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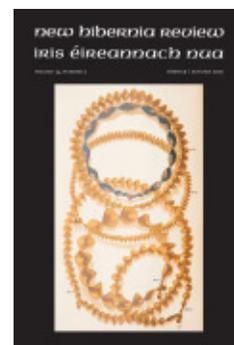
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Christie Fox



Creating Community: Macnas's Galway Arts Festival Parade, 2000

The theater and community-arts company Macnas overwhelms the city of Galway in a two-hour fantasy each summer during a parade for the annual Galway Arts Festival.¹ Built on the labor of volunteers, the event provides a platform for the employees as well as a few hundred volunteers to be part of a community event with a local and international audience numbering from fifty to a hundred thousand people annually. These theatrical parades confront the borders of genre by incorporating aspects of procession with elements of drama and spectacle, and so place Macnas—Irish for playfulness and frolic—in the avant-garde of Irish theater.

Begun in 1986, Macnas has focused on presenting community-based outdoor “spectacles” for the Galway area and, increasingly, beyond. The original group of art and drama students from University College, Galway, first came together to begin an annual Galway Arts Festival celebrating the arts and culture of the West of Ireland. Later it developed a local organization that showcased the talent of Western Ireland and provided an opportunity to the many unemployed artists and musicians in Galway. Over time, the spectacles grew and now include more than four hundred performers from the community—most of them volunteers and most of them inexperienced. Centered on a theme often derived from Irish folklore, these parades celebrate the annual arts festival. Most years the parade tells a story centering on a light-hearted, Märchen-like battle of good and evil where the good always wins. At the same time, the parade contains another story—this one more embedded in the props, puppets, and performances—commenting on a local topical issue such as economic development or immigration. The second layer of narrative remains oblique, however, and is most useful during the conception and building of the parade

1. This article is based on more than a year of fieldwork in Ireland when I worked on two Macnas parades, first as a volunteer, then as an employee. My work was generously supported by the Jacob K. Javits Foundation. I owe a debt of gratitude to the individuals who make up Macnas and, especially, to Dominic Campbell, the director of the 1999 and 2000 parades.

that takes place for six weeks in the summer and includes volunteers, student interns and community employment workers. The arts festival parade is generally the biggest outdoor production of Macnas's year and requires the concerted effort of more than a hundred volunteers and employees.

The Galway Arts Festival parade is based on a theme that, each year, the Macnas design team and director transform first into an overarching narrative, and then into a dozen or so smaller, self-contained micronarratives: small vignettes including dialogue enacted by the performers that generally draw the audience into the action and tell a small self-contained story themselves. By interpreting a folk tale or other known text through a contemporary context, Macnas map meanings onto the text, often referring to current political issues or other local topics. Sensitive to the audience's need to be entertained more than taught, the creators of the parade disguise the political content both intentionally and accidentally by making the performance a multivocal, multidimensional event not particularly well suited to political discourse. Macnas enacts these political themes through a form more immediate than conventional drama, and provides an opportunity for the audience to explore such complex issues as the rising tide of immigration in Ireland in a popular and accessible setting. By providing multivalent, multivocal, community-based performances, Macnas helps the community to reunite, if only for a short time, and provides relief from the increasing urbanization and globalization that are the by-products of the Irish economy.

The decision to use parades to tell these stories comes equally from Macnas's interest in outdoor theater and spectacle and from a desire to involve the community in the performance. Indeed, they tell a story to the audience about the community. Grounded in local, topical themes, the parades can provide the audience with alternative means to interact with current societal problems. Such theatrical parades borrow elements from several different genres and are a genre in their own right. Theatrical parades in Ireland arise from a strong tradition of taking to the streets to celebrate community: mumming and the contentious Orange Order parades, for example, both demonstrate a community and are the two forms with which the Macnas parade is most in dialogue.² The parade exists as a theatrical genre, however, and relies on communicative devices found in other theatrical forms.

2. For mumming traditions, see Henry Glassie, *All Silver and No Brass: An Irish Christmas Mumming* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975). For the traditions involved in Orange Order parades, see: Dominic Bryan, *Orange Parades: The Politics of Ritual, Tradition, and Control* (London: Pluto Press, 2000); Neil Jarman, *Material Conflicts: Parades and Visual Displays in Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Berg, 1997).



Map of Galway. Macnas parade route is marked on map. Points of interest: 1) Black Box (site of Macnas administration); 2) Fisheries Field (Macnas workshop); 4) National University of Ireland, Galway

By the nature of their open-air and widely accessible settings, theatrical parades also create a performance community that allows members of an increasingly fragmented geographical populace to come together around a form that resembles other, older forms once practiced to celebrate community—forms such as mumming. An extremely popular form of outdoor entertainment, theatrical parades are often, but not always, linked to an existing festivals. Theatrical parades as practiced in Ireland today tell the audience that they are a modern, wealthy, European, urban community, while still tied to their past through this genre's links to earlier processions and parades. Macnas exists in the vanguard of Irish drama, and in that position, it subverts some audience expectations and plays with the boundaries of both drama and street theater to create a new genre performed sometimes outside and, at other times, modified to fit indoors.

Macnas's recent work reflects a particular moment in Irish society and the arts world, as Ireland is changing as a result of membership in the European Union and the Celtic Tiger economy. At the same time, decreased emigration and increased immigration are creating a need for the Irish public to find ways to adapt to the changes. Macnas has chosen to tackle such issues through their highly accessible, multivalent parades. The multivocal aspect of the parades allows for a frame that accommodates not only differing viewpoints, but small stories that, taken together, provide a larger message or story. In 2000, Macnas and director Dominic Campbell agreed upon *The Listening Wind*, a parade based very loosely on Homer's *Odyssey*, the theme for the year. *The Listening Wind* centered around "exotic birds" (read: immigrants) who wanted to land but were prevented by the "crows" and the "Gravity Guards." Various elaborations on this theme were added, as were elements that pleased the creators aesthetically but had little or nothing to do with the central idea of the parade except to relate the idea of "being blown off course."

The layers of meaning in the parade include commentary on immigration in Ireland, artistic life in Galway, relations between men and women, and the state of politics in Ireland. A multiplicity of meanings is one asset of the genre. Macnas's audience must rely on broadly realized themes and micronarratives to make sense of the multidimensional event. Each member of the community can walk away with her or his own interpretation of the parade, yet each has shared in the experience. The next day in the pubs or the grocery lines, the parade provides a focal point for conversation and for feeling a part of a larger community.

By enacting theater on the streets of Galway, Macnas claims the space and transforms the use of that space. At the same time, the parades themselves rep-

resent transformations that may be considered ritualistic, for they often include a wedding or other closing event. Writing in 1977, Martin Esslin finds that “in ritual as in the theatre, a human community directly experiences its own identity and reaffirms it. This makes theatre extremely political because pre-eminently social, form of art.”³ While Esslin warns that the theatrical should not be too didactic and risk being boring and ineffective, he acknowledges the role theater plays in educating its audience. Macnas does not want to be seen as an educating force, and its director, Dominic Campbell, is clear that any “message” must be combined with laughter:

I hate lecturing and what do I know? It's always more fun solving puzzles (or finding patterns, which is what the mind does) than listening to a treatise. Plus if you are laughing and entertained and leaning in to listen then you might just recognize something.⁴

The social, and therefore political, aspects of the Macnas parade make it an opportunity for learning, especially social learning: how we get along together in this new situation. Esslin asserts that drama

not only provides its [. . . audience . . .] with a collective experience on a high spiritual level, but also in very practical terms teaches them, or reminds them of, its codes of conduct, its rules of social coexistence. All drama is therefore a political event: it either reasserts or undermines the code of conduct of a given society.⁵

A theatrical parade, even with animals as analogues for humans, cannot help but do the same.

When discussing any kind of political performance, one enduring problem is the question of audience reception: did the audience get it? Even as productions apply more sophisticated models of irony and satire, delighting the academic, these tools make communication with a general audience more difficult as they render any message more oblique. Thus, the concern can only be one of potential within a work:

[D]iscourse on the politics of art . . . serves to reveal a political *potential* within the work, a potential that is not always realized in the work's interaction with every audience.⁶

Philip Auslander chastises those who expect an audience never to get the political message. That stance ultimately disempowers the audience to make con-

3. Martin Esslin, *An Anatomy of Drama* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 29.

4. Dominic Campbell to author, 31 January 2001, e-mail.

5. Esslin, p. 29.

nections between the communicative event and what they experience through such other media as the television news. The connections are there, and some audience members will do the work to “connect the dots,” as it were, while others will not. In each parade, layers of meaning sit on top of one another. For this structure of meaning Harold Scheub proposes the metaphor of the palimpsest in *Story*:

Palimpsest is the tracery of biography, crucial to the success of performance because it is the central fount of the emotions that cradle the images and give them their meaning. . . . Each member of the audience experiences the story within a palimpsest of his own circumstance. There is thus a vital cacophony of audience experiences.⁷

Scheub suggests that each listener imbues the narrative with his own biography. The same process is at work in theatrical parades; the spectators draw on personal history, knowledge of parades, and experience with Macnas to lay meanings from the parade on top of these other circumstances to make sense of any embedded—or blatant—theme.

The immigration theme of *The Listening Wind* was present but oblique. Most people go to the Macnas parades not to see theater but to be entertained. As a result, they apprehend the parade as a diversion and may not work to find the story; however, spectators of the parade may easily comprehend “good birds,” and “bad birds,” with all the birds together at the end. Simply put, the parade contained three narratives: Ireland through the ages; the story of flight; and an allegory about the immigration situation where “exotic” birds flew into Ireland and tried to land but were prevented by crows representing the locals. Police at the beginning of the parade, dressed up as “Gravity Guards” and working with the crows to keep non-native birds out, became friendly, funny police at the end of the parade.

The final and culminating performance of a Macnas parade depends on many factors: weather, the appearance of the volunteers, and the coordinating effort needed to prepare some four hundred volunteers. Richard Schechner interprets performance as the “reversal of the workshop-rehearsal,” because once the show opens—or the parade begins—it becomes “real” in history, and a part of certain public rituals, including the attendance of strangers at the event, returning the floats to the workshop, and the party that follows the

6. Philip Auslander, *Presence and Resistance: Postmodernism and Cultural Politics in Contemporary American Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), p. 30.

7. Harold Scheub, *Story* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), p. 242.

parade.⁸ The outcome of the parade also depends on the reactions of the volunteers, most of whom are not seasoned performers, to a crowd numbering fifty thousand or more. They will define, in the end, what story is presented to the audience.

The audience at a theatrical parade must work much in the way that an audience at a symphony might. The audience can accept the conglomeration of sounds and sights in front of them and let it “wash over” them without separating them into meaningful constituent parts, or they can single out one sight-sound combination, much as a listener might hone in on the strings or brass in a concert.

In the 2000 Macnas parade, the first narrative of “Ireland through the ages” began with a group of women called Prams, who were dressed in costumes recalling those in *Mary Poppins*, but with the added detail of ruby-red slippers, and leading “windblown” dancers stepping Gene Kelly-style around their umbrellas. Allusions to classic Hollywood shows abounded, including a strongly realized reference to *The Wizard of Oz*: the red slippers were followed by a “Tornado” section, and later still by flying monkeys and a hot air balloon. The ruby-red shoes immediately indexed *The Wizard of Oz* and provided a fanciful, whimsical mood that carried the beginning of the parade. The Hollywood references, here and elsewhere, act as what Roland Barthes calls “cultural codes”: “fragment[s] of ideology” that “invert its class origin . . . into a reference, into a proverbial phrase.”⁹ These allusions signify not only the movie, but the innocence portrayed in the film; the movie is reduced to a series of references that recall the 1940s—and “Emergency Ireland.” This code is shorthand not only for an era, but for an ideology—in this case “family values” and “there’s no place like home”—particularly when some characters in the parade are trying to make a home and, like Dorothy, have been “blown off course.”

The ruby slippers and the dresses resembling those in *Mary Poppins* reinforce the perception that the beginning of the parade as set in the past, but it is a fictional past. If the beginning of the parade represents Ireland’s past, then it is only the past that we can see now; it does not represent reality, but an era seen through the lenses of memory and nostalgia. The subtle irony is reinforced with a later reference to *The Wizard of Oz*, the flying monkeys with faces of

8. Richard Schechner, “Collective Reflexivity: Restoration of Behavior,” in *A Crack in the Mirror: Reflexive Perspectives in Anthropology*, ed. J. Ruby (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), p. 72.

9. Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), p. 97.



The Bag of Wind Float in *The Listening Wind*. Photograph by Christie Fox.

Democratic Unionist Party hardliner Ian Paisley.¹⁰ These monkeys are “tainted” with modern valences. The utopian nature of *The Wizard of Oz* cannot be recovered, but the threatening aspects of the film and the greed and evil they represent are with us still. Cultural codes, Barthes demonstrates, “refer to a science or a body of knowledge. In drawing attention to them, we merely indicate the kind of knowledge . . . referred to, without going so far as to construct (or reconstruct) the culture they express.”¹¹ The references to *The Wizard of Oz*, *Mary Poppins*, and also to *Singing in the Rain* are a way—almost a lazy way—of constructing mood for the beginning of the parade. Allusions to happy, upbeat films create another level of possible readings. What Macnas’s audience sees on the streets of Galway depends on what an individual spectator bring to the event in terms of background, knowledge of Irish history and current events, fluency with Hollywood films, and to a lesser extent, language.

Barthes indicates that the “remedy” for the “emetic virtue” of the codes is irony, but the irony here is part of a political message that remains obscured in the parade.¹² The most direct statement of the parade on the state of Irish politics arrives in the “Gravity Guard” section: the Bag of Wind. This important float holds the key to deciphering many of the messages of the narrative of the 2000 parade. Broadcast on a public address system throughout the route, the Bag of Wind lampoons some clichés of Ireland and Irish political rhetoric:

Welcome, welcome ladies and gentlemen to this afternoon’s gathering and very welcome you are. Céad Míle Fáilte! . . . Delighted, delighted I am to see people from all corners of the world with us here today, people of all shades, colours, and hues, why before me I can see green, olive, jasmine and emerald. . . . We are a small and welcoming tribe on the west of Europe. I’d like to welcome you all here and trust you’ll leave after your allotted fortnight and let the rest of us get on with it.

Most important, perhaps, is the middle section quoted here. This speech marks the one place in the entire parade in which a nearly direct statement about immigrants is made, and it is situated so that the words of unwelcome emanate from the mouth of a “politician.” Further, at certain points in the rant, the crows pushing the float echo or respond to what has been said; this echo occurs both live and on the taped broadcast. Thus, after “and let the rest of us get on with it,” the Crows—both live and recorded—respond by saying, “Bye,

10. The likeness between the Macnas parades in Galway during the summer arts festival each July and the Orange Order parades in the North during the “marching season” of July and August is, of course, not lost on the Macnas company nor on the Galway spectators.

11. Barthes, p. 18.

12. Barthes, p. 18.

bye, bye, bye!” indicating the general view of immigrants by the population, according to Macnas. This cue alone—hearing the Bag of Wind’s rant—could indicate to the audience what the parade is trying to communicate. The speech may cue the spectator to look more closely at some of the other aspects of the parade to see how these may relate to this speech, although the spectator must still participate in a certain amount of deduction to determine that the float is indeed a politician and to discern the speech from the ambient sound. The Bag of Wind leads the “Gravity Guard” section of the parade, and his rant serves to set the tone of the section even more than the drums or the rambunctiousness of the Crows.

Many of the Crows in this section, like the rest of the performers, are novice actors. Some have never performed before, or they may be children. Some 175 of the 474 participants were children. Entrusted with the micronarratives that relate directly to one of the themes, more seasoned performers often will rehearse dialogue that can be improvised upon during the parade. They are central to understanding the parade’s stories—the lighthearted ones and the more political ones. Generally, these micronarratives seek to draw the audience into the action, blurring the distinction between performer and audience. The micronarratives, however, stand alone and can be seen as small self-contained dramas that lead to the larger political theme but do not depend on it. The audience may choose whether or not to string the micronarratives together and arrive at the “message” of the parade. In *The Listening Wind* parade, they lead directly to a statement on immigration in Ireland.

So there develops a gap—an “intertextual gap”—between what the performers think they are performing and what the audience sees. The performers in the micronarratives know they are part of a larger whole that, taken together, speaks to the looming immigration crisis. But on their face, the micronarratives are engaging and, generally, humorous. The audience is there to be entertained, bringing its own ideas and insights to the performance and leaving with, perhaps, a new view of immigration. Macnas is communicating, in effect, an idea, and if the audience does not perceive the narrative whole in this parade, then it is a lesson to be learned from, not a failure. Campbell has suggested that layering the political content of the parade and creating an event with many possible interpretations serves a distinct purpose:

Truth often seems to me to be fluid, a bit like that Japanese film [*Rashomon*] where you see a crime and trial from several viewpoints. So to create a performance with a number of readings seems OK.¹³

13. Dominic Campbell to Author, 31 January 2001, e-mail.

Not only are the strata of meaning present on purpose, but Campbell knows that the audience must work to decode the parade on its own terms. The people who work the hardest will be rewarded with more interpretations. The more the spectators know about the situation regarding refugees in Ireland and the contemporary political scandals, the more they will glean from the parade. The meaning of *The Listening Wind* parade is layered, and the layers of the 2000 parade were confused, but that does not undermine the effect of the theatrical parade genre, as it serves not only to tell a story but to demonstrate and create community. Peter Brook states that the “purpose of theatre” is to bring a group of fragments together to create a community:

The purpose of theatre is [...] making an event in which a group of fragments are suddenly brought together [...] in a community which, by the natural laws that make every community, gradually breaks up. [...] At certain moments this fragmented world comes together and for a certain time it can rediscover the marvel of organic life. The marvel of being one.¹⁴

The Macnas parade creates a community of builders of the parade, but the event in performance also creates a greater community of those watching who join in with the performers on a variety of levels. They share the same space, and thereby share in the experience. Many in the audience become performers—some engage in direct interaction with the costumed performers, while others join in at the end and become *de facto* performers as they dance with the parade to the end of the route.

The role of those people who join the Macnas parade at the end should not be underestimated. They undermine the separation of performer and audience, sometimes even visually confusing the two, as when an audience member takes and wears a performer's hat. Then, they both are partly costumed, and although it is easy to see who started the day costumed and who did not, this knowledge does not necessarily imply a value judgment. Macnas wants people to join in the parade; the designers place engaging music at the end to ensure that people are moved by the rhythm, and new spectator-performers are welcomed. Conversely, by the end of the parade, many costumed performers have left the ranks of the parade and joined their families and friends along the sidelines. This fluidity of movement enhances the community orientation of the parade by reinforcing the idea that the parade is by, for, and of community—by, for, and of Galway.

Does the age-old rule of carnival, of the marginalized upsetting norms and taking to the streets, create an arena for *communitas*? The sense of world turn-

14. A. C. H. Smith, *Orghast at Persepolis: An Account of the Experiment in Theatre Directed by Peter Brook and Written by Ted Hughes* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1972), p. 52.

ing upside-down is very present for the creators of Macnas, even in their conceptions of what a parade is and should accomplish. Victor Turner describes *communitas* as “the implicit law of wholeness arising out of relations between totalities [...] intrinsically dynamic, never quite being realized.”¹⁵ The sense of *communitas* as a goal never quite within reach echoes the premise of the Macnas parade as a community event; all the performers share in the responsibility for performance. The parade can never quite create a holistic community with the audience, for the sense of community created by the parade is fleeting and changes from one block to the next. Thus, the creation of *communitas* remains an abstract performance goal just out of reach, as the Macnas parade either moves on or breaks down into “off-stage” moments. Indeed, that intense level of audience-performer interaction is what some of the design team and some of the original members of Macnas most desired. They created Macnas in order to realize a democratic idea of performance opportunity.

Moreover, the “democratization” of performance may yield unexpected and positive results.¹⁶ According to Suzanne and Harry Lennard, British architects interested in the role that public space plays in social life, the theatrical parades provide the potential for creation of community by bringing, in their words,

. . . persons of heterogeneous background together. Strangers watching and enjoying such performances and entertainments find it easier to interact with one another around the shared experience.¹⁷

The bringing together of an audience around a Macnas parade serves, therefore, to bring momentarily the Galway city community back together from the suburbs and the countryside. Outdoor events like theatrical parades serve an ever-more important function in this sense, as people move to the cities for work, but find themselves living in increasingly distant suburbs.¹⁸ By marking the Macnas parade as part of “festival time,” people are even more likely to behave in extraordinary ways. Spectators at a outdoor social events in general are, according to the Lennards, “more likely to be more spontaneous and playful in their actions

15. Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1986), p. 84.

16. One of the community arts goals of the Macnas parades is the “demystification of the creative process,” which is often glossed as the “democratization of performance.” *The Making of a Macnas Parade: Cargo de Nuit* (Galway: Macnas, 2000), p. 25.

17. Suzanne H. Corwhurst Lennard, Henry Lennard, *Public Life in Urban Places: Social and Architectural Character Conducive to Public Life in European Cities* (Southampton, NY: Gondolier Press, 1984), p. 54.

18. Dublin and Galway both present examples of urban sprawl. The suburbs of Dublin now extend well past the airport on the north side and into County Kildare on the west. Galway’s suburbs now extend west into the Gaeltacht and east along the newly created divided highways.

[than in their normal lives], singing, dancing . . . and appear less guarded and preoccupied with status trappings.”¹⁹

As city life in Ireland becomes more fragmented, large-scale public events like the Macnas parades offer a partial remedy to that alienation by allowing participants and audience alike to be part of a community again. The parades create a temporary cohesion that may seep into everyday life. In the logic of the parade, different skills are displayed and valued. Being an astute businessperson may not help an audience member participate in or understand the parade, but being good with one's hands will. People who are not normally highly valued members of the economy come center-stage during theatrical parades and display their expertise to their larger community. The result is a temporary leveling of social divisions and rank. Through this community interaction, class differences are temporarily suspended or ignored, as the Lennards have observed:

. . . status differences that are submerged in sociable interaction . . . may subsequently become less salient for those involved. . . [Thus] the public experience tends to offset the fragmentation and depersonalization of most role relationships characteristic of city dwellers.²⁰

One of the strongest tools for creating that community is audience participation. The performers may pull a willing spectator or by-stander—police officer, parade steward—into the action in a gesture that blurs the normally rigid definitions of performer and audience. According to Philip Auslander, the invitation to audience participation “privileges [the event's] communal aspect and, paradoxically, deprivileg[es] the authority of the performers while simultaneously offering them as models.”²¹ Macnas undermines its own authority as cultural role model and critic, or even performer, as it invites the Galway community to join in the parade. Where disparate goals of the parade conflict, community orientation always wins out. In fact, spectators are often asked to bring some sort of prop—a mask, for example—to increase their sense of participation.²² If the goal is to get “the man in the street” involved in the parade, the performance must remain accessible and nonthreatening, an aim that occasionally is at odds with the aim of conveying overt political messages that could alienate segments of the audience.

The form of a theatrical parade does not permit discrete performances. The environment is too chaotic. Performers must battle with noise from the

19. Lennard, p. 54.

20. Lennard, p. 55.

21. Auslander, p. 37.

22. In the 2001 Macnas parade *Colours*, spectators were asked to pick a color and to join the parade in that color's section, thus completely blurring the performer-audience divide. For more information, see <http://www.macnas.com>.



Jonathan Gunning as the Red Baron in *The Listening Wind*. Photograph by Christie Fox.

audience, from other parts of the parade, and with the weather. The consequentiality of the parade assures that the early sections of the parade directly effect the later micronarratives. Not only does the audience build a set of expectations—which the parade may then meet or subvert—but practically, the performances depend on what happens at the front of the parade. If the front moves too fast, the micronarratives cannot fully develop, and if a float gets stuck going around a bend, the parade will stall. Performers may easily run out of things to do, and then we see them acting “off-stage,” even as they are still “on-stage.” These off-stage moments create an opportunity for the participants to collude with the audience. The break in frame—sometimes inadvertent—is an open acknowledgment that the parade is a performance, not real life, and can serve to draw the audience in further as they become “insiders,” privy to some of the parade mechanisms.

In 2000, Campbell stopped *The Listening Wind* parade to let the first micronarratives play out fully. The stop lasted at least ten minutes, although many micronarratives were only three to four minutes long. The participants whose bits ended had no recourse to additional narrative material. Many seized the opportunity to look for friends and family, or talk to each other and the audience out of character, thus breaking the tenuous suspension of disbelief the parade produced. Often, throughout the parade, performers seized upon the roaming stage managers and other helpers walking with the parade to ask them for water, to adjust a costume, or even to help fix a float piece. Moments usually reserved for an off-stage moment in a drama where the boundaries of on- and off-stage are clearly drawn, can occur only in front of the audience during the parade. These off-stage moments happened frequently. As there is no backstage in a parade, the performers create their own.

The audience knows that what it is seeing is not reality, thus, the creation of off-stage moments resembles Bertolt Brecht’s “strange-making” that calls attention to the artifice of the play.²³ While these moments may in fact distract the audience from the narrative or the micronarrative at hand, they can reinforce the idea that the performers, while dressed as animals, actually represent people in the present. The off-stage moments draw attention to specific elements of the parade such as the puppets and the floats. In the Macnas tradition, where the physical construction of the parade is privileged, a break in performance continuity is acceptable.

On the other side of the boundary between on- and off-stage are those moments when the performer is inspired to perform other than what was rehearsed—to engage an audience member or to cajole a police officer into join-

23. See Martin Esslin, *Brecht: The Man and His Work* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1971).

ing the action—thereby reinforcing the idea that the parade is a community event and must involve the community even in performance. To borrow Dell Hymes's phrase, such a "breakthrough into performance" happens when, walking down the street in costume and in synchrony with the music, the performer, fully in character, finds an opportunity to bring that character to a new level, or to finally realize it within the logic of the parade.²⁴ Esslin remarked that "without an audience, there is no drama."²⁵ The parade audience must be present and, one hopes, attentive, but the timbre of any individual moment of performance depends on the atmosphere of the surroundings, the "setting." Even the amount of sunlight or darkness on a particular stretch of road can affect the outcome.

Another way of thinking about these moments is through "performance competency"—again, in a Hymesian sense—to mark those moments in the parade when the performer and role are fully integrated, when there is no thought of a context outside the parade, and when the participant is truly inspired by the performance itself.²⁶ When the Red Baron (Jonathan Gunning) shouted, "Duck! Duck!" and ran into a spectator, was a "breakthrough to performance," as opposed to his just walking down the street, leading the Bi-Planes or telling them when to start their dance routine.

Many of these breakthroughs incorporate the audience in a spontaneous display, cementing the relationship between performer and audience. The timing of a performer's "breakthrough" relies heavily on context. The audience's reaction can bolster a performer's confidence, just as the presence of someone outside the parade logic, such as a police officer, might inspire a performer. Much as a piece of theater with a scheduled run changes with each night's performance, so the Macnas parade changes as it moves. It is different at the beginning of the parade from at the end, and again when it is framed by particular streets, bridges, or fields as backdrop. The presence of children, police, parade stage managers, and other people for the performers to "play off" of greatly affects the evolving performance. The context of each moment of the performance changes as the parade moves and the performance changes with it.

24. Dell Hymes, *In Vain I Tried to Tell You: Essays in Native American Ethnopoetics*, ed. G. Sankoff, H. Glassie, D. Hymes (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1974). I am tweaking the meaning of Hymes's term "breakthrough" a bit. for the rest of the performance day for an individual participant in the parade is not "reporting," but there are certainly times during the parade when each performer is off stage.

25. Esslin (1977), p. 23.

26. Hymes, p. 101–106. For more on Hymes and competency, see "How to Talk like a Bear in Takelma," in *In Vain I Tried to Tell You*.

Macnas arose in a prosperous, employed, modernized, globally oriented Ireland. The unemployment rate in Ireland in 1990, four years after Macnas first received funding, was thirteen percent. In December, 2000, the national rate was less than four percent. The Irish economy has grown so quickly that many arts organizations are scrambling to keep up and to maintain a critical presence in a country that no longer sees itself as rural, poor, and Catholic. A country that has a surplus can afford to fund the arts; further, a country whose economic star is rising has something to celebrate. In the new climate of prosperity, more celebrations and festivals occur during the summer. Events draw Irish people into the streets and public meeting areas.

The performance theorist Philip Auslander found that postmodern political art of the 1980s “offered us positions from which to criticize postmodern culture—not by claiming to stand aside from it, to present an alternative to it, or to place the spectator in a privileged position with respect to it but, rather, deconstructively, resistantly, from within.”²⁷ To what direction could postmodern political art of the 1990s then go? While Macnas grew out of performance traditions and political art, it has had to develop a new strategy of resistance in the 1990s—a time of unparalleled prosperity in Ireland against which it was very hard to speak. After all, the Celtic Tiger had brought Ireland into the twentieth century and provided jobs, houses, and cars for everyone. Dissenting voices remained whispers for much of this time. Political art did not seek to dismantle the structure, and for a while most art chose other topics.

Commodification and the status of an organization such as Macnas in the eyes of its funding body, the Arts Council, cannot be separated from the artistic decisions of Macnas. The core of Macnas's work remains the big, outdoor spectacle that attracts thousands of people; and Macnas cannot afford to alienate this audience base artistically or politically.²⁸ Therefore, as Ireland's general quality of life has improved, overt social criticism has had to go underground. This means that Macnas cannot comment directly on Northern Ireland or the economy except in a way that garners widespread support. Campbell has said explicitly that he is “uncomfortable with building a show with many people of all ages, and a variety of education, which is overtly political.” This reluctance to take too strong a stance reflects not only Campbell's awareness of potential audience rejection, but also the problem of including more than four hundred people in a political statement they may not be entirely aware of or with which they may not agree.

27. Auslander, p. 51.

28. Dominic Campbell to author, 31 January 2001, e-mail.

In 1998, Macnas commented on the overdevelopment of Galway, a stance that had the support of a large base of Galwegians. The statement was rather direct at times. *The Carnival of Fools* parade presented a float showing wrecking balls destroying small medieval buildings and bright blue office buildings being built in their place. Performers surrounding that float carried signs reading "Save our Galway." The issue of immigration was still very contentious in the summer of 2000, and many Irish people remained suspicious of admitting so many immigrants into the country and the economy. As a result, the Macnas critique went even further underground and became more indirect in *The Listening Wind* parade. This descendant of the 1980s political performance art can be interpreted as not critical at all. It must be so double-coded that it can seem to be nonoffensive even as it takes aim at a very sensitive topic. Macnas is sensitive to the political content of its performances not only in respect to its status as a publicly funded organization that must not alienate its audience base, but also as a community arts organization that wants to remain as inclusive as possible. As community involvement grows, Macnas ultimately rejects "political theatre" or agit-prop.

As a genre, theatrical parades produce multilayered and multivalent communication. The many voices of the creators match a multiplicity of receptions in the audience; the parade is a successful communicative attempt because it can simultaneously "speak" to many people at once, on many different levels. The form matches its audience's expectations, and varying levels of attention receive different rewards. The spectator who "leans in to listen" will apprehend a full, complex narrative; and find the work gratifying. At the same time, the spectator who is distracted, will also find something to fulfill his expectations. *The Listening Wind*, the 2000 parade, communicates broadly, breezily almost, within its stated theme of "being blown off course," while it simultaneously embeds deeper, more complex meanings. The process of creating the parade allows Macnas workers an opportunity to think about current issues, and to determine their own position on them. Presenting the parade permits the audience members to access the same troubling, complicated issues in a nonthreatening setting.

The Macnas parade creates communities, the two most obvious being makers and audience members. The architects and builders of the parade come together for six weeks in the summer to think together about how to turn a complex story into a series of vignettes or micronarratives. The creation of the parade is very much a collaborative effort, which at times dampens the communicative effectiveness of the event. Too many voices lead to a sometimes confusing narrative. The second community is that of spectators, who come for the Galway Arts Festival. The parade is the leading free event of the festival, and is well attended. Macnas's Galway Arts Festival parade is not the only theatrical

parade in Ireland, however. Both in Galway and around Ireland, theatrical parades allow the audiences a “break” from their normal routines. Like such traditional carnivalesque events such as the Donnybrook Fair, as well as the once popular Corpus Christi processions, theatrical parades provide an occasion for the audience to come together as a community. They are a focal point for the locals. In an increasingly fast-paced, widely employed, urban Ireland, these community-based events are one time when the inhabitants of Galway can come together and regain their community ties.

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Clúdach: Cover

The galleries of the Irish Museum of Modern Art: Áras Nua-Ealaine na hÉireann display not only contemporary sculpture and installation pieces, like Kathy Prendergast's *Stack* pictured on the spring cover of *New Hibernia Review*, but also key works by early Modern and middle twentieth-century painters, including canvases by the late Tony O'Malley (1913—2003). Never robust in health, O'Malley spent the first twenty-five years of his life in the Munster and Leinster Bank, all the while painting when he could. A self-taught artist, O'Malley first exhibited his work in the 1951 Oireachtas show, Dublin, where, three decades later, in 1981, he was awarded the Douglas Hyde medal for his work. In 1960 he settled in Cornwall and began painting full-time, returning to Clare Island, the home place of his mother's family, in 1970, and later visiting Ireland yearly until 1990, when he settled in Physicianstown, Callan, County Kilkenny. In 1993 Aosdána awarded the torc of the Saoi to him in a ceremony presided over by President Mary Robinson. Our cover for the summer, 2003, issue features O'Malley's *Hawks Searching Corn*, a gouache on paper measuring 78 by 56.65 cm. This vividly executed composition dates from 1968 when O'Malley had just returned to St. Ives from Ireland. In a manner typical of his abstracted landscapes of the time, O'Malley's brushwork and coloring recall fundamental natural shapes—a wing, a stalk of grain—all infused with a central luminosity that often proves a hallmark of O'Malley's painting. This gouache is one of a number of works in the Irish Museum of Modern Art's extensive McClelland Collection. *Hawks Searching Corn* and other works by O'Malley from the McClelland Collection were exhibited at the Irish Museum of Modern Art from July, 2001, to January, 2002. Readers interested in learning more about the span of O'Malley's accomplishments as a painter may wish to consult *Tony O'Malley*, edited by Brian Lynch, and published in association with Kilkenny's Butler Gallery in 1996. Again, we thank the director and board of the Irish Museum of Modern Art—and especially Catherine Marshall and Riann Coulter—for helping us to bring this work to our readers.