

In caves, in ruins

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**‘In Caves, in Ruins: Place as Archive at the Happy Days Beckett Festival’,
Contemporary Theatre Review (forthcoming 2016)**

In a review of the 2014 Happy Days International Beckett Festival, Sarah Jane Scaife described the production of *Not I*, set in the Marble Arch Caves just outside Enniskillen town, in the following way:

Entering the Marble Arch Caves was like being sucked into the belly of the mountain, bringing to mind many images from Beckett’s prose writing, of long corridor-like tunnels, shapes and sounds near and far, of ‘ultimate wall licks’ (*Fizzles*), the moisture and drips of this visceral cavern like the stomach of Jonah’s whale. We were led down hundreds of steps to get to the underground lake in the caves. We were then brought to three boats, where the ferryman told us to board one by one. The lights ahead created a haunting journey into Dante’s Inferno; the lap of the water on the boats created the only sound. It was a journey for the senses.¹

This role has become a signature one for Lisa Dwan and is an astonishing accomplishment. Watching her perform deep underground, among the rock formations that attract droves of tourists to the site annually was a singularly haunting experience. Billie Whitelaw once described the role as ‘like falling backward into hell’.² It seems as though this *Not I* completed that gesture, landing audience and performer alike together in the dark belly of the play, as they shared in that sense of being swallowed by the earth and by time, surrounded by calcified limestone formations built up over aeons; a natural cathedral in the seemingly unending tunnels. The author who served as theme for that year’s festival was of course Dante; the caves playing the role that year as the infernal underworld.

It is this sort of audacious staging that has become a feature of the Festival, although it must be noted that Sean Doran, the Festival’s director, is no stranger to such expansions beyond the frame of the traditional theatre space. His past projects included Wagner staged at Glastonbury Music Festival, experimental art works on the beach during the Perth Arts

¹ Review of ‘Happy Days: Enniskillen International Beckett Festival’, 22–26 August 2013, *Journal of Beckett Studies* 23.2 (2014), pp. 255–267.

² Mel Gussow, *Conversations With and About Beckett* (NY: Grove, 1996), pp. 83-92 (p. 84).

Festival and Aboriginal community sculptures in the desert of Western Australia. In the 2014 Enniskillen Happy Days Festival some of the attractions included an abandoned church, was the secret location for *Catastrophe*, while the monastic ruins on Devenish Island saw dawn readings from Beckett's work. What these particular festival performance spaces share is that they occupy the fringes or margins of the town, some distance from Enniskillen centre. New sites are chosen each year. They are temporally distant also, reaching back into the past. By contrast, some performances take place in more traditional proscenium theatre spaces situated in the town; these include the main Ardhowan Theatre and Portora Royal Hall. The Festival concerts are held in Enniskillen's cathedral and churches and the commercial spaces of the town embrace Beckett in their own ways, leading to themed products and services including sandwiches and haircuts. While the majority of the festival events do take place in or around the town centre, the marginal spaces remain vital and important sites within the festival context. And, as will be shown in the following commentary, they are an important aspect of the festival's use of place.

At roughly two hours' drive from Belfast and from Dublin, the festival takes place away from major metropolitan areas. This means the festival lacks the range of institutional spaces in which to site work. Yet, this is considered 'a gift' by Doran,³ as the festival must then innovate when it comes to space, extending its reach to the marginal, the forgotten and, often, the most picturesque. Ruins become important sites: Beckett's final prose piece *Stirrings Still* was presented in 2015 in an abandoned barn on a local estate, for example. The affective experience of the festival is one marked by journeys into these places and sites that are heavily encoded with human historical and epochal memory, even if Beckett's life and work might be only tangentially and temporarily linked to Enniskillen itself. I consider in the following commentary the idea of place, from land and cityscapes to geological formations,

³ Sean Doran, Interviewed by T. McTighe, August 2014.

as a sort of archive. This is in order that we might consider how sited performance pieces engage (or not) with the histories, human and non-human, which shape those sites.

It is tempting to see the use of site in this festival as emerging amidst the more recent general trend toward sited work in Irish theatre. Some of this Irish sited theatre has been shown at Happy Days; Sarah Jane Scaife's *Beckett in the City: Act Without Words II*, for instance, was 'staged' in an Enniskillen underpass in 2013. Brian Singleton has traced the development of site-specific performance in Ireland, noting how many Irish theatre practitioners are moving beyond institutional boundaries in order to interact with sites.⁴ The work of Scaife and that of ANU Theatre Company, known for their politically engaged site-specific theatre, are obvious exemplars in this trajectory away from traditional theatre spaces. Can Happy Days, however, fit similarly within this context? There is an overarching political intent in Scaife's work and in ANU's. As Miriam Haughton puts it, ANU's production of *Laundry*, based on true stories of Magdalen Laundry survivors, uses a 'haunting historical landmark' in order that participants 'realize the importance attached to their individual presence at this event.'⁵ Although Scaife uses a pre-existing Beckettian theatre text (*Act Without Words II, Rough for Theatre I* and more recently *Come and Go, Footfalls, Not I* and *Rockaby*), she also utilises site ., creating new meanings and resonances in the text.⁶ Audiences are called upon to experience the material surrounds (cold, isolation, incarceration, neglect) that the frail, unhomed figures of Beckett's drama and the actors who play them experience, to be present in very particular and material ways. Although very different in terms of approach and content, Scaife and ANU do share the sense that once theatrical performance is taken beyond the institutional frame, its political aims and import might be reconceived.

⁴ 'ANU Productions and Site-Specific Performance: The Politics of Space and Place', in *That Was Us: Contemporary Irish Theatre and Performance*, F. Walsh (ed.) (London: Oberon, 2013), pp. 21-36 (p. 21-22).

⁵ 'From Laundries to Labour Camps: Staging Ireland's "Rule of Silence in ANU Productions' *Laundry*' (italics?) in *Modern Drama* 57.1 (2014), 65-93 (p. 75).

⁶ Author? 'Beckett in the City', in *Staging Beckett in Ireland and Northern Ireland*, ed. by Trish McTighe and David Tucker (Great Britain: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama: forthcoming 2016).

While individual Festival events might be readable in this way, it is less clear that this can apply to a Festival as a whole. With Festivals in general it is necessary to consider the relationship with the local economy and the ways in which a festival responds to matters of local identity and concern. In other words, who participates in the festival? Who benefits from its presence in a specific place? How does the Festival map onto the topographies of the town and its environs? This article will therefore seek to understand certain aspects of the sited practices of the festival in broad terms, even as I acknowledge that a complete analysis of such a multi-faceted event is outside the scope of this essay and indeed may not yet be possible, given the comparatively youthful vintage of the festival. Rather, I present a case study of a single production, of *Ohio Impromptu* on Devenish Island in 2015, as a representative example of the ways in which the festival blends with a long history of tourism in the area, before going on to trace some of the complex histories apparent within Enniskillen's landmarks and cityscapes in order to think in broader terms about the festival's relation to the notion of place as archive.

Devenish Impromptu

The principles of scarcity and novelty appear to drive the Festival's use of site. The lack of performance spaces demand a creative engagement with site and, in order to handle the brevity of many of Beckett's works, the Festival employs a strategy of programming journeys to and from these sites. These journeys often utilise or gesture toward the tourist context in which they operate and in certain cases use tourist infrastructure or travel via well-worn trails. This is the case for events held in the aforementioned production of *Not I* in Marble Arch Caves and *Ohio Impromptu*, directed by Adrian Dunbar, which this author attended in 2015. It was an evening performance of the play sited on Devenish Island (from the Irish

Dáimhinis, apparently meaning Ox Island⁷). To reach the island we picked up one the flat-bottomed river boats, usually hired by tourists, from a pier just outside the town centre. The journey took about thirty minutes and was an opportunity to view some of that river's unspoilt banks of green fields and trees. A few older farmhouses and recently built houses edge close to the water but otherwise the view is little changed from the nineteenth century when the ferry boat (?) *The Lady of the Lake* brought local tourists to the island for picnics. Touring on Lough Erne, with Devenish a popular picnic destination, goes back to the late nineteenth century . Helen Lanigan Wood's illustrated history of the region shows how *The Lady of the Lake* operated between 1896-1915, linking up with Sligo, Leitrim and Northern Counties and The Great Northern Railway to provide tourist and travel services to local and surrounding areas.⁸ The Festivals use of the Devenish site brings to light its connections with tourism.

On our arrival on the island, half the attendees were brought directly to a small stone cottage; the other half were free to wander among the ruins of the monastic settlement. The performance itself took place in a darkened cottage (the site's tiny museum which preserves some of its finer stone carvings) set away slightly from the ruins of the Monastic church, the round tower and the gravestones. Frankie McCafferty played the Listener, while Vincent Higgins played the Reader. (Adrian Dunbar directed the production.) This short, spare playlet, was written by Beckett for a 1981 symposium on his work at Ohio State University to celebrate the author's seventy-fifth birthday. The figures are seated throughout, the only movements are the knock, or 'staying' of the Reader's hands when the Listener demands he repeat a passage or turn to a different page. The festival's production managed to achieve a beautifully lit tableau, using a scrim to separate actors and audience, which had the effect of

⁷ This is disputed by the nineteenth century commentator J. E. McKenna who makes the case that daim comes from the old Irish word for Druid or learned man (Dauv) and therefore believe the island's name should translate as 'Sacred Isle' See *Devenish (Lough Erne): Its History, Antiquities, and Traditions* (Dublin: Gill, 1897), pp. 9-10.

⁸ Helen Lanigan Wood, *Enniskillen: Historic Images of an Island Town* (Belfast: Friar's Bush, 1990), p. 80.

enhancing the white glow illuminating the figures. The chiaroscuro effect was a fitting rendition of the Beckettian palette, illuminating the figures in ghostly silhouette.

After the performance, we wandered among the island's ruins. There has been a settlement on the site since the sixth century, when St Molaise founded the monastery there on the pilgrim route to Croagh Patrick. It endured Viking raids in 837AD; it was burned down in 1157, only to flourish once again from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries. Among the items of interest is an intricately carved high cross dating from the mid-fifteenth century and the twenty-five-metre-high round tower with Romanesque decorations. This all reads like the language of tourism and it was strange to find these two experiences paralleled so closely within a single event. The stillness and quiet acceptance contained within *Ohio Impromptu* seems on the face of it to be at odds with the more tourism-friendly aspects of our visit. Tramping among the graves and ruins of the Devenish site, taking photographs and the obligatory sunset 'selfies' with the round tower in the background seems out of place with this drama; the setting has tourism and art making uncomfortable bedfellows (though the author himself would have no doubt approved of the bar on the boat which opened for the return leg of the journey).

There is not only a slight disconnect between site and performance, but also a certain dissonance between the activities of the tourist and the Beckett spectator. The former might be characterised as exploring, consuming and recording place through the memento, the photograph; the generation, in other words, of memory. By contrast, Beckett's drama often involves the very opposite gestures. Many of the figures of his dramas, partially realised, imaginee being consumed by place, not consuming it; literally so in some cases, as May in *Footfalls* and the woman of *Rockaby*, for instance, are half-swallowed by the darkness of the *mise en scène*. Krapp is consumed by the memory of the girl on the lake, the details of the

place and the ‘farewell to love’⁹ are inescapable for him; other figures in the later drama seem similarly so. The voices of *That Time* bring forth waves of memories, particular times certainly, but also particular places: the ruins where he hid as a child, the portrait gallery, the library. I am reminded also of the destruction of photographs in both *Film* and *A Piece of Monologue*, acts which appear to be attempts to free the protagonist from the overwhelming tide of life’s memories. The listening figure of *Ohio Impromptu* is also consumed by memory, of the dear face, the one who has sent the Reader to bring comfort, even if the play stages a winding down of the story, and of the life to which the story refers. The Reader has come ‘from time to time unheralded [...] to read the sad tale through again’;¹⁰ this performance, as the Reader describes, will be the final night, he will not come again: ‘So the sad tale a last time told they sat on as though turned to stone’ The play ends with quietness, the two ‘buried in who knows what profounds of mind.’¹¹

For all its touristic resonances, the site itself was part of the journey to and from the performance; if it had an effect, it was perhaps to generate a sort of quietness in the presence of what is no longer there, the sense of the ineffable in Beckett’s work echoed by the ghostly absence of the island’s former inhabitants, wrought by the weight of history in the surrounding stone monuments. Fittingly, then among the play’s final lines is the following, ‘so sat on as though turned to stone. The sad tale a last time told.’¹²

The figures’ stone-like quietude is echoed in the stillness of the place, its time of conflict now long passed. Such a reading validates my point that individual productions may be set against place in ways that illuminate both site and text. Yet broader questions remain about the Festival’s relationship to the tourism and culture industries of Ireland and Northern Ireland and its ability engage with the region’s complex history.

⁹ Samuel Beckett, *Collected Shorter Plays* (London: Faber, 1984), p. 57.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 287-8.

¹² Beckett, *Collected Shorter Plays*, p. 288.

In 1997 Patrick Duffy commented that the tourism industry in Ireland, one of the most rapidly expanding sectors of the time, ‘is one of the most influential forces now shaping representations of identity, landscape and culture’ with most of the narratives of Irishness – the myth of the West, the Anglo-Irish legacy and even the northern conflict ‘appropriated by the tourism industry.’¹³ This is visible in, for example, the Yeats summer school and festival, running since the late 1950s, Belfast’s black taxi tours, and the Galway Arts Festival, to name but a few of the more well-known of the multitude of Irish events that muddy the distinction between cultural and touristic consumption. Given its location however, Enniskillen does not fall easily into the category of mythologised Irish landscapes nor troubles commemoration, yet modernity has seen it become a significant tourist destination, a quiet fishing retreat for the most part. However, this quieter part of the world bears traces of more troubled times. In fact, the existence of Enniskillen itself signals a more unsettled history, one which it is necessary to trace before attempting to further analyse the Festival’s relation to place.

Enniskillen, Plantation Town

The Beckett festival comes to this island town, rich in a history going back to the Neolithic period, to an area where farming and tourism are the current mainstays of the economy. As with much of the island of Ireland apart from Belfast, Enniskillen saw little heavy industry (other than linen production up to the nineteenth century). Enniskillen lies in County Fermanagh in the southwestern corner of Northern Ireland, about a twenty-minute drive from the border with the Republic. Although approximately eight thousand years of human settlement can be traced in the surrounding area, the town itself only came into existence through the Plantation of Ulster in the early 1600s. Created in 1612 by the charter of James I, it is one of eighteen borough towns which were to be represented in the then Dublin

¹³ Patrick J. Duffy, ‘Writing Ireland: Literature and Art in the Representation of Irish Place,’ in *In Search of Ireland: A Cultural Geography*, ed. by Brian Graham (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 64-83 (p. 81).

parliament. William Cole, from London, was appointed constable of Enniskillen Castle in 1609 and eventually became the sole owner of 60 acres across the island. His descendants became the Earls of Enniskillen.¹⁴ From this moment on, Enniskillen, a garrison town surrounded by farms planted by English and lowland Scots, English army servicemen and the remaining Gaels, was a mixture of peoples and cultures. The town came into being due to the plantation policy of urbanisation and modernisation and as such is an example of a market town built to increase trade and simultaneously increase the presence of the bourgeoisie.¹⁵ This purpose can be traced today in the layout of its streets with their open market spaces.

It was Fermanagh's complex 'mosaic' of Nationalists and Unionists which could not be easily separated out that made the debates about partition in the early twentieth century so difficult.¹⁶ Fermanagh became one of the counties whose inclusion in the proposed partition six (Antrim, Down, Tyrone, Armagh, Fermanagh and Londonderry) was debated at length. Like Tyrone, it did not have a Protestant majority. Partition was raised through a proposed amendment to exclude the four predominantly Protestant counties – Antrim, Down, Londonderry and Armagh – from the 1912 Home Rule Bill. This would have left them outside territorial scope of the Irish Home Rule Parliament.¹⁷ The partition eventually included Tyrone and Fermanagh and came into being with the 1920 Government of Ireland Act and was to set the scene for the conflict which Northern Ireland endured for most of the latter half of the Twentieth Century. During the 'Troubles', Enniskillen was to become the site of one of the worst bombing atrocities by the IRA; this was the 1987 Remembrance Sunday attack in which eleven people were killed and sixty-four injured. The history of this town and region is also the history of plantation, partition and conflict; these are the forces

¹⁴ Lanigan Wood, *Enniskillen*, p. 5.

¹⁵ R.J. Hunter, 'Sir William Cole, The Town of Enniskillen and Plantation County Fermanagh' in *Fermanagh History and Society: Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County*, E. M. Murphy and J. Roulston (eds.) (Dublin: Geography, 2004), pp. 105-146 (p. 128).

¹⁶ K. J. Rankin, *Theoretical concepts of Partition and the Partitioning of Ireland* (Dublin: Institute for British-Irish Studies, 2006), p. 11.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

which have shaped its topographies, leaving their marks in various ways, from monuments, to architecture, to farming practices and land management.

There has been much written on the difference or distinction between the archive and the live, which translates often into the difference between text and embodied performance.¹⁸ Yet what might thinking of place *as* archive bring to the conversation when it comes, in particular, to sited work? Places carry traces of human and non-human forces; landscapes may not be documents, in the strictest sense of that word, but they do record the traces and imprints of the human life which covers and uses them. We might say that places document the past, even if the ‘curatorial’ practice of stone and earth is not driven by human intentionality battling the processes of decay. The place-archive emerges from the blind processes in which the earth encases the activities of the human, held tautly between preservation and decay; often more is lost than is preserved. Limestone records the passage and trace of water, a force which has shaped the Marble Arch Caves in spectacular fashion, and fields ‘remember’ in their own way the work of generations of farmers. Like the archive, place and landscape appear to be permanent, seemingly exceeding in existence the events to which they form the backdrop. Yet the archaeological and geologic perspective would correct this view; places and their landscapes change, though this change is often imperceptible to the human eye. Places and archival documents are material entities whose only distinction is might lie, therefore, in their differential rate of decay. In one sense, place is what happens beyond the limits of the archive, if the archive stands for pieces of the world whose natural pace of decay is interrupted and slowed by curation and preservation. Place equals that which is beyond the archive, subject to its own laws of preservation and decay, etchings in stone and earth, by chemicals, water. It is less clearly legible than the archive’s documents and subject to more interpretation perhaps (though the difference is one of degree rather than distinction).

¹⁸ See for example Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

Take for instance what is known as the Black Pig's Dyke, a supposedly defensive linear earthwork (a deep ditch side by high banks) demonstrated to belong to the Iron Age (500BC to 400 AD) that skirts the border of County Fermanagh into County Leitrim between Lough Melvin and Lough Macnean Upper. Although recent excavation work now disproves the theory,¹⁹ it has long been read, used as a metaphor and somewhat naturalised as an ancient boundary partitioning Ireland, north and south, a sort of justification for a long-standing enmity 'written' in the landscape.²⁰

For the most part, the sited work done at Happy Days tends to be of a site-sympathetic variety,²¹ where an existing performance text is physicalized within a specific site, as exemplified in the production of *Ohio Impromptu*. It uses history obliquely, drawing on the sensuous resonances of place without articulating explicitly the layers of history that I have glossed above. On the one hand, approaches such as this necessarily limit the capacity of the Festival to be able to speak to its spatial and political contexts. On the other, it reflects accurately the transitory quality of Beckett's own presence in that context. It is in this complex territory which we find a festival celebrating the life and work of an author whose main connection to the region lie in his years at secondary school in Portora Royal, situated on the outskirts of the town; Beckett himself a member of Ireland's Protestant minority and later an émigré artist from its shores.

Beckett and Enniskillen, at the limits...

¹⁹ Cólín, Ó Drisceoil, Mary Leenane, Stephen Davis, Barry Fitzgibbon and Mary Teehan, *The Black Pig's Dyke Regional Project Report* < <http://www.roscommoncoco.ie/en/Services/Heritage/The-Black-Pig%E2%80%99s-Dyke-Regional-Project/> > [Accessed 28 January 2016]. See also: Aidan Walsh, 'Excavation at the Black Pig's Dyke', *Clogher Record* 14.1 (1991), pp. 2-26 (p. 22.).

²⁰ Art Ó Broin, *Beyond the Black Pig's Dyke: A Short History of Ulster* (Dublin: Mercier, 1995), p. 7.

²¹ I am using the spectrum set out by the UK performance collective Wrights and Sites who make the case that site-specific should only refer to a performance created specifically for a site, site-generic to a performance created for a series of similar sites, while site-sympathetic refers to performance that physicalizes an existing performance text within a particular site. Cited in Fiona Wilkie, 'Mapping the Terrain: A Survey of Site-Specific Performance in Britain', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 18 (2002), pp.140-160 (150).

Enniskillen does not only lie at the limits of the Northern Border, it also lies at the limits of the Beckett archive: the biographical basis for the festival lies in, as we know, Beckett's attendance at Portora. Yet the Portora years lie at the limits of the consciousness we have of Beckett's life. These are his formative years and do not enter into his writing in any great way, as Knowlson's account notes.²² He did not retain the same sympathy for Portora that he did for Trinity College Dublin and later overtures for recognition from the school were ignored.²³ However both Knowlson and later Seán Kennedy observe that the creation of Ireland's partition, during his second year at Portora, must have had some impact on his developing political awareness, even though he himself scarcely felt it impinging up on him.²⁴ So the question might be, when it comes to a discussion of site and space at the festival, how does the festival relate to Beckett's lack of relationship, not only with the place itself, but also with its history, even if, as Joseph Roach puts it, history 'like so much else in the work of this most physical of playwrights, is made palpable, present to the senses even as absences—a silence, a stillness, an unbroken horizon.'²⁵ Not only will a festival like Happy Days struggle to find direct connection between text and landscape, it is also the case that, as was asked of Eoin O'Brien's 1986 photographic book *The Beckett Country*, how is it to express Beckett's exilic distance from Ireland,²⁶ not to mention partition and the county's exile from the rest of the island?

Beckett was quite comfortably homed in Dublin by the Gate Theatre in the early 1990s. The 1991 Beckett Festival achieved a sense of the Irish connection within Beckett's

²² *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), p. 26.

²³ S.E. Gontarski and C.J. Ackerley, *The Faber Companion to Samuel Beckett*, (London: Faber, 2006), pp. 450-1.

²⁴ Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 37, and Kennedy, 'Samuel Beckett's Reception in Ireland,' in *The International Reception of Samuel Beckett*, ed. by Mark Nixon and Matthew Feldman (London: Continuum, 2009), pp. 55-74 (p. 55).

²⁵ Joseph Roach, 'All the Dead Voices: The Landscape of Famine in *Waiting for Godot*,' in *Land/Scape/Theater* ed. by Una Chaudhuri and Elinor Fuchs (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 84-93, (p. 92).

²⁶ S. Gontarski and C. Ackerley *The Faber Companion to Samuel Beckett*, p. xv. [You need the full reference for this source].

work, without parochialising it,²⁷ or without an overreliance on Irish stereotypes.²⁸ The Gate's Artistic Director, Michael Colgan, saw the theatre's championing of the author as restorative, prompted by a lack of Irish presence at Beckett's 1986 birthday celebrations in Paris.²⁹ This 'homing' or restoration also has a longer history in the performances of Jack McGowran in the 1960s and '70s, then Barry McGovern in the 1980s, with the prose adaptations that helped to highlight the 'Dublinness' of Beckett's writing. Given the biographical connections with Dublin and its surrounding landscapes, as so effectively traced in O'Brien's *The Beckett Country*, it is fair to say that the threads connecting Beckett to Enniskillen are not quite as robust.

Furthermore, moving Beckett 'to the country' presents a marginality reflected in the aforementioned marginality of Enniskillen itself. It might be worth acknowledging how the sense of what counts as marginal is of course subjective; I am cautious to use the term here to indicate Enniskillen's proximity to the border rather than reiterate an implied urban (and therefore cultural) centrality to either Dublin or Belfast. The region's landscapes are marked by remnants of pre-Partition days and a gradual post-partition atrophy of connections between north and south: fragments of the bridge which once carried the Great Northern Railway line can be seen as you enter the town from the east. Although this rail company did not go out of business until the 1950s, the financial support which might have saved it would have had to have come from both northern and southern governments – a cooperation impossible at that time. The ruined tracks can still be seen along the south-western route between Sligo and the border, telling a tale of under-resourced infrastructure which affect

²⁷ D. Clare, 'The Gate Theatre's Beckett Festivals: Tensions between the Local and the Global', in *Staging Beckett in Ireland and Northern Ireland*, T. McTighe and D. Tucker (London: Bloomsbury: forthcoming 2016). [By the time this edition of the CTR journal is published your volume should be out so no need to put 'forthcoming'.

²⁸ J. Harrington, 'Festivals National and International: The Beckett Festival', in *Interactions: Dublin Theatre Festival*, N. Grene, P. Lonergan with L. Chambers (Dublin: Carysfort, 2008), Kindle edition Loc. 2207-2376 (2360-2376). [Use book edition rather than kindle edition].

²⁹ See Kennedy, 'Samuel Beckett's Reception in Ireland', in *The International Reception of Samuel Beckett*, edited by Mark Nixon and Matthew Feldman (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 68.

roads as well. Driving west from Belfast, you notice how the road peters out from the well-maintained main road to Enniskillen, the slightly narrower main road from Enniskillen to the border to the much narrower country road which takes you from the border into Sligo, the nearest large town in the Republic. The road enters Sligo through one of its lesser, albeit highly scenic, arteries, almost through the backdoor, as if the southern town has forgotten (or tried to forget) the existence of one of its nearest northern neighbours. Through stifling the development of transport links, partition increased this sense of marginality and remoteness. Without partition, Enniskillen might have been a much busier hub connecting Sligo and Dublin with Belfast and Derry, rather than, as it is for many holiday-makers, a retreat of lakes and green fields away from the urbanised east. Yet it is here that Doran stakes his claim to the creation of a cultural hub out of which the Beckett, Friel and Wilde festivals will emerge (though the inaugural Friel Festival took place in 2015 in Donegal).

Happy Days and the Place-Archive

Given this historical backdrop, what conclusions can be drawn about the relationship between the Happy Days Festival and the place-archive? Some may see the Festival as not only as a cultural event in itself but as a way to also showcase local tourist amenities. As Thomas O'Reilly, Chairman of Fermanagh District Council puts it in the 2012 inaugural programme:

By using venues in and around the island town of Enniskillen, the festival will showcase our waterways, landscape, buildings and streets as a hub for arts, culture and sport. Whether you are familiar with Enniskillen or not, you find unique events in unique places and a warm welcome to all.³⁰

Such a relationship between the touristic economy of a place and its cultural events is to be frequently observed in the context of international festivals and the use of place for these

³⁰ Programme held by the author.

ends demands interrogation. Many commentators, deeply influenced by Pierre Bourdieu's writings on culture and capital, see festivals and cultural celebrations as ideologically inflected and reflecting for the most part the interests of specific social classes and groups. As Sharon Zukin writes, we can no longer simply think of culture as a reflection of material civilisation but rather as a tool in the hands of patrons who often compete over the 'definition of symbols and the space to put them', using 'images not only as salable commodities but also as the basis of tourist and real estate markets and visions of collective identity.'³¹

Stanley Waterman has explored how place as well as art is consumed in festivals and 'prestige projects and place-marketing do not necessarily contribute to cultural regeneration and are more inclined to benefit the local middle-class and cultural tourists.'³² Festivals can often be part of the spatial rebranding of places, in ways which do not benefit those most in need. Parts of Fermanagh are in line for urban regeneration and one has to wonder if this festival, like so much cultural touristic ventures, as Emer Sheerin puts it, relies upon 'a very selective and exclusively aesthetic representation' of the region, in which there is a constant attempt to discover what is visually appealing and exotic' while ignoring poverty and conflict.³³ In terms of cultural events and their relationship with place, a connection can be drawn, therefore, between festival attendee and tourist observer, Denis Cosgrove sums up the problematics of place-consumption beautifully when he articulates the distinction between those who perceive space as landscape (and consume it as such) and those for whom the land forms the surrounding of their daily lives: 'The insider does not enjoy the privilege of being able to walk away from the scene as we can walk away from a framed picture or from a tourist viewpoint.'³⁴ The erasure of conflict, poverty and their historical precedents are a

³¹ S. Zukin, *The Culture of Cities* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000 (1996), p. 113. Is this a revised edition?

³² 'Carnivals for Elites? The Cultural Politics of Arts Festivals', *Progress in Human Geography* 22.1 (1998), pp. 54-74 (p. 64).

³³ Quoted in Gerry Smyth, *Space and Irish Cultural Imagination* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 31.

³⁴ Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), p. 19.

wider problem of place consumption, as is – and this is highly specific to places which have been affected by partition and conflict – an inability or unwillingness to engage with that unsettled history. It may be that festivals force us to ask difficult questions about the ways in which sites are used in contemporary theatre practices, inside and outside festival contexts. Thinking of place as an archive of sorts demands that we think of how the place-text is being utilised and imagined under these conditions, in other words, whether or not individual artworks or the festival as a whole are responsive to the traces of history embedded in the landscape. And more, importantly the links that this festival (and indeed many festivals) have with the tourism industry.

It may be too soon to say if these problems of ideology; and inequality apply to the Happy Days Festival. It does, as with many such festivals, tend to follow along the tracks laid down for tourists and showcases sites as much as it showcases art and this leaves it open to sharing in some of the same critiques directed at the tourism industry. Tourism suffers from, as Judith Rugg puts it, a ‘resituat[ion of] place as benign and free of conflict. Tourism as a form of ‘place reframing’, for Rugg, involves a sort of ‘enforced coherence [...] of regeneration, redevelopment, urban planning or tourism’.³⁵ Dean McCannell’s seminal work on the subject indicates that tourism offers a sort of inoculation against the past: ‘the effect of preservation is to make the present more unified against the past, more in control of nature, less a product of history.’³⁶ He observes how modernity has transformed nature from ‘cruel alternative to community life’ to a ‘place of play’, from something we must fight to something we must preserve.³⁷ Rugg argues that site-specific art can work against the

³⁵ Judith Rugg, *Exploring Site-Specific Art: Issues of Space and Internationalism* (London, GBR: I.B. Tauris, 2010), p. 124.

³⁶ *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley and LA: University of California Press, 1999 [1976]), p. 83.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

constructions of the place through tourism narratives, and reveal rather than conceal conflict.³⁸

Individual works in the Festival might respond to site aesthetically but do not attempt – at least so far – to unearth the historical content of sites, to access and utilise the cultural loci of memory. Like the biographical connection of Beckett himself to the area, the festival floats atop a complex history of plantation and partition. Not unlike visitors to the Marble Arch Caves who are strictly prohibited from touching the rock formations because this can alter the pattern or even stunt the growth of the calcified rock, the Festival may also leave no traces. It hovers, rather, somewhere on the spectrum between site specificity and site responsiveness and the ‘transitory topographies’ that characterise festivals of this nature.³⁹

The question of this festival’s relationship to place is part of a broader set of questions which must be asked of all festivals and cultural events: who benefits, culturally and economically? How is place-archive, its history, landscape, conflicts and partitions, being used? What if anything is being forgotten in that use of place? And, what traces will remain within the place-as-archive? The Happy Days Festival is still in its infancy. It is perhaps too soon to ask it to answer to all the questions that have been raised here. At only four years old, it is perhaps too newly in place to deal in a meaningful way with the place-archive that it rests upon. Yet it presents an opportunity for critics and commentators to observe the process of a festival’s embedding in place. As observers, we have a responsibility to be aware of the issues at stake and aid in documenting the Festival’s embedding, while being cognisant of the historical realities which are always already present in the landscape and which precede the artistic practices of the festival.

³⁸ *Exploring Site-Specific Art*, p. 49.

³⁹ B. Jarvis quoted in Waterman, ‘Carnivals for Elites?’ p. 62.

To end on a speculative note, it may be that the tentative connection between Beckett's work and Enniskillen is exactly the thing that resists a sanitising or embalming of history within touristic representations of place. Work like the production of *Ohio Impromptu* discussed here presents the tourist experience side by side with the aesthetic quietude of Beckett's theatre, allowing a dissonance to stand between the two. This echoes the dissonance (but not disconnection) which is to be found between art and the economy and may provide a blueprint of a fault-line along which other dissonances, such as the remnants of local conflict, embodied geographically in the partitioned island, may be mapped. For the Festival, time – and place – will tell.