way I see it and from other people I've talked to is that the title is the icing on the cake. I mean people hold up this grand title, and we're going all out to win it, but it's the icing on the cake. What we're doing is a process that in Belfast needs to be done anyway and has been needed for a long time – it's a real opportunity for us.

The crazy thing is there was three of us running this bid for the last six months so it's been absolutely hectic. Now in the last week we have a creative team who are drawn from architecture, media and entertainment, culture and arts, and the community sector. It's a brilliant team and the new energy that they have brought is going to be fantastic in the next six months whilst we prepare the bid. We're going to launch a major public awareness campaign on 25 October so that will give everybody in the city a chance to start to engage in the dialogue and we're going to open up that whole debate. That's really all I wanted to say.

Fiach MacConghail

There's a lot of them in the audience anyway from Cork. Shona, can you tell us what the schedule is, what the deadline is? Can you talk us through what the deadline is for the bid is, that process up to the point when the announcement is made and who is making the announcement?

Shona McCarthy

At this stage the deadline is March next year so although 2008 seems a long way away we've actually got a further six months to put the whole bid together. All the bids will be submitted in March. We're competing against Newcastle, Gateshead, Liverpool, Bristol, Cardiff, Oxford and Milton Keynes. Then the decision-making process after that is they will do a shortlist of three cities, all of them will get a stamp of cultural excellence – that will happen in the autumn of next year. Then they're hoping to make the final announcement in March 2003. I suspect it's going to take a bit longer than that, so it may actually be autumn 2003. They just have literally done a call for a jury: they're putting together, initially anyway, a UK jury to do the shortlisting, so they've called for nominations from Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. That jury will make the decision on the shortlist and our hope is that the final decision will then go to a European jury but there's no decision made on that.

Fiach MacConghail

Thanks. Our final speaker is Jan Duursma who is working in Rotterdam. I used to think this only happened in Ireland – you know he was only given two years to develop a programme. I think we've learned from the Cork decision today that there is a little more lead time here. So, Jan, how did you do it? It's currently in Rotterdam and it's 2001, it's this year.

Jan Duursma, Rotterdam European City of Culture 2001

We worked in the field of architecture, with some theatre and media mixed in, for 2001 but it's not pure architecture because we dealt with themes, not disciplines. As you've already heard, we did not have much time to prepare. So our director came up with the idea of a book as a starting point. In this book, the traveller, Marco Polo, an independent spirit, tells stories to the ruler of the Moghul Empire about the people under his rule. We thought we'd use this to devise stories in which the city could speak for itself. Unlike Paris, Athens, Berlin and so on, Rotterdam is not a city with one unique cultural identity.

So our approach is based on searching identities. We know that we have a cultural identity. We know that we are a modern dynamic city with youth culture, architecture, a multi-cultural city

which leads to lots of interesting initiatives, but we are not a city in which you can grab our identity easily, like Bruges, I think. So around these themes, we devised ten stories and each of the programme staff members is responsible for a number of these stories. They're all based on very short stories about what could Rotterdam be, what its history is. For instance, this history of it as a pleasure city which was very strong in the period between the wars, does it still have a value today? If so, what kind of programme should we adopt in the case of debates, but also theatre programming, and also, for instance, it's the city of Erasmus. Erasmus, the philosopher, was born in Rotterdam so we based the programme on the fact that he lived here, that some of his books are in the Rotterdam Library but also the themes of this work, his humanist work, we used that for programmes related to tolerance today, between different groups living in the city, things that you can do on a local level and also on an international level. So around all these themes we devised programmes.

We had two years to make our programme. We did our bid five or six years before 2001 but because City of Culture became so popular, it also became a big debate in Europe which cities should be chosen next. Countries were struggling. Spain wanted it first, Oporto wanted it also, that led to the situation in 2000 where you had nine Cities of Culture in Europe. Maybe you know about it, it was difficult for all the cities. It was a cultural disaster year – maybe some of the cities succeeded. It's not really a problem if people don't know all over Europe, all over the world that Rotterdam is City of Culture this year. A City of Culture only becomes a success in my opinion if it's rooted in the city itself, if the city is not trying to use this bigger culture budget, this bigger marketing project to focus all the attention on the city for one year and then afterwards the big international theatre groups are gone, the Three Tenors are gone, you built the museums, you built the theatres but you put so much emphases on the infrastructure of the buildings, you forgot you also need people and a budget to programme the buildings, to operate theatres and museums. Some cultural capitals seem to have forgotten that.

This is also the problem with bigger events like Expo. It's also a problem with, for instance, the Seville Expo. They put all the emphasis on one year, 1992. I was there in 1991 and the city was vibrant and buzzing about the Expo. I didn't go there in 1992 but I went back in 1993 and everybody was disappointed. You have all these new buildings empty – it didn't work.

Employment was just as low again as before. Of course, City of Culture is on a smaller scale than Expo, but I think City of Culture should become a success if they are rooted in what is happening in the city. Still it can become an international success if you build theatre groups or if you have a very famous museum, of course you can focus attention on that. But if you try to be something else than you are in this year then you can be a success in that year, you can attract maybe millions of visitors, but the year afterwards you will have nothing. People will be disappointed, artists will be disappointed, the City Council who is your commissioner – we are also an independent foundation – they will be disappointed and the city, well, what will you have gained for one year? You will have gained some extra profits for hotels. For one year, you will have extra revenue from tickets and so on, but afterwards you are left with nothing.

I agree you don't get elected to be a cultural capital, you feel that you are a cultural capital and it's always a phase in the cultural development of a city. In the 40's Rotterdam was bombed, in the 50's it was rebuilt, in the 60's slowly you started to get a cultural feeling to rise again after 20 years of hard work and building, the Rotterdam Arts Foundation was built in the 70's and 80's, real good cultural buildings were started. For instance, the Rotterdam Theatre is one of a series of buildings that opened in the 80's and 90's. So the City of Culture was for us the icing on the cake really.

I'm going to end with three quotes. The first sums up, in my opinion, what we did wrong in Rotterdam 2001 – we had too many programmes. We had thousands of ideas and we carried out 300 programmes. We invited a few hundred other people also into the programme so that we could communicate these programmes so we had far too many programmes to do. So this quote is “Less is more”, from the architect Mies van der Rohe: less programmes would have provided us with the possibility of higher quality in the marketing, higher quality in the programmes themselves, more time to spend to talk with the creators of the programmes. Now two quotes from Robert Palmer whom many of you will know (he was on the selecting panel for the 2005 bids). He was in Rotterdam a few weeks ago and he told us that he had said to the cities after they outlined their brief for 2005: “I'm not really that interested in what you're going to do in 2005. I'm curious about what you want the city to look like in 2006, 2007 and 2008.” I fully agree with him: it's much more important how you come out of the year than how the year itself

is. His second quote is maybe a starting point for discussion: “Avoid the abuse of culture, don’t use culture to achieve something else. Culture will fail you, it will fail you in itself. The primary justification for being a City of Culture, it’s about being intellectual, spiritual and creative. Be honest with that and don’t try to use culture as a vehicle.”

Fiach MacConghail

Thanks, Jan, that was very informative. I think Belfast learned that by appointing Shona as Chief Executive, that culture is leading the way in terms of their bid in Belfast. Can we open it up to the floor for questions or comments? Is Neil Murray here from Glasgow and Gerry Barnes or Mark Mulqueen as well from Cork just to contribute to this? Certainly, one of the comments that Jan made about Expo, I think the devastation that Hanover is feeling now after Expo – ironically one of their themes was sustainability – but the real connection with the city was not achieved, the real connection with community wasn’t achieved, with the artists wasn’t achieved. The contributions from Hugo and from Jan and our own experiences in Dublin 1991 suggests to me the scale in terms of local, national and international has to be rooted, has to emanate from the city itself, to make further connections that should develop organically. Any comments from the floor?

Seamus Lynam, Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands

Thanks very much, Fiach. Just a point of clarification really. There has been no decision made on the City of Culture, the capital of culture for 2005. What we’re hearing in the media over the last week or so, there is a select committee that the commission have put together to look at the four bids that were made for the City of Culture 2005. As I understand it, the recommendation from that committee will be Cork but I have absolutely no formal notification of that. It still has to go through a process, through the European Parliament, European Commission and the final deciders are actually the European Council of Ministers, so it’ll be a number of months, but saying that the obvious recommendation of the select committee will hold quite a weight.

Fiach MacConghail

Is that official, does Cork have the nomination?

Seamus Lynam

No, it's not official, but as I understand it that is likely to be the recommendation from this committee. The other thing to say is that what our colleague was saying about Rotterdam and the number of Cities of Culture bidding over the last number of years there is actually a new programme for the City of Culture where each year a member state has the right to nominate a City of Culture from the year 2005. Ireland happens to be the first and there is a new process of nomination and selection, so the nomination and the decision has to be at least three years in advance and that at least gives us a three-year planning period. That's why Dublin unfortunately in 1991 and obviously Rotterdam this year had very little time to plan. Thanks very much.

Fiach MacConghail

Can you clarify then what the sequence is, Seamus, from now on? When will announcements formally be made?

Seamus Lynam

Well, as I understand it, the report is now being issued by the select committee and the European Parliament have three months to respond to that report. Their response, their report and the Commission's own views will be put to the Council of Ministers so it's likely be the end of the year before there is a formal decision. But I would imagine from my own experience that the select committee which has been put together by the Commission (and there's representatives from the Council on that and also of the Parliament) that it will carry weight OK.

Fiach MacConghail

Thanks, Seamus, for that clarification.

Gerry Barnes, Cork Opera House

I take the cautionary note from Seamus Lynam. I think when we came to this meeting we had no idea of the announcement that would be made. For myself, I thought the gods punish us by granting us our wishes and I really felt that Galway, Waterford, Limerick and Cork, all of whom had applied, we're going to have a huge challenge and a huge problem when you look at the slender means of support from the central governments that are going to those four regional

cities, that they would be expected to step in and produce a programme of work that this whole country would be proud of. So whoever gets it in the long term they have a challenge and a huge problem and because this is a theatre I just want to make a comment on two issues.

I think in the future, if it is Cork, the challenge would be to receive the very best, to work in co-productions – which was very much by the way written into the document which Cork prepared, Mark Mulqueen and others prepared a tremendous submission – but to receive the best, to co-produce with the best, to reach out to the best nationally and internationally. In that respect, I think we face a challenge today and in the weeks ahead, as the new Arts Plan is being developed by the Arts Council, to address an ongoing imbalance about international work and nationally produced work and it has to get out to more people. The Cork submission was very strong on the importance of the Cork population, the inclusiveness that they would be involved, so they have to see more. The other thing I think is very important is there has to be a sustained effort to get the companies and the houses in Cork or whatever regional city gets this award, to produce more so there's a sustained momentum that will be there for three years afterwards. As you know, there is a need for the funding situation to be changed here so that the many houses in the regions – not just in the four cities mentioned – can produce their own work and tour it to the rest of the country.

Neil Murray, Tron Theatre, Glasgow

I didn't have anything actually to do with 1990 Glasgow, other than the fact that I lived there and worked in theatre there and work there now. I think Glasgow at the time invested more ambience in the City of Culture than any city previously. I'm not sure subsequently as well. Bob Palmer was director of 1990 Glasgow who's now looks after the whole scheme. I think Glasgow was faced with problems, perhaps not as big as Belfast in terms of identity, but it was certainly a big issue for Glasgow that it had a reputation basically for knives and football and not much else. I think Glasgow wanted to assert itself as the cultural city and in lots of ways it's done that, but it's come at a really big cost. For me, the biggest cost and the most galling thing and the warning thing I think for future cities that go for it is that theatre in Glasgow in 2001 is funded less than it was in 1990. There has actually been a decline in funding. It did some fantastic things; it brought people into the city we'd never seen before, such as Robert Le Page and the Maly Theatre, and it

had a big influence in theatre-making in Scotland was we finally saw those people, and that's been a very positive factor. However, in terms of the buildings themselves, even the Tramway which was pretty much invented for 1990 is really really struggling. It's had a refurbishment, but hardly anything happens there, nobody goes there any more, and I think there has to be an incentive, not just from within the city itself, but from whoever it is that runs the City of Culture programme to give a incentive why you should go for it and how it can help you after you've had it. I don't know how that's done but I would just caution, the thing about Glasgow just briefly, where it's failed, it's failed locally but it's succeeded internationally. It's really interesting about Glasgow. If you live in it, it's no better, in fact it's worse now than it was in terms of trying to make theatre in that city although there is some very good work coming out of it. However, there's no denying that Glasgow's international reputation is hugely different and I think that 1990 had a massive impact on that so in that sense the local/national/international thing is tricky. If you can get all three, fantastic – one out of three isn't good enough – but we hopefully will get another one at some point in the future.

Fiach MacConghail

Thank you. Yes, I remember attending a couple of Mayfests which then petered out towards the mid 90's as well, and the impact of the individual artists is something I'd wonder, in terms of the status of the individual artist in a city like Glasgow, how that is maintained now ten years later. Certainly in Dublin it would be an interesting one as well. Can I just bring in Hugo here? You're about to enter into 2002: what are your aspirations, what's your vision in terms of 2003, 2004, 2005?

Hugo de Greef

I've a big problem with pep-talk. Culture capital, all that it brings to a city and to a region gives good reason to have pep-talk, so saying that 2006, 2007, 2008 is more important than 2005 I can at least agree with that, but what I'm still wondering is how do you do it? How do you organise the future? Therefore, I think it is important to explain to people what the possibilities are to organise the future. I mentioned on our project some of them in the beginning of my statement. As I said, architecture can be very important; I think Rotterdam is a good example. I think that also structural elements can also be important as we try to make working places for artists,

working places for young people to be busy with art and culture for years. I think a good example is Antwerp and to have 93 after the culture capital they were building on the structure, how to give a frame for the future and if you see Antwerp now if you see for instance the fashion year they got this year if you see the Van Dyke year two three years ago, it's only some items that are very strongly in the picture but around these elements are a lot of cultural activities, society activities, urban activities and real ongoing process on culture in the favour of the city and of the people living there. How does that come, simply by the fact that there is a structure, people working in the structure, money available and things like that. You have to build it, you have to organise it, you have to manage it and not just use pep-talk.

Fiach MacConghail

OK. I don't want to sound negative. I think one of the most important things to come out of '91 for Dublin was Martin Drury's Dublin arts report. I think it had a fundamental shift, it allowed us to get a full-time Arts Officer in the city so I'd qualify my comments by saying that was in the sense probably one of the most important legacies to come out of our year of culture, '91.

Bridget Webster, CoisCéim Dance Theatre, Dublin

It was just something Neil said, as somebody else that comes from Glasgow. The huge thing, the impact that did happen was the identity of the person within Glasgow, that you were actually proud to be Glaswegian in 1990, which was something – then being in Dublin in 1991 – that didn't happen here. The other thing I wanted to say was three years after the festival in Glasgow it was still vibrant so I think it was more outside factors, especially to do with funding of the arts in general in Scotland that has happened since then, that is maybe the reason why things are not happening as they should be there now.

Fiach MacConghail

Before I wind it up, any other comments?

Bridget Cleary, Meridian Theatre, Cork

Liz Meany [Cork City Arts Officer] sends her apologies that she can't actually be here this morning but I just wanted to make a point of clarity on behalf of Liz. Cork has received the

nomination from the panel chosen to select the City of Culture. That was confirmed to them by phone yesterday, just to clarify that point. It does have to go through a number of various stages from here and the final say will be from the Council of Ministers and they expect that in January 2002, but it is highly unlikely that they would overturn the decision from the panel. Thank you.

Fiach MacConghail

Thank you Bridget. Is it a council of ministers, so it's a final political ratification.

Seamus Lynam

It's final and it has to be a unanimous decision by the Council of Ministers as well. I'm not saying anything is going to happen or anything like that, but it's the first year of this new programme so we're all learning as we're going along. I was quite surprised that this has come out in the media now as a decision. I'm just afraid it will interfere in the process.

Mark Mulqueen, former Arts Officer for Cork City

Just to say I think it's great for Cork. I think you can be damn sure it will be great politics in the arts in Cork for the next three or four years. We've got proof of it this morning.

Fiach MacConghail

I think we'll wrap it up, I just want to thank Hugo, Jan and Shona. I want to wish the very best to Hugo next year. Perhaps it'll be worth our while for the Theatre Shop to invite Hugo and perhaps other representative organisations like the Architectural Association and Art Association of Ireland and to put a colloquium together on that. My very best wishes to Shona in her pre-formal bid for next year and good resting for Jan for next year as well. Thank you.

Loughlin Deegan, Theatre Shop, Dublin

I want to introduce you now to what is possibly Theatre Shop's most ambitious project to date. We have now consolidated this annual conference and I hope you all know we have the second edition of the Irish Theatre Handbook published. As part of our Multi-Annual agreement with the Arts Council, we've begun work on the Irish Playography. Lots of people think we're mad but we believe we can do it. We're attempting to create the first-ever complete catalogue of all

new Irish plays published and produced professionally back to 1904 – which may become 1898 depending on what date you take for the formation of the National Theatre. What we are providing basically as a catalogue of new plays. What we are attempting to do in many ways is to establish for the first time what the Irish repertoire is. There is no existing record of all the new Irish plays that have been produced. We're also trying to reinvigorate that repertoire by providing people with access to those plays.

One of our major reasons for doing this is the alarming lack of publishing that has gone on in Irish theatre for decades and all through the last century and into this one unfortunately. We will be providing information, not only on published plays, but also on unpublished scripts, and hopefully providing access for all unpublished scripts. We're producing this as an internet database initially which will be fully searchable and fully relational. We will also be publishing it in three volumes along side a series of critical essays on the repertoire. Obviously, Theatre Shop's motivation for doing this comes from our role as a body which promotes Irish theatre in an international context. We believe the primary users of this database will be theatre practitioners both at home and, possibly more importantly, abroad. In a sense, what Theatre Shop is beginning to do is not just promote the work of Irish productions abroad but also promotes the work of Irish playwrights internationally.

We began work on the Playography almost two years ago, in fact when we were planning our first proposal to the Arts Council. We began initial research over a year ago and spent over six months testing all aspects and parameters of the project, not only how you define an Irish play, where you draw the line in the sand, how you define a professional production and everything else. In June this year we initiated a pilot project. There are many people in this room who are involved in that project and I'd like to thank them at this point for their wonderful co-operation. We invited eight companies to submit information in advance in order to test the project and to assist in the design of the database and the database schematic. Those companies were: Replay Theatre Company from Belfast, chosen as a theatre-in-education company; Tinderbox Theatre Company, an independent company who have a large body of new work produced; Fishamble Theatre Company in Dublin for similar reasons; the Everyman Palace in Cork because it's a venue that has also produced musicals and produced work on professional, semi-professional and

amateur bases. We had Island Theatre Company from Limerick, a company that has done a lot of new work but also a lot of adaptations and translations; Blue Raincoat Theatre Company from Sligo who produce a lot of improvised work along with new work; Fly By Night Theatre Company as an unsubsidised company who have obviously produced a lot of significant work including the early work of Conor McPherson, and Glasshouse Productions in order to test the difficulties in researching companies that are no longer in existence.

With the help of our wonderful technical partners X Communications, a team led by Ciarán Burke, we've also been designing the database schematic and we're also at the advance stage of designing the actual web interface. I'm going to show you now very briefly how the database will work. The best way to illustrate is to actually show you a sample of slides: this is not actually live – we are in the process of designing the pages so what you see are really templates.

Alongside putting the database online, we are intending to put the Irish Theatre Handbook online. There are large sections of it that represent Irish theatre companies, venues and festivals, again as an attempt to promote these organisations internationally, there will be a separate website with a separate search engine and we will also have the Theatre Shop website, which will form basically a tri-partite of websites with a very large database in the middle.

If you click on “search” in the Irish Playography database, you will come up initially with the “simple search” page where you can enter the play title or author you are looking for. For instance, if you are looking for the work of Emma Donoghue who is one of the writers that we've covered on the pilot project because of her involvement with Glasshouse. When you submit “Emma Donoghue” what you get is the two plays that Emma has had produced professionally by Glasshouse: *I Know My Own Heart* and *Ladies and Gentlemen*. If you just click once more on either title, you'll get a full listing on this play. The database will be completely relational – what that basically means is if you click on Emma Donoghue you would get a complete biography and bibliography for the writer and her plays.

Otherwise you could go into “advance search”. You can look for a play using as many of these fields as you want: original venue, the year produced, the total cast size and the play type,

theatre-in-education, the number of acts. We'll also have a searchable list of main themes, so if you are looking for plays on Northern Ireland, you type in Northern Ireland, hit "submit" and every single play produced about Northern Ireland will be included.

We'll also be providing a 100-word synopsis on each of the plays, the play type, which in this case is general but we will also be including puppet shows, theatre-in-education plays, theatre for young audiences. We have information on the number of acts and the cast size broken down into male and female. All of these fields will be searchable so if an amateur theatre company comes to the database and they have six women and two men they can draw up every single play that will fit their cast. We'll have very comprehensive information on the first production. This will include the original theatre company which will link from your theatre company to your page in the Irish Theatre Handbook directly which will then have the link to your own website and it will include a list of all your company's new productions or new plays which are included in the playography and this would again link back in. Similarly if you click on Andrews Lane it would bring you in to the Andrew Lanes listing from the Theatre Handbook, the date of the opening and any general information useful to academic researchers, for example, on the history of the play. We will then have information on the original cast, including character names, and the entire production team as per the credit page on the original programme. All of this will be relational as well, so basically you click on Stewart Anderson who on this production was the lighting operator and every single show that Stewart has worked on will be drawn up.

Additional information is primarily for academic research: this will basically be the source for every single piece of information that we include in the database so we can corroborate facts at any time but also provide access to further information. "Further information" will provide details about the published version of this play – information on the title of the book, the editor, contact details for the publisher, the ISBN and the recommended retail price. It will also say if the book is in print or not. If not, we will try to include an unpublished script, a contact point. If the play isn't published, that will either be an agent, the theatre company who originally produced the work, the writer's address or an archive or library that holds the unpublished script. What we're attempting to do is provide a contact point for every single play in the database and also information on how to clear the rights.

Just to illustrate how the relational database works, if you click on Katy Hayes what you get here is the artist Katy Hayes, playwrighting credits include her one play *Vampirella and the Company of Wolves*, which was an adaptation of Angela Carter's stories, and also the directorial credits. Again now you can either look up Clare Dowling, say, or you can go to any of these plays and get a full listing. If we go back to *I Know My Own Heart* I'll just show you how the Handbook will link in, we will now click on Andrews Lane, venue for the original production and information on this venue will be taken directly from the Irish Theatre Handbook. There will be an opportunity, before we go live, for people to update their entry from the Handbook because I know a lot of staff changes and so on have occurred already and in a way this will provide an opportunity for people to keep their entry in the Handbook up-to-date at all times and will also make it easier for us to create new editions of the book. All the venue information from the Irish Theatre Handbook is already in the Playography database.

This is obviously an enormous research project, possibly one of the largest ever taken on the performing arts in Ireland. We will have three full-time researchers who will work on this project once we get started, hopefully in January next year. People will come to your offices and establish a list of new plays produced by your company. They will take away a photocopy of the programme and original flyer. They will make most of the entries themselves. There will then be questions: we may need help in writing the synopses but more particularly in terms of locating published and unpublished scripts and rights for each of your writers. We will be contacting you in January. What I am hoping, basically, is that you will agree with us in Theatre Shop that this is a very worthwhile project and that you will work with us to create this database. We've also appointed an Advisory Panel to help us with the more difficult aspects of the projects, made up of Ben Barnes, Phelim Donlon, Tony Ó Dálaigh, Eleanor Methven, Garry Hynes and Christopher FitzSimon. These people will be advising on the more intellectual aspects of the project.

Finally, we're also running an archival awareness programme, given that in undertaking this research we will be raising huge issues about future proofing documentation to do with Irish theatre. We will not be able to provide any direct archival services: we have neither the

knowledge or the facilities to do so. We have already entered into relationships with all the existing archives in Ireland that undertake this work. We are working with them and we are also encouraging existing theatre companies to begin to use best archiving practice in-house in order to begin the process of future-proofing material. We will be running a series of archival workshops, alongside the research, which will be led by Mairéad Delaney from the Abbey. They will be happening regionally around the country and we will be inviting people to attend those workshops and encouraging anyone holding important documentation to begin to deposit it with archives.

There are endless possibilities for the future expansion of this database beyond the catalogue of Irish plays. The kind of mad ideas that we are envisaging at the moment include extending the database beyond new plays to all theatrical productions; having a visual archive attached, a separate database of visual material, particularly photographs of productions which would be linked directly to this database; the possibility for writers to attach downloadable versions of their unpublished plays to their page in the playography so that people get direct access to the plays. That's only the beginning! We see this as only a project that will grow and grow.