Re-Place: Performative Landscapes as Conceptual Ecological Environments.

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Table of Contents

1) Abstract \hspace{1em} iv

2) Acknowledgements \hspace{1em} v

3) List of Illustrations \hspace{1em} vi

4) Chapter One

   1.1 Thesis Introduction \hspace{1em} 1
   \hspace{1em} \hspace{1em} Conceptual Ecological Environments \hspace{1em} 1
   1.2 Methodology \hspace{1em} 6
   \hspace{1em} \hspace{1em} Culture \hspace{1em} 9
   \hspace{1em} \hspace{1em} Nature \hspace{1em} 10
   1.3 Literature Review \hspace{1em} 14
   \hspace{1em} \hspace{1em} Ecocriticism \hspace{1em} 16
   \hspace{1em} \hspace{1em} Ecocriticism and Space and Place in Irish Studies \hspace{1em} 37
   1.4 Conclusion \hspace{1em} 60

5) Chapter Two

| Conceptualizing the West |

   2.1 Introduction \hspace{1em} 63
   2.2 \textit{Riders to the Sea} \hspace{1em} 65
   2.3 \textit{The Well of Saints} \hspace{1em} 73
   2.4 \textit{Druid/Synge} \hspace{1em} 86
   2.5 Conclusion \hspace{1em} 96
6) Chapter Three

**Beckett’s Fragmented Environments**

| 3.1 | Introduction | 99  |
| 3.2 | *All That Fall* | 100 |
| 3.3 | Urban Sustainability and *Not I* | 114 |
| 3.4 | Pan Pan’s Staging of Beckett’s Radio Plays | 127 |
| 3.5 | Conclusion | 135 |

7) Chapter Four

**Conceptualizing the North**

| 4.1 | Introduction | 137 |
| 4.2 | *Translations* | 142 |
|      | • Mapping | 145 |
|      | • Hedge Schools | 151 |
| 4.3 | Exile and the North in *Making History* | 156 |
| 4.4 | Ouroboros/*Making History* | 161 |
| 4.5 | Conclusion | 167 |
8) Chapter Five

Digital Environments

5.1 Introduction 172
5.2 Druid Archive as Conceptual Environment 180
5.3 The Ongoing Performativity of Digital Documentation 184
5.4 Material Networks: Contesting Ephemerality 192
5.5 Conclusion 198

9) Overall Conclusions

6.1 Introduction 200
6.2 Reflecting on Transformations: Careers. Disciplines and Methods 207
6.3 Recommendations for Future Research 209

10) Works Cited 212
Abstract

This dissertation aims to integrate Irish theatre history into a wider discourse of the environmental humanities. Combining material ecocritical thinking and theories of space and place, this thesis contends firstly, that grouping the selected theatrical, radiophonic, and digital landscapes under the umbrella term conceptual ecological environments will offer a way to examine disparate landscapes thematically. Secondly, that this thematic amalgamation, with its emphasis on inclusivity, bridges the division of nature and culture. That is, it can challenge (at least on a textual and performative level) the human/non-human dynamic that has facilitated the collapse of nature in the face of anthropocentrism. I intend to read the performances (and the corresponding digital documentation) as a material response to the environment it depicts, examining, as Serenella Iovino writes, “matter as a text, as a site of narrativity” (“Stories” 451). In examining the environmental rather than the cultural in these plays, this thesis challenges the polarization of both.
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List of Illustrations

**Fig 1:** Opening scene from *Riders to the Sea. DruidSynge: The Plays of John Millington Synge.* Screen Dir. Rónán Fox. Wildfire Films/Druid, 2007. DVD.

**Fig 2:** Beginning of Act 2, *The Playboy of the Western World.* Still from Wildfire/Druid documentary, 2007.

**Fig 3:** Set for Pan Pan’s *All That Fall.* Photographer: Ros Kavanagh, 2011.

**Fig 4:** Set for Pan Pan’s *Embers.* Photographer: Ros Kavanagh, 2013.

**Fig 5:** Castle Hill, Dungannon. Outdoor scene looking over the Sperrin Mountains. Ouroboros Archive.
Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction

This dissertation aims to integrate Irish theatre history into a wider discourse of the environmental humanities. Combining material ecocritical thinking and theories of space and place, this thesis contends firstly, that grouping the selected theatrical, radiophonic, and digital landscapes\(^1\) under the umbrella term conceptual ecological environments will offer a way to examine disparate performative spaces thematically. Secondly, that this thematic amalgamation, with its emphasis on inclusivity, bridges the division of nature and culture. That is, it can challenge (at least on a textual and performative level) the human/non-human dynamic that has facilitated the collapse of nature in the face of anthropocentrism\(^2\). I intend to read the performances (and the corresponding digital documentation) as a material response to the environment it depicts, examining, as Serenella Iovino writes, “matter as a text, as a site of narrativity” (“Stories” 451). In examining the environmental rather than the cultural in these plays, this thesis challenges the polarization of both.

**Conceptual Ecological Environments**

Before continuing I would like to define conceptual ecological environments as it is the central idea around which I build the study. Ecology is the holistic

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\(^1\) For the purposes of this dissertation, I define landscape as place framed by human culture. This definition of landscape is not without controversy and I realise that there is a nature outside of the cultural realm. For the purposes of this study, I am focusing on nature as conceived and performed by mankind rather than the natural world that exists outside of that remit.

\(^2\) One of the reasons that digital materiality is included in this dissertation is that it challenges anthropocentric narratives, as Rosi Braidotti has argued, “contemporary technologically mediated bodies…marks a shift from anthropocentrism, in favour of a new emphasis on the mutual interdependence of material, biocultural, and symbolic forces in the making of social and political practices” (“The Politics” 203-4). My dissertation emphasizes (in line with Bradiotti’s point about interdependence) a more biocentric reading of performative texts.
understanding of the interconnectedness between all entities. The analyses in this thesis are ecologically driven: that is, they aspire to capture the human and nonhuman aspects of the plays and performances. The term, ecology, comes from the Greek *oikos* (meaning house) and *logos* (meaning study). I have used the term *ecological* environments as it reflects this breaking down of boundaries. Hubert Zapf has argued that “the sense of a shared and complex world is the fundamental impulse of ecological thought” (55). I intend to embrace this dictum of thinking ecologically (and the materialist implications of a shared and complex world) and read the following performances as material rather than cultural projects. That includes all the material generated in its production, from the authors’ first description of landscape, to the medium of transmission, to the environments that new types of digital documentation create. The term ecological is important as a tool for all-inclusivity. Timothy Morton writes that to think ecologically is to have a “radical openness” to an immeasurably diverse collection of factors (*Ecological* 15). These are the parameters of the term, ecological, in this research. In accepting the immeasurability of the myriad actors in creativity, I acknowledge that the scope would be too large to capture all participants but, nevertheless, I hope to capture the spirit of total inclusivity.

I will be using the term, conceptual ecological environment, because there are two types of environment being studied in this thesis: the aestheticized environments in the plays (such as Ballybeg), and the total environment of that play’s production (such as the radiophonic aspect of *All That Fall*). Embracing inclusivity of all material as part of the play’s environment means that the

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3 It is worth noting that Greg Garrard has critiqued the discourse around “pastoral ecology” writing that the “metaphor of Nature as a harmonious and stable machine remained at the heart of the new science of ecology as it emerged in the early twentieth century, and shaped the rhetoric of later environmental movements even as scientific ecologists became increasingly sceptical of the ‘balance of nature’” (*Ecocriticism* 56).

4 This thesis seeks to establish an environmental narrative of materiality – whilst not suggesting that these playwrights deliberately sought to create this type of narrative.
human aspect is just a constitutional element of the play’s production. Conceptual art is so named because its ideas take precedence over its aesthetic concerns. Conceptual environments work the same way in that the idea that the landscape generates is more important (for the purposes of this research) than the landscape itself. I hope that by using the term, conceptual ecological environments, ecological inclusivity will be the primary concern of the study, thematically linking these real, theatrical, radiophonic, and digital landscapes. This is a radical interpretation of the aesthetics of Irish theatre which takes ecological thinking and applies it thematically to historical texts and performances.

I use the term environment because it denotes the totally of a grouping including human and nonhuman, organic and inorganic, actors. Morton describes an environment as “a way of considering groups and collectives – humans surrounded by nature, or in continuity with other beings such as animals and plants” (Ecology 17). There are many definitions for these material collectives – Latour’s assemblages, Haraway’s knots, Morton’s mesh – all of which will be discussed in the literature review. I have used the term environment because it is the most basic unit available for a human and nonhuman collective. Overall, conceptual ecological environments are a way of thematically grouping diverse landscapes through a focus on the material aesthetics of place.

To work in the mode of all-inclusivity, I will look at five different iterations of what I mean by conceptual ecological environments. The examples consist of two environments that capture the imaginative and cultural character of the Irish aesthetic: the West and the North of Ireland. These two examples will be matched by plays that depict more challenging environments: the radio play (All That Fall) and the synecdochical play (Not I). Finally, I will examine how the emergence of digital environments means that we need to reimagine traditional narratives of place.

To begin I will examine the West of Ireland. I will analyze J.M. Synge’s relationship with nature as the foundation of his theatrical representation of
environment. “Conceptualizing the West” explores how a place can be the keeper of memory and establishes the power of the natural world in the Irish narrative. The chapter will deconstruct how the natural landscape is imagined on stage and challenge the idea of the marginal more natural environment as a keeper of memory is central to the division of nature and culture in Irish aesthetics. It will study how emerging narratives of the natural world during the foundation of the Irish state has shaped a more melancholy relationship between human and nonhuman. The question of how the physical landscape is represented aesthetically tells us about how urban space remembers and memorializes. I argue that Synge’s representation of landscape is what Pierre Nora describes as “heritage consolidated”: an interpretation of the pre-modern age for the modern era (Between 12).

“Beckett’s Fragmented Environments” looks at plays that do not have concrete evocations of place. In my examination of All That Fall and Not I, there is a focus on the material environments. Drawing on Ulrich Beck’s definition of risk theory, and Stacy Alaimo’s Bodily Matters: Science, Environment, and the Material Self, this chapter will contend that the environments in All That Fall and Not I can be read as part of an environmental humanities discourse because they emphasize materiality. All That Fall uses the medium of radio to concretize issues of being part (or not being part in Maddy’s case) of the environment and Not I captures the fears of urban unsustainability and apocalypse narratives tied to the networks of modernity. James Knowlson has noted of Beckett’s later work: “Life material remains. It is simply located at several removes below the surface” (xxi). I hope to excavate below that surface.

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5 I am basing my use of the term aesthetics on Adorno’s chapter “Natural Beauty” in Aesthetic Theory where he sees art beauty as more related to “cultural landscapes” than the natural beauty it is trying to depict (84). I have included the chapter in my literature review on page 34.

6 This chapter uses Pierre Nora’s seminal study of les lieux de mémoire (which examines the role of memory in the construction of identity) to look at how memory and, as a consequence, identity is socially constructed.
and examine the materiality that infuses Beckett’s *Not I* and imagine it as a synthesis between the body and its urban surroundings.

Chapter four, “Conceptualizing the North”, examines the outward manifestations of land-ownership on the environment and argues that the North is an active and ongoing site of trauma. This chapter asserts that in Friel’s work there is a theatrical expression of place through ritual enactment. The colonial tools of cartography, for example, place Friel’s subject in the context of a modern risk society. Using Ulrich Beck’s theory of a risk society where subjects can only comprehend risk from within reflexive modernity, this chapter will look at how a society in the process of modernizing is represented through its relationship with the environment. Beck argues that understanding risk requires “the ‘sensory organs’ of science – theories, experiments, measuring instruments – in order to become visible or interpretable at all” (*Risk* 27; emphasis in original).⁷ I will explore how Friel’s characters – both in *Translations* and *Making History* – become disenfranchised players in the modernity brought about by colonialism.

To tie in with the remit of an all-inclusive materialist analysis of performative landscapes, the final chapter, “Digital Environments”, looks at the ongoing performance of digital documentation. I examine how representations of the natural environment can be expanded using digital technology. The reason that this chapter forms an important part of the research is that digital environments are expressions of conceptual landscapes. Sidney Dobrin argues that digital environments complicate the distinctions between real and simulated places and “signifies a shift in how we think about interactions with places and spaces” (203). I want to include digital environments because these

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⁷ It is true that living in contemporary society, we have acclimated to living in a period of extended crisis. Lauren Berlant’s *Cruel Optimism* is testament to the traumatic effects of collective belonging, or what she terms *being in common*, in a neoliberalist society. Her kind of optimism becomes ‘cruel only when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that bought you to it initially” (1). This dissociation between desire fulfilment can create anxiety in our contemporary risk society.
are the spaces where ideas of landscape and identity circulate. In the introduction to this dissertation, I outlined the central thesis: that Irish performative landscapes represent conceptual ecological environments and that these conceptual ecological landscapes offer a way of bridging the nature/culture binary. Moving away from the physical world and into digital space, this chapter examines digitally rather than geographically defined environment. Digitization has given us the tools to broaden our understanding of what an environment is. Studying digital archives as ongoing cultural depositories and examining in what ways they reflect cultural ideas, I will further the conceptual representations of the environment. How is the natural landscape represented in digital space? This chapter examines how theatre has proved to be adept in creating mediated representations of natural landscapes, thus creating a ready template for conceptual ecological environments that can be extended to the digital sphere.

1.2 Methodology

This dissertation consists of a new materialist reading of the chosen plays and aims to recognize an interdependent and interconnected relationship between matter and performance. I have chosen the plays that open up the parameters of what consists of a nonhuman environment. The Beckett plays I chose for the thesis were the most suited to expanding the notion of what a conceptual environment could be. A radio play, for example, is an important addition because it offers a different theatrical structure than the traditional auditorium. What environment does an auditory relationship engender? What are the material aspects of listening to a radio transmission as an audience member? Of Beckett’s work, it might be surprising that I didn’t choose *Endgame* as an apocalyptic environmental narrative. Greg Garrard has already written an insightful article on how *Endgame* is “the perfect play for the era of anxiety about climate change” (“Endgame” 383). Whereas *Endgame* might be the most environmental of his plays, both *Not I* and *All That Fall* emphasize the
materiality of the body in the environment and that is what I want to be the 
main focus of this study. Not I also challenges what an environment is as I 
argue that it is a narrative of an urban ecology. It tests the premise that the 
human body is needed in a theatre play – a human body is not even needed to 
 enact the part given computer technology. I have chosen these two plays as they 
complicate the notion of the bounded body and allows for a more materialist 
reading of place.

I have included site-specific tours of both Synge and Friel’s work and 
plays that question the idea of what a cultural (or nationalistic) landscape is.
Synge’s ethnographic work centres on the idea that the west of Ireland was a 
region of unparalleled importance because of the richness of the language and 
culture practiced there. I have chosen Riders to the Sea because it is an 
allegorical play representing the live of the rural west and underscores a shift in 
the balance of power between nature and culture. Lawrence Buell has noted that 
central to Riders to the Sea (which he describes as an “ecodrama”) is the 
“performance of a particular kind of ecocultural commitment” (Future 48). I 
want to examine the interplay between the cultural community of the islanders 
and the natural environment that threatens them. The Well of the Saints is about 
a marginalized couple that lives outside the realm of what is cultural or habitual 
social behavior. I have chosen the play because it describes the relationship 
between those living closer to nature and the community that feels threatened 
by that choice. Both these plays problematize the notion that there is a more 
authentic and closer relationship evident in pre-modern cultures.  

The reason that I have chosen Translations and Making History is 
because they are the two major Field Day plays. Friel founded the Field Day 
Theatre Company (in 1980 with actor Stephan Rea) and co-opted the term, the 
fifth province, with the intention of creating a cultural sphere that transcended

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8 The notion of Ireland as a pre-modern culture is supported by Roy Foster who writes that “the 
idea that Ireland underwent a process of ‘modernization’ (economic, political, and social) in 
the nineteenth century is much contested; certainly a good deal of what characterized the 
country in the mid-twentieth century was obdurately pre-modern” (567).
the territorial disputes of the North. Field Day’s vision for the North as a conceptual environment makes these plays central to my argument. The fifth province was intended to counter the realities of the violence and prejudice in the North. I hope that reading these plays, in the all-inclusive fashion that new materialism calls for, would add to the cultural criticism that has built up around Field Day.

These playwrights have formed the core of Irish theatrical expression in the last century and many contemporary writers respond directly to their work. I hope that the plays that I have chosen will offer the most varied grouping of communities and their experience of being-in-the-world. A question arises here as to the normative (white, middle-class, male) playwrights that are under scrutiny in this thesis. To that I will say: the focus of this discussion is on the framing of place. Historically, the default framing of landscape is this very demographic. To examine the rich output of the non-normative, side-lined and marginalized communities in Ireland is a very different project. I hope that this dissertation’s study of the framing of place will serve to highlight this discrepancy.

9 Richard Kearney originally coined the term “fifth province” as part of the vision for the journal, The Crane Bag. Started in 1977 and edited by Kearney and Mark Patrick Hederman, the journal based the term on the Irish word for province which means fifth (as Ireland has four provinces the fifth province was to be a conceptual one). Kearney describes the purpose of the journal was to “promote the excavation of unactualized spaces within the reader, which is the work of constituting the fifth province. From such a place a new understanding and unity might emerge” (4).

10 E. Ann Kaplan builds on the premise of the male gaze expounded in Laura Mulvey’s Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema (1975) to forward the concept of the imperial gaze which “reflects the assumption that the white western subject is central much as the male gaze assumes the centrality of the male subject” (78).

11 The notion of “place” is a contentious and fluid one. Buell states that “Place is an indispensable concept for the environmental humanities not so much because they have precisely defined and stabilized it as because they have not; not because of what the concept lays to rest as because of what it opens up” (Future 62). Place as a conceptual aesthetic metaphor and what that means for the nonhuman world is the focus of my study.
Performed landscapes are places that epitomize the social sphere rather than the natural one. Performed landscapes – whether theatrical or digital – offer us the opportunity to understand how nature is represented and framed, and this research can contribute toward the dismantling of that framework. One of the aims of this dissertation is to bridge the nature/culture binary that has separated the human from the non-human. Before using the words nature and culture, I would like to elaborate on how I define those terms and how they will be used in the thesis.

**Culture**

The term culture, which Raymond Williams famously called “one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language”, traces its origins to the Latin word *cultus* which means care and the French word *colere* which means to till the ground (87). The term, although emphasizing the social, has its origins in cultivating the natural world. Williams writes that historically culture “was a noun of process: the tending of something, basically crops or animals” (87). The term was grounded in agriculture and not exclusive to human social practices. Edward Casey makes the point that “to have a culture, is to inhabit a place sufficiently intensely to cultivate it – to be responsible for it, to respond to it, to attend it caringly” (34-5). The idea of culture as tending to a person’s mind arrived at a later date. Buell has noted that the idea of culture as a “life-state as distinct from life-process” did not “become fully institutionalized until the nineteenth century” (*Future* 135). Contemporary critical discourse approaches, Buell writes, “environmental issues from the standpoint of cultural studies, conceiving of nature, particularly under modernization, predominantly in terms of its manipulation or reinvention by human culture” (136). Cultural communities’ version of nature therefore is created by the artists, poets, and playwrights that frame the natural world. This aestheticized nature is the focus of this dissertation.

It is this story-telling aspect of cultural renditions of the natural world
that has had an impact on how the nonhuman world has been separated from
the human one. This is creativity that Herbert Zapf has noted “is beginning to
newly move into the focus of attention not only as an exclusionary feature of
human culture but as a property of life and, to an extent, of the material world
itself” (51). He sees cultural creativity as a feature of nature and, therefore,
subject to the same materiality as physical entities. This dissertation will be
framed along the same lines, on human creativity as a natural process, coming
from nature rather than culture.

Nature

The problem with nature, as a conceptual term, is that it has been overly
simplified and romanticized. Timothy Morton makes the point that “[o]ne of the
ideas inhibiting genuinely ecological politics, ethics, philosophy, and art is the
idea of nature itself” (Ecology 14). He argues that the historical notion of nature
“wavers in between the divine and the material” (14). It has been used as a tool
reflecting communities’ social concerns and has moved from being, Morton
writes, “practically a synonym for evil in the Middle Ages” to the “basis of
social good by the Romantic period” (15). This makes nature a difficult term to
untangle. Patricia Yaeger argues that ecocritical discourse has become “so
contaminated with nature as perfection or with a quest for organic truth that
operating in its name is hard” (529). We must always be aware of our subjective
aesthetic experience of nature and the cultural context that our understanding of
the term is operating in. Adorno argues this point in Aesthetic Theory:

The song of birds is found beautiful by everyone; no feeling person in
whom something of the European tradition survives fails to be moved
by the sound of a robin after a rain shower. Yet something frightening
lurks in the song of birds precisely because it is not a song but obeys the
spell in which it is enmeshed (87; emphasis added).

This is one of the reasons that fictional narratives of the natural world are as
important as scientific data in our understanding of nature. Fictional narratives
tell us about how we view the natural world and, given the emergence of
anthropogenic climate change, the examination of nature aesthetics (such as is evident in this thesis) is crucial.

In “The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis”, Lynn White argues that the separation between nature and culture occurred in the Middle Ages, and the linear, progressive system of environmental exploitation that followed is a direct result of a Judeo-Christian mode of thinking. In the Enlightenment, nature became a scientific term. The emergence of nature as a mode of classification allowed us to separate ourselves from our environment in order to exploit it. White points out that, “we are not, in our hearts, part of the natural process. We are separate to nature, contemptuous of it, willing to use it for our slightest whim” (1206). The beginning of the othering of nature in the Middle Ages moves to exploitation in earnest with the emergence of capitalism. Morton argues that “nature has been used to support the capitalist theory of value and to undermine it; to point out what is intrinsically human, and to exclude the human; to inspire kindness and compassion, and to justify competition and cruelty” (Ecology 19). The success of capitalist modernity means that we now see ourselves only from inside the framework of industrialization.

This thesis argues that aestheticized landscapes are refuges that hide ongoing tensions between man and environment. It seeks to examine how we can become embedded in the material environment rather than viewing environment as the nonhuman other. John Wylie’s article, “Landscape, Absence and the Geographies of Love”, highlights this relationship between man and landscape as the haunting (or absence) of presence. His exploration of the memorial benches at Muillion Cove in South-West England counters the trend in landscape studies of moving/walking/mapping (that we see in the work of Tim Robinson for example). Wylie’s focus on absence moves the emphasis of landscape studies from what he terms, “a romanticized account of being-in-the-world, one troubled by both myths of primitivism and baleful notions of

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12 Lawrence Buell has highlighted that “White’s thesis has been disputed by biblical scholars, theologians, and environmental ethicists, who have convincingly exposed its tendentiousness without having permanently laid the charge to rest” (Future 150).
authentic or proper dwelling” (282). I think that Wylie’s article is important to note at the beginning of this dissertation because he highlights the pitfalls that many studies of landscape might not foresee. He warns against valorizing presence in landscape studies. The tendency toward the idealization of being-in-the-world, in particular the primitive or premodern mode of experience, is also evident in Irish studies and something that I hope to avoid.

The spatial turn in Irish studies has emerged from a focus on postcolonial discourse, a historical model that critiques the inequalities inherent in modernity. Postcolonialism has been introduced as a critical framework in Irish Studies, with Declan Kiberd writing that, “the Irish case … will complicate, extend and in some cases exposes the limits of current models of postcoloniality” \((\text{Inventing} \ 5)\). Irish postcolonial studies have been important in decentring the idea of a progressive forward-thinking modernity but some of the limitations of postcolonial discourse might be evident in the universalizing aspects of dividing regions into colonizer and colonized. Postcolonial and

\(13\) Wylie writes that “[s]tudies of landscape couched within literary, phenomenological or non-representational idioms may be felt to neglect or underplay both the contested historicities of specific landscapes and the highly differential nature of the landscape experiences of different cultural and social groups; in the latter case leaving themselves open to misinterpretation in which the narrative voice appear to universalize specific ways of seeing and experiencing landscape” (286).

\(14\) See Lloyd 1999; Kiberd 1995; Gibbons 1996.

\(15\) David Lloyd has argued that the “value of a postcolonial critique of modernity that emanates from locations once considered peripheral is that it supplements the recognition of the internal contradictions of modernization” (3). The geographical importance of being on the periphery allows Irish post-colonialism to “call into question the historicist narrative that understands modernity as a progress from the backward to the advanced, from the pre-modern to the modern” \((\text{Irish} \ 3)\).

\(16\) Catherine Nash has highlighted the danger of this essentialism writing that in the “context of attempts to undermine the polarized versions of history and identity in North Ireland, this simple binary of colonized and colonizer is deeply problematic” (460). She sees contemporary postcolonial discourse as offering a way of “challenging this dualism while maintaining a critical perspective on the oppressions of both colonial and nationalist
ecocritical theory do have a lot in common not least the politicization of landscape. Rob Nixon has expressed surprise in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* that there has been a “mutual reluctance” between environmental and postcolonial studies as “both exhibited an often-activist dimension that connects their priorities to movements for social change” (233). Timothy Clark has noted that in the “encounter between ‘postcolonial’ thinking and ecocriticism to date, it is ecocriticism that first seems the more in need of revision. For, to many people, modern environmentalism can look like another form of colonialism” (120).

In Irish studies, Eóin Flannery has called for a postcolonial ecocriticism that challenges the “destructive linear vector” of capitalist imperialism (104). He argues that one of the ways to challenge “dominating worldviews” is “through a renewed attention to and understanding of ‘place’” (104). But the impact of colonialism in Ireland’s case has perhaps led to wariness of ecocritical discourse. One of the issues that Joe Cleary has raised is that colonialism brought modernization to Ireland before industrialization, “Ireland did not have to wait … for the arrival of industrialization or technological modernity to undergo that traumatic sense of breakneck modernization, of rapid cultural transformation and psychic transformation” (7). Postcolonialism has been an important critical frame in Irish studies (in understanding the cultural impact of colonialism) and certainly the environmentalism as neo-colonialism issue that Clarke raises has impacted on the Irish literary response to ecocriticism.

This dissertation builds on the work in Irish studies that has emerged from cultural geography and literary criticism centring on issues of space and place. The spatial turn in Irish studies reflects a wider global discourse about formations” (460).

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17 Rosi Braidotti has also written, in *The Posthuman*, that “Post-colonial thought asserts that if Humanism has a future at all, it has to come from outside the Western world and by-pass the limitations of Eurocentrism” (25). Both points outline the postcolonial premise of accessing subaltern narratives that are outside hegemonic power structures.
place and has created a rich foundation for Irish theatre studies to discuss environmental concerns. The privileging of the cultural over the natural is more nuanced in Irish discourse, in which the dynamics of place have historically been more troubled. This thesis draws on theorists in Irish Studies who have made this anxiety of place their central concern: Helen Lojek, Christopher Morash, Shaun Richards, Tim Robinson and, in the development of Irish ecocriticism, Eóin Flannery, Tim Wenzell, Gerry Smyth, Christine Cusick, and Oona Frawley.

This research is also placed within a new materialist ecocritical paradigm. I have used this new materialist approach as it reintroducte the body to the environment (after the excess of depopulated landscapes of the romantic enlightenment) and focuses on the interdependence between body and place. This research follows an interpretivist mixed-methods approach that combines theoretical analysis of play texts with performance histories of theatrical tours. I have identified key theorists – Nora, Buell, Alaimo – and have used a mixed method research paradigm, utilizing different theorists that reflect each of the distinct theatrical iterations of landscape. Methodologically, a mixed paradigm has both the benefits of quantitative and qualitative research and enables a study of the play texts and the performance histories that accompany the touring of these performances. I will begin with a literature review that focuses on texts that specialize in aesthetic representation of place, landscape and environment.

### 1.3 Literature Review

The first section in the literature review will be “Ecocriticism” and establish the

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I use Pierre Nora in the analysis of Synge’s work because Nora’s work concretizes memory through memorial sites. That is, he manifests issues of memory and memorial discourse, into physical sites – *lieux de memoires*. These are landscapes of memory, which are untied from real history. They are self-referential in the same way that, I argue, Synge’s depiction of the Aran Islands are.
debates, concepts, and vocabulary used in the field of green literary studies. I will examine the development of ecocritical discourse and the theorists and terms that have been prominent in the area. I will then review the books that have had the most impact on my research and whose work I build on through the thesis. These books are Iovino and Oppermann’s *Material Ecocriticism* (2014), Timothy Morton’s *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Ethics* (2009), Stacy Alaimo’s *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (2010), Ursula Heise’s *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (2008), Jane Bennett’s *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010), Bruno Latour’s *Politics of Nature: How to bring the Sciences into Democracy* (2004), and Theodor Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory* (1970) with an emphasis on his chapter “Natural Beauty”.

Ecocriticism emerged in the 1990s as a new field of critical theory in American literary scholarship. The most commonly cited definition of ecocriticism is “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” as described in Cheryll Glotfelty’s introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader* (xviii). This broad definition reflects the vastness of the ground covered by ecocritics. Spanning the nonfiction nature-writing texts of Aldo Leopold, environmental science in Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* and post-apocalyptic fictions such as McCarthy’s *The Road*, ecocriticism focuses on nonhuman agency in literary texts. Ecocritical discourse consists of environmental literary analysis and generally has an ethical or activist dimension. There is an element of care and stewardship evident in the ecocritical canon. Ecocritics, Greg Garrard notes, “generally tie their cultural analyses explicitly to a ‘green’ moral and political agenda” (*Ecocriticism* 3). Kate Rigby has pointed out that ecocritics “seek to restore significance to the world beyond the page” (154-55). There is an ethical agenda attached to ecocriticism where literature is seen as part of, and (in many ways) responsible for, our attitude to nature.

Lawrence Buell’s foundational ecocritical text, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (2005), defines ecocriticism as “a concourse of discrepant practices” which “gathers itself around a commitment to environmentality from whatever critical vantage point” and likens the critical framework to feminism where the focus is issue-driven rather than a specific research methodology (11). Like feminism or marxism, ecocriticism seeks to analyze texts in order establish a critical structure for dealing with societal issues. Buell determines that ecocritical thinking has largely split into two waves.¹⁹ For first-wave ecocritics, Buell

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¹⁹ Iovino and Oppermann have argued that material ecocriticism, which forms the main framework of this dissertation, could potentially be seen (following on from Buell’s
argues, “‘environment’ effectively meant ‘natural environment’” (21). First-wave ecocritics established the natural world as romantic, wild and untainted by human hand. Second-wave ecocritics differ in their understanding of what the term environment encompasses and, as Buell notes, tend to “question organicist models of conceiving both environment and environmentalism” (22). Second-wave ecocritics challenge the notion of a pristine or untouched wilderness and focus on the urban as much as the rural landscape. Buell writes that “[n]atural and built environments, revisionists point out, are long since all mixed up; the landscape of the American “West” is increasingly the landscape of metropolitan sprawl” (22). Ecocriticism has moved towards a more complex understanding of what nonhuman nature is and building an interdisciplinary methodology tied in with, though not reliant on, the environmental sciences.

This demarcation between first and second-wave ecocriticism should not be seen, Buell states, as “a tidy succinct succession” and that “currents set in motion by early ecocriticism continue to run strong, and most forms of second-wave revisionism involve building on as well as quarrelling with precursors” (17). He acknowledges the depth owed to first-wave ecocriticism but calls for a more nuanced critique of environments that encompass urban as well as rural settings: “a mature environmental aesthetics – or ethic, or politics – must take into account the interpenetration of metropolis and outback, of anthropocentric as well as biocentric concerns” (22). It is worth noting that The Future of Environmental Criticism is now over ten years old and his call for a more nuanced critique of environments has been answered, not least, by new materialist ecocritical discourse.

20 The term wilderness has been challenged for its romantic connotations (being beyond the realm of civilization), as Greg Garrard notes, “the word ‘wilderness’ derives from the Anglo-Saxon ‘wildeoren’. Where ‘doeren’ or beasts existed beyond the boundaries of cultivation” (Ecocriticism 60).
In exploring a theoretical framework suitable to environmental literature, Serenella Iovino argues that it is in the network of mediated literary depictions of nature that we develop an ethical understanding of the environment. She notes that, “the text and the world are a complex information unit; they create a feedback loop consisting of the actions of the world on the text and, most of all, the possible action of the text on the world” (Ecocriticism 761). The reason that ecological and all-inclusive thinking, which forms the foundation of the environmental humanities, is beneficial to this research is that it expands the range of knowledge from the social sphere (where theatre resides) to a more inclusive amalgamation of culture and nature. Cheryl Glotfelty has argued that in “most literary theory ‘the world’ is synonymous with society – the social sphere. Ecocriticism expands the notion of “the world” to include the entire ecosystem” (xix). This expanded world view incorporates both human and the nonhuman agency.

The inclusivity of non-human agents and the impact of toxicity and pollution on the body (in particular the gendered body) have led to a focus on materiality in ecocritical discourse. This engagement with matter is evident in the emergence of new materialist thinking around embodiment and how organic and inorganic compounds can relate to each other. Donna Haraway talks about the “infoldings of others to one another is what makes up the knots we call beings or, perhaps better, following Bruno Latour, things. Things are material, specific, non-self-identical, and semiotically alive” (Species 250; emphasis in original). Haraway focuses on the interplay between human, animal, and technology as it constantly shifts. Her naturecultures, 21 like Latour’s assemblages, are ways that the human and nonhuman can come together. Iovino and Oppermann argue, in Material Ecocriticism, that this new materialist method of reading a text, “allows us to actively participate in a creative process in which material levels and levels of meaning emerge together, contributing to the world’s becoming a web teeming with collective stories” (10).

The metaphor of the web is an important one in new materialist ecocriticism. In *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett, states that, “all bodies are kin in the sense of inextricably enmeshed in a dense network of relations. And in a knotted world of vibrant matter, to harm one section of the web may very well be to harm oneself” (13). Timothy Morton has posited the notion of the mesh as a mode of thinking ecologically, as he states, the “ecological thought imagines interconnectedness, which I call *the mesh*. Who or what is interconnected with what or whom? The mesh of interconnected things is vast, perhaps immeasurably so” (*Ecological* 15). Karen Barad introduces the “mutual constitution of entangled agencies” (*Meeting* 33; emphasis in original). With terms such as enmeshment, entanglement, and the web, there is an acknowledgment that the bodies we inhabit are inseparable from their environment. The dualistic mind and body division and the hierarchical structure of different types of material are being challenged in new materialist discourse. Oppermann notes that, “in such a radical rethinking of the environment as a dynamic comingling of discursive and material flows, the world comes to be seen as a multiplicity of complex interchanges between innumerable agentic forces” (28). This new thinking around embodiment has important consequences for the meaning of nature, in particular, the othering of the natural world.

*Materialist Ecocriticism* (2014), edited by Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, gathers together theorists that focus on the literary aesthetics of material interchanges between the body and the environment. Iovino and Oppermann’s argument is laid out in their introduction, that “the world’s material phenomena are knots in a vast network of agencies, which can be ‘read’ and interpreted as forming narratives, stories” (1). The discourse around the interchange of storied matter has become central to a new form of ecocriticism heavily influenced by materialist feminist readings of texts.  

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22 Iovino and Oppermann argue that “a relationship of particular intensity is the one that connects material ecocriticism with all trends and figures of material feminisms” and highlight the works of Stacy Alaimo, Karen Barad, Susan Hekman, Catriona Sandilands,
material turn in literary criticism focuses on matter both “in texts and as a text, trying to shed light on the way bodily natures and discursive forces express their interaction whether in representations or in concrete reality” (2; emphasis in original). New materialism is an advocate of a “storied world” where culture and nature do not exist in opposition but are enmeshed as “a hybrid compound, congealing, to use Haraway’s term into naturecultures” (5). All matter can be read as text, be they bodies, chemicals, organic or inorganic, and, most importantly for this dissertation, landscapes.

Matter produces narratives that can be transcribed into stories. Iovino and Oppermann argue that this new materialist perspective leads to a “less human-centred idea of literature” (8). In as much as it is possible for humans, the aim is to engage and interpret matter’s narrative agency in the world. A materialist reading is built on the viewpoint that object and subject are inseparable. This enmeshment is evident in Karan Barad’s notion of diffractive reading where, according to Iovino and Oppermann, we read “world and text as an agentic entanglement” (10). Central to the notion of the unbounded body is that literary impulses work from within nature as opposed to objectively viewing it from outside. Herbert Zapf’s chapter, “Creative Matter and Creative Mind”, examines connections between literature and “cultural ecology” (56). “Cultural ecosystems”23 are systems which acknowledge, according to Zapf, “creativity as a general feature of material nature” (52). This is a type of creativity far removed from the individualistic approach of the lone author or creator. It is interdependent, relying on many material forces that make up a cultural ecosystem. Art and Literature are cultural ecosystems where “creativity is given a central place” (56). Zapf argues that:

From its beginning in mythical storytelling and oral narratives, literature has been a medium of cultural ecology in the sense that literature has symbolically expressed the fundamental interconnectedness between

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culture and nature in tales of human genesis, of metamorphosis, of symbiotic coevolution between different life forms. (57)

The source of literary creativity is the result of interconnecting relationships between agentic human and nonhuman material. Literary (and performance) narratives, then, emerge from the ecological sphere, and the association does not end at that point but is being constantly rejuvenated through continuing engagement with the text or performance.

The exchange between material agencies is discussed in the second section of *Material Ecocriticism*. Serenella Iovino’s chapter reads the city of Naples as a narrative of matter. She builds on the work of Lucretius who first acknowledges the interchange between the building blocks of life. She looks at the porosity of Naples and the collapse of the delineations between the various materials – brick, body, and fluid – that make up the city:

As bodies are what they are via their permeable boundaries (membranes that cause the flows of energy and matter), so, too, bigger entities and formations follow the same dynamics. A city, for example, is a porous body inhabited by other porous bodies, a mineral-vegetal-animal aggregate of porous bodies. (102)

Iovino sees the city of Naples as porous with the narrative of place written, not only in the historic buildings, but in the boundless bodies that inhabit that city. These bodies write or perform the cultural narratives of place. Iovino argues that “their narrative porosity becomes…both the point where the world enters bodies and the point from which bodies deliver their stories to the world” (103). This is a narrative formed from the interchange between human bodies and the environment. These environmental narratives can also come from remembrance instead of direct experience. Discussing Pompeii, Iovino notes that bodies “emerged from their own absence, from the hollows they left in the petrified ash after decomposing” (194). The Pompeii findings, not only highlight the importance of the discourse between new materialism and archaeology, but constitute “a site full of narratives” (104). The story of Naples is a narrative that is embedded in the surrounding environment.
The historical imprint of cultural activity on a specific site is also evident in the photographer, Peter Goin’s work, *Nuclear Landscapes*. Cheryll Glotfelty’s chapter in *Material Ecocriticism* looks at how Goin is drawn to “abandoned, neglected, forbidden, and condemned landscapes as he bears witness to the places that our culture sweeps out of sight, out of mind” (221). His photographic book, *Nuclear Landscapes* (1991), documents the impact of U.S. atomic testing on the environment. Goin differentiates between taking a photograph and making a photograph. Making a photograph, he argues, “suggests an interactive process, the photograph being the material artefact or record of the photographer’s active encounter with place as mediated through the camera” (224). The active encounter with place that Glotfelty highlights in Goin’s photography illustrates material ecocriticism’s focus on the exchange that happens between the body and the environment. Like theatre performance, which not only captures an aesthetic version of the body in the environment but also is a very real instance of an audience engaging with a performative space, Goin’s photography emerges from the active encounter with place.

Stacy Alaimo discusses trans-corporeality in her chapter, “Oceanic Origins, Plastic Activism, and New Materialism at Sea”. Illustrating the debt trans-corporeality pays to feminism, Alaimo outlines her political agenda:

> It is my hope that trans-corporeality – in theory, literature, film, activism, and daily life – is a mode of ecomaterialism that will discourage citizens, consumers, and embodied humans from taking refuge in fantasies of transcendence and imperviousness that render environmentalism a merely elective and external enterprise. (187)

This is evidence of the activism, personal responsibility, and environmental justice that is bound up with the environmental humanities. Alaimo’s trans-corporeality is an activist approach to literary theory with an ethical responsibility to understand what it means to be a porous body in a world where matter is agential. Violence visited upon the body can be perpetrated through channels that are invisible to the naked eye. Alaimo states that, “material ecocriticism, by definition, focuses on material agencies as part of a wider environmentalist ethos that values ecosystems, biodiversity, and nonhuman life”
This notion of environmental responsibility is also evident in the critiquing of the hierarchal value placed on certain bodies. It forms the central theme of Joni Adamson’s chapter which examines Amazonian oral narratives and the idealization of the pre-modern past. Adamson lists Ursula Heise as a theorist who problematizes this rhetoric, and “urges literary critics to move away from romanticization of supposedly ecologically responsible premodern cultures” (259). *Material Ecocriticism* gathers together new materialist essays that complicates traditional readings of rural landscapes. My research works along the same lines, seeking to apply a new materialist reading to my chosen narratives of landscape, I want to complicate the analysis of my chosen plays by emphasizing the materiality of the theatrical exchange. In my own research, as is evident in *Material Ecocriticism*, I hope to think ecologically and to put into my critical practice, the ethical and environmental concerns of narrating landscapes.

Timothy Morton (a theorist in thing-theory, also called object-orientated ontology), has advanced the concept of dark ecology in his book, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (2009). He argues that “in a truly deep green world, the idea of Nature will have disappeared in a puff of smoke, as nonhuman beings swim into view” (204). *Ecology without Nature* critiques the aesthetic practices inherited from European Romanticism and argues that “the very idea of ‘nature’ which so many of us hold dear will have to wither away in an ‘ecological’ state of human society” (1). Morton believes that “aesthetics…performs a crucial role, establishing ways of feeling and perceiving this place” (2). He is influenced by Adorno, whose writing, Morton says, “has a strong, often explicit ecological flavour” (7). Like Adorno, Morton sees nature as something that is socially constructed and exploited for cultural reasons. Morton argues that nature occupies “at least three places in symbolic language” (14). Firstly, it is an “empty placeholder for a host of other

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24 Object-oriented ontology (OOO) rejects anthropocentrism and puts things, rather than humans, at the centre of existence.
concepts” (14). Secondly, it is deemed the standard for normality. If something is unnatural, it is deviant. Finally, it is a word that “encapsulates a potentially infinite series of disparate fantasy objects” (14). It is the final meaning that Morton examines in depth.

In order to see nature for the complex all-inclusive structure that it is, we must challenge the “deluded ideas” around it (20). Morton argues that “ideology resides in the attitude” we have towards nature and that by “dissolving the object, we render the ideological inoperative” (20). Dismantling the ideological notions around nature, such as it being something wild and pristine, does not necessarily mean negating nature entirely, but heralds a new relationship founded on ecological principles. *Ecology without Nature* begins with a detailed examination of how “art represents the environment” (21). Morton calls the nature-writing genre, ecomimesis. He states that this genre wants to “break out of the normative aesthetic frame, go beyond art” (31). Writers, like Thoreau and Leopold, are seeking to connect totally with nature and immerse themselves in the natural world. For Morton, “ecomimesis is a pressure point, crystallizing a vast and complex ideological network of beliefs, practices, and processes in and around the idea of the natural world” (33). Morton calls ecomimesis an “authenticating device” and he argues that it is too focused on the attempt to capture an authentic, real, experience of nature (33). He writes that Thoreau’s *The Maine Woods*, for example, “does not even try to tell us something, but appears merely to be a journal, something artless that falls out of normal conventions of literary narrative” (70). The problem with ecomimesis is that it “works very hard at immersing the subject in the object,

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25 Morton supports this point by saying nature is a “transcendental term in a material mask” that “stands at the end of a potentially infinite series of other terms that collapse into it” (14). He lists “fish, grass, mountain air, chimpanzee, love, soda water, freedom of choice, heterosexuality, free markets” as examples of terms that collapse into nature (14).

26 Oona Frawley puts Synge’s ethnographic account of Aran in this milieu saying “the narrative procedure of *The Aran Islands* bears resemblance to Thoreau’s compression of material into ‘one year’ of time at Walden, and also to Picturesque and Romantic travelogues, which frequently privilege ‘timelessness’ over historicism” (*Irish* 86).
only to sit back and contemplate its handiwork” (135). This type of writing falls into the trap of separating the author from the natural world at the point where he or she is trying to connect with it. Instead of ecocritics either reinforcing or critiquing ecomimesis, Morton posits a “new way of doing ecological criticism” which is dark ecology.

Morton argues that we must challenge and deconstruct the idea of nature. He proposes “ecocritique” as a “critical and self-critical” mode of analysis which is “similar to queer theory” (13). Ecocritique works by examining how “nature is set up as a transcendental, unified, independent category” (13). This type of criticism forms part of Morton’s method for thinking ecologically and the overall aim is to “strengthen environmentalism” (24). To avoid the “dense meaninglessness of nature writing” we must recreate an ecological aesthetic or dark ecology (24). Embracing materialism is central to dark ecology, as Morton says, “living beings exchange substances with their environment(s)” (150). The argument in materialist theoretical texts, such as *Ecology without Nature* and *Material Ecocriticism*, is that the human and nonhuman are intertwined and inseparable. In the *Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Environment* (2014), Timothy Clark states that these new materialist theories reflect the human condition of living in the Anthropocene:

What emerges is a sense of the plurality, multiple agency and unpredictability, and compromised condition of the natural world. New terms emerge from the nature/culture that we inhabit, or are, such as Morton’s “the mesh” or Stacy Alaimo’s “transcorporeality”. These express the fact of an incalculable connection between bodies, human and nonhuman, across and within the biosphere (food, water, nutrients but also toxins and viruses), with a sense of both holism and, increasingly, entrapment. (80-1)

Morton’s dark ecology is part of materialist discourse that is emerging in ecocriticism. Theorists such as Iovino, Oppermann, Morton, and Bennett are part of a drive to read narratives as material and I intend that my own research will be a further addition to that enterprise.

Alaimo argues that the human body is irrevocably embedded in the environment. She builds on the work of the physicist Karan Barad whose concept of intra-action denotes matter as agential and decentres the human subject. Barad describes intra-action as “the mutual constitution of entangled agencies” (Meeting 33; emphasis in original). Alaimo argues that, through understanding and accepting the body as matter (and embedded in its environment), we can begin to understand, and appreciate fully, issues of environmental justice. Alaimo explores the “interconnections, interchanges, and transits between human bodies and nonhuman natures” (2). As the human is inseparable from its environment (an idea I apply to the plays in this dissertation), she makes the point that “thinking across bodies may catalyze the recognition that the environment, which is too often imagined as inert…is, in fact, a world of fleshy beings with their own needs, claims, and actions” (2). Seeing the human and its environment as a free flowing “constitution of entangled agencies”, as Barad describes it, allows us to see the human body as operating within rather than outside the landscape (33).

According to Alaimo, the concept of trans-corporeality gives us back the nature that we have lost through transcendental philosophy. She states that “as various toxins take up residence within the body, the supposedly inert ‘background’ of place becomes the active substance of self” (102). This research builds on the premise that toxic discourse has resulted in body and environment becoming indistinguishable and therefore inseparable. Landscape can no longer be framed. Understanding the self as embedded in nature has to be a key trope, not just of contemporary environmentalism, but, also, of twenty-

27 Although matter is agential it is important to note that Barad sees matter as merging and dissolving organically rather than through causality. She states in an interview with Adam Kleinman that the “usual notion of interaction assumes that there are individual independently existing entities or agents that preexist their acting upon one another. By contrast, the notion of ‘intra-action’ queers the familiar sense of causality (where one or more casual agents precede and produce an effect), and more generally unsettles the metaphysics of individualism” (77).
first-century aesthetics, as Alaimo says, “the material self cannot be
disentangled from networks that are simultaneously economic, political,
cultural, scientific, and substantial” (MCS 20). Trans-corporeality allows us to
be part of a network in which human and nonhuman materials are
interchangeable but also emphasizes a duty of care when living in a porous
environment. This duty of care is reflected in the term “worlding” which, Barad
says, is “about responsibility and accountability for the lively relationalities of
becoming of which we are a part” (Meeting 392-3). For Alaimo, responsibility
begins with recognizing the concerns evident in the material memoirs she uses
in Bodily Matters. She states that material memoirs “inspire a trans-corporeal,
posthuman environmentalism that builds connections rather than boundaries
and that undertakes ethical actions from within global systems, interchanges,
and flows” (111). Alaimo has an ethical understanding of the implications of
toxicity in her readings of material memoirs. As she points out in the beginning
of Bodily Matters, “trans indicates movement across different sites, trans-
corporeality…opens up a mobile space that acknowledges the often
unpredictable and unwanted actions of human bodies, nonhuman creatures,
ecological systems, chemical agents, and other actors” (2). Trans-corporeality
underlines the movement between material entities. As I will show in my
reading of All That Fall, the representation of this transfer of matter, and its
ethical implications, is as important as the texts and performances themselves.

Heise’s Sense of Place and Sense of Planet (2008) also examines the
ethical implications of environmental discourse. Her concept of eco-
cosmopolitanism or “environmental world citizenship” advances a more global
outlook (10). She argues that globalization is “gradually replacing earlier key
concepts in theories of the contemporary such as ‘postmodernism’ and
‘postcolonialism’” (4). Sense of Place and Sense of Planet is divided into two
parts; the first is the imagining of the planet on a global scale, the second is an

28 Rosi Braidotti also argues for this duty of care and that what is needed in the future is “a
regrounding of the subject in a materially embedded sense of responsibility and ethical
accountability for the environment she or he inhabits” (Transpositions 137).
expansion of that planet at risk. Heise takes the concept of eco-cosmopolitanism (which she sees as the connections between local environmental issues and globalization) and uses this as a tool to explore how ecocriticism can think globally. She calls for an “eco-cosmopolitan environmentalism” to engage with “steadily increasing patterns of global connectivity, including those generated by broadening risk scenarios” (210).

Like Alaimo’s acknowledgement of the impact of Ulrich Beck’s risk society, Heise’s chapter, “Narrative in the World Risk Society”, gives an overview of risk theory and introduces the idea that the emerging world risk society has become crucial to imagining “global connectedness” (11). Heise, distinguishes between two different types of risk, systemic risks which are global in scale (such as climate change), and culminate risks which are local changes that build up to effect the plant (such as habitat change). She sees these types of risk scenarios as emerging from global connectedness and changing the way we think, the way we process and the way we create narratives: how we write, paint, represent our world.

Heise argues that apocalyptic narratives are a particular form of imagining the global. These narratives of risk have a certain framework – that of the peaceful natural countryside being corrupted by the dangers of urbanism and modernity. Apocalyptic narratives are part of a human response to risk and the main difference between that and general risk narratives is that within the apocalyptic narrative there remains the ideal of self-generating eco-systems and holistic communities. Risk analysis outlines desirable outcomes or consequences of actions for networks of modernity but no system is completely

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29 Alaimo’s notion of trans-corporeality builds on Beck’s risk society, as she writes, “Trans-corporeality emerges from the sort of risk society…in which the contemporary landscape of potential, or virtual, harms requires that ordinary citizens have access to scientific information” (Oceanic 193).

30 She analyses two books, Don DeLillo’s White Noise (1985) and Richard Power’s Gain (1998) which explore chemical contamination and how these risk scenarios form part of the narrative of contemporary societies.
exempt from risk. Building on Beck’s concept of a world-risk society, Heise highlights “reterritorialization” where cultural practices become detached from place (50). This can result in alienation, cultural unease, social uprooting and economic displacement but there are also positive results in new forms of connectivity and choice (to travel for example). Heise envisions new global communities emerging from these changes and a new cultural solidarity founded on sharing the burden of living in a world risk society. This is her vision for eco-cosmopolitanism which she sees as linking “experiences of local endangerment to a sense of planet that encompasses both human and nonhuman world” (159). These new communities are centred on experiences of global contamination and how it impacts the porous body. Emphasizing the interaction between the human and nonhuman, Heise’s work is a commentary on how various communities are impacted, not just by the benefits of increased connectedness, but also by environmental inequality as played out in the Global South.

Jane Bennett’s *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010) challenges “the idea of matter as passive stuff, as raw, brute, or inert” (vii). She examines the implications of giving a voice to the nonhuman aspects of society and argues for a “vital materiality” (vii). She wants to highlight the “material agency or effectivity of nonhuman or not-quite-human things” in order to better...
understand the things that anthropocentric discourse has discarded (ix). She uses Bruno Latour’s term, actant, which attributes agency across the human and nonhuman material spectrum. She identifies a “foe in mechanistic or deterministic materialism” and wants to attribute agency to matter (63). The reason is because, she argues, it is the othering of the nonhuman world that has led to “our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption” (ix). She begins her argument for the active agency of things by acknowledging the power that cultural practices have on nature. Rather than maintaining that there are strict binaries between nature and culture, we must recognize the interplay between the two. She builds on work such as Foucault’s concept of biopower and the impact of cultural and social norms on the body. The acknowledgement of the cultural domination of the material body leads to a realization that “cultural forms are themselves powerful, material assemblages with resistant force” (1; emphasis in original). Bennett examines the agency of matter itself or, as she describes it, “thing-power” (2).

Bennett uses another term, assemblage, to describe how this material coagulates. These assemblages, or arrangements of matter, pulsate and Bennett uses the Chinese idea of shi to describe this vibration: “shi names the dynamic force emanating from a spatio-temporal configuration rather than any particular element within it” (35). The reasonability of the human living within this multitude of assemblages is to respond in an ethical fashion to harmful effects that might form and damage these arrangements. Arguing for a new materialist environmental discourse (rather than one shaped by eco-heteronormativity, for example), Bennett’s theory is inclusive of all actants. She illustrates this

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33 Latour defines actant as “a term from semiotics covering both humans and nonhumans” (Politics 237).
34 An example of this is gender, which Bennett describes as, “a congealed bodily effect of historical norms and repetitions” (1).
35 Bennett defines assemblages, (a term she takes from Deleuze and Guattari) as “living, throbbing confederations that are able to function despite the persistent presence of energies that confound them from within” (24). She gives an electrical power grid as an example.
inclusivity by examining how the sentences she is writing have developed:

From the confederate agency of many striving macro- and microactants: from “my” memories, intentions, contentions, intestinal bacteria, eyeglasses, and blood sugar, as well as the computer keyboard, the bird song from the open window, or the air or particulates in the room, to name only a few participants. (23)

This call for inclusivity means that nonhuman actants must be given a means of narration. In her first in-depth examination of vibrating matter, she argues that food should be seen as an “actant inside and alongside intention-forming, morality-(dis)obeying, language-using, reflexivity-wielding, and culture-making human beings, and as an inducer-producer of salient, public effects” (39). The “activity of metabolization, whereby the outside and inside mingle and recombine, renders more plausible the idea of a vital materiality” (50). Food becomes an active agent in the dynamic processes between the body and its environment. Although the intentions of the owner of a body are crucial, there is a need to acknowledge the other players in the act of ingestion.

The second material Bennett examines is metal, one of the more difficult materials to imagine as an actant. Here, Bennett attempts to push the boundaries of “the figure of life” to see “how far it can be pulled away from its mooring in the physiological and organic” (53). She chooses metal because it follows Deleuze and Guattari’s naming of metal as the exemplar of “vital materiality; it is metal that best reveals quivering effervescence; it is metal, bursting with a life, that gives rise to ‘the prodigious idea of Nonorganic life’” (55). Humans find it difficult to assign agency to metal because it goes against our “need to interpret the world reductively” (58). Bennett wants to envision a world of vibrant matter because it adds depth to the drive to “avoid anthropocentrism and biocentrism” (61). If agency can be attributed to a nonorganic material such as metal, there unfolds, in Bennett’s mind, “an interstitial field of non-personal, ahuman forces, flows, tendencies, and trajectories” (61).

Bennett then moves from examining matter as agential to looking at the impact of this type of thinking on cultural and natural spaces:
If human culture is inextricably enmeshed with vibrant, nonhuman agencies, and if human intentionality can be agentic only if accompanied by a vast entourage of nonhumans, then it seems that the appropriate unit of analysis for democratic theory is neither the individual human nor an exclusively human collective but the (ontologically heterogeneous) “public” coalescing around a problem.

The inclusivity of all matter in this new vital materialist framework will offer, according to Bennett, three advantages. The first is the use of the term, materialism, which offers a more egalitarian view of the human and the nonhuman. Secondly, vital materialism complicates simplistic notions of a harmonious nature or nature as a “blind mechanism” (112). Finally, vital materialism reminds humans of the “radical character of the (fractious) kinship between the human and the nonhuman” (112; emphasis in original). These changes impact on our Othering of nature as pristine and unpolluted. In my own research in theatre and literature, aestheticized depictions of the natural world need to reflect this vital materiality. As entities that are indivisible from our surrounding environment, we must challenge the traditional boundaries between nature and culture. Bennett argues that “an affective, speaking human body is not radically different from the affective, signaling nonhumans with which it coexists, hosts, enjoys, serves, consumes, produces, and competes” (117; emphasis in original). Bennett finishes by stating that a “careful course of anthropomorphization can help reveal that vitality, even though it resists full translation” (122). Vital materiality is a project that redistributes agency in radical new ways and, as such, has an impact on the way all nonhuman matter is narrated.

Bennett’s use of the Latour’s term actant illustrates the importance of Latour’s work in the environmental humanities.36 His book, Politics of Nature:

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36 Lawrence Buell has pointed out that “several second-wave ecocritics have commended Latour as a wholesome antidote to simplistic endorsement either of science’s authority over against the claims and frames of literary and cultural theory or of “theory’s” purported demolition of science as nothing more than discursive or cultural construction” (Future 21).
How to bring the Sciences into Democracy (2004), is part of his broader thinking which (through the Actor-network theory) seeks to collapse the human nonhuman binary by including the nonhuman in societal systems such as politics. Latour argues that scientists have become the spokespeople for nature and fulfil the role that politicians do for humans. We need to deconstruct traditional narratives of nature in order to understand and embrace a political ecology. He sets out a hypothesis that political ecology “has nothing at all to do with ‘nature’ – that blend of Greek politics, French Cartesianism and American parks” (5). His definition of political ecology is indistinguishable from scientific ecology and “serves as an umbrella term to designate what succeeds modernism according to the alternative ‘modernize or ecologize’” (146-7). Latour aims to revise traditional notions of “nature, politics, and science” through the creation of a new inclusive constitution (7).

Latour then outlines why and how to let go of our traditional understanding of nature. To begin a more authentic and all-inclusive political ecology, we must first leave the cave. Latour uses Plato’s cave to distinguish between the social world and the world of truth. The scientists (who are speaking for nonhuman matter) needs to free themselves from the chains in the world of shadows to learn the truth about the “world of external realities” (12). Latour uses this allegory to differentiate between the “Old Regime”, that separated human and nonhuman, and the “new constitution” built on political ecology (239). Scientists can move between the social world and the world of external reality because, “[t]hey can make the mute world speak” (14). Latour also distinguishes between two types of ecology practiced by the Green movement: militant ecology and the philosophy of ecology or Naturpolitik.

Ecology movements, he argues, make the mistake of having “retained the conception of nature that makes their political struggle hopeless” (19; emphasis in original). Political ecology has nothing to do with the nature that militant

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37 Latour’s term (modelled on Realpolitik) to describe a model of ecology that “claims…to be renewing public life, even while keeping intact the idea of nature invented to poison it” (245).
ecology clings to. He argues that nature “is not in question in ecology: on the contrary, ecology dissolves nature’s contours and redistributed its agents” (21). So now the “great Pan” that is nature is dead, there is an opportunity to move towards a more inclusive world (25). This new “pluriverse” moves from traditional distinctions between human and nonhuman to a “multiplicity of nature” (40). It challenges and complicates preordained notions around nature and culture. Political ecology will, like feminist discourse, challenge absolutes:

For the moment, “nature” still has a resonance that “man” had twenty or forty years ago, as the unchallengeable, blinding, universal category against the background of which “culture” stands out clearly and distinctly, eternally particular. (49)

Having done away with the old constitution, Latour continues his argument by discussing how we create a new “collective” which he defines as a “procedure for collecting associations of humans and nonhumans” (238; emphasis in original). He makes the point that we cannot just add nature and society together: “the boa constrictor of politics cannot swallow the elephant of nature” (58).

So how, according to Latour, can nature and culture be merged? We need to be skeptical of scientists’ ability, although they are the spokespeople for the natural world, to represent the nonhuman effectively. The knowledge disseminated by scientists is not value-neutral. To begin with, we need to accept that “speech is no longer a specific human property” and that nature is not mute (65). We can include the voice of the nonhuman, even though they do not speak through “indisputable speech” (68). This new inclusivity will make limiting societal discourse to humans “as strange a few years ago from now as having denied the right to vote of slaves, poor people, or women” (69). This new civilization will not only give the nonhuman their own voice (through speech

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38 Indisputable speech is, according to Latour, “a previously invisible form of political and scientific life that made it possible sometimes to transform mute things into ‘speaking facts’, and sometimes to make speaking subjects mute by requiring them to bow down before nondiscussable matters of fact” (68).
impedimenta\(^\text{39}\) but see the nonhuman actively grouping themselves. As uncommunicativeness in the nonhuman is seen as a difficulty rather than an insurmountable obstacle, nonhumans are not deemed inferior by reason of muteness. What becomes crucial is the difficulty in defining the role of the social actant. Latour seeks to redefine the actant as a member that modifies other members “through a series of trials that can be listed thanks to some experimental protocol” overcoming issues of species hierarchy (75; emphasis in original).

This new collective is remarkable in that it puts nonhuman actants in the same social arena as humans. Building on the origins of the term ecology, oikos which means house, this is a cooperative for all matter, as Latour calls it, a “conceptual Noah’s ark” (131). This Noah’s ark houses various trades that can contribute to the running of the collective.\(^\text{40}\) The final chapter in Political Ecology attempts to find common worlds that are inclusive of all actants. Latour seeks to establish a more complex collective which “no longer finds itself facing the alternative between a single nature and multiple cultures” (234-5; emphasis in original). The collective must be sensitive to all of nature because “the outside is no longer either strong enough to reduce the social world to silence or weak enough to let itself be reduced to insignificance” (212). This ambitious new society will have lost nature in the traditional sense and “the fragmented, dispersed, irremediable form that it gave” (220). Latour argues that by “losing nature, public life also loses the principal cause of its paralysis” (224). His new reading of political ecology seeks to overcome the isolation of nature and the polarization of both nature and culture. It attempts to reconfigure the social world to include the nonhuman.

So (for the purposes of this thesis), how can the arts and the narratives it

\(^{39}\) Latour defines speech impedimenta as “the difficulties one has in speaking and the devices one needs for the articulation of the common world” (249-50).

\(^{40}\) These are the politicians, economists, scientists, and moralists. These groups or “fairies” emerge from their disciplines and “contribute to developing the same job with different skills” (137).
generates contribute to this new vision of society? Before answering that question, I would like to look at Theodore Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory* (1970). The main focus of *Aesthetic Theory* is on the relationship between art and society. Adorno’s approach to the aesthetic experience is relevant because he likens the beauty of nature with art; he argues that there is no difference between the two. In his chapter, “Natural Beauty”, he begins by pointing out that, at first, art and nature seem totally different given that art is “wholly artificial” whereas nature consists of “what is not made” (81). But Adorno argues that, because they are opposite, they refer to one another, “nature to the experience of a mediated and objectified world, the artwork to nature as the mediated plenipotentiary of immediacy” (81). Both can illustrate the characteristics of the other: art can highlight the immediacy of nature and nature can highlight the artificiality of the arts.

Adorno’s argument is that the art object has a truth-content that rests outside of the subjectivity of the viewer. He challenges subjective relativism and focuses on the primacy of experience. He discusses the cultural aspect of the aesthetics of nature in art and introduces the term “cultural landscape” to mean “natural beauty imbued with cultural history” (84). This is where nature and natural beauty separate. Cultural landscapes, which Adorno states, “dates back to romanticism, probably initially to the cult of the ruin” are an expression of history (84). Natural beauty cannot be nature because it is a mediated social practice, as Adorno writes, “like the experience of art, the aesthetic experience of nature is that of images” (86). Natural beauty is a cultural product, “a myth transposed into the imagination” (87). According to Adorno, the beauty of art sacrifices nature by commodifying it: “all naturalistic art is only deceptively close to nature because, analogous to industry, it regulates nature to raw material” (86). To overcome this regulation of nature to raw material, art producers must understand that nature “cannot be copied” (87). Adorno argues that this is an insight that is evident in the producers of modern art and achieved in their creative output.

Adorno sees Samuel Beckett’s work as evidence of modern art’s ability
to transcend imitation. Adorno argues that (now that natural beauty has been “transformed into a caricature of itself”) Beckett’s success lies in his refutation of mimesis (88). The environments that Beckett’s plays conjure up illustrate man’s inability to represent nature truthfully. Art emerges from society and, as such, has meaning (no matter how absurd) that can always be deciphered by humans. Adorno points out that “Beckett’s plays are absurd not because of the absence of any meaning, for then they would be simply irrelevant, but because they put meaning on trial; they unfold its history” (201). Art unravels historical narratives of meaning, as Adorno says, “art is not the imitation of nature but the imitation of natural beauty” (92).

To return to my earlier question of how narratives generated by the arts can contribute to this new vision of society. They are a crucial part of a new human/nonhuman collective, as envisaged by the theorists in this section, because they are not reflective of nature but, as Adorno argues, natural beauty. It is the aesthetics of nature that is central to this dissertation. This, I argue, is how the arts and the narratives it generates contribute to a more ecologically-sound cultural space. This thesis explores conceptual ecological environments through the aesthetic experience of theatrical narratives.

**Ecocriticism and Space and Place in Irish Studies**

A focus on place as a means of establishing identity, particularly within the context of colonial and imperialist narratives, led to a dynamic discourse on literary representations of the landscape in Irish studies. Colonial violence is essentially geographical and its legacy forms a large part of Irish Studies scholarship. Postcolonial discourse has had an influence on Irish ecocriticism as Eóin Flannery notes, postcolonialism has always been “attuned to the politics of space and place and to the ecological traumas of exploitation” (4).

41 Postcolonial discourse has had an influence on Irish ecocriticism as Eóin Flannery notes, postcolonialism has always been “attuned to the politics of space and place and to the ecological traumas of exploitation” (4).
place in order to facilitate a discussion of materiality and nature in an Irish context. A discussion of place (such as the one found here) will be in the service of environmental rather than cultural concerns.

Gerry Smyth was the first scholar to bring the term “ecocriticism” into an Irish critical context in his article published in *Irish University Review*, “Shite and Sheep: An Ecocritical Perspective on two recent Irish novels” (2000). The article was followed a year later by his book *Space and the Irish Cultural Imagination*. Smyth builds on the perception that Ireland and the Irish have a natural affinity to the landscape writing that “[g]eographical peculiarity and historical discontinuity have produced a situation in Ireland in which questions concerning space, landscape, locality, gender, urban and rural experience and nature have become central to both the cultural and the critical imagination” (*Shite* 164). Smyth reiterates a common trope in Irish studies, that the experience of place is central to the Irish imagination. However, in the same way that nature aesthetics have been challenged in second-wave ecocritical discourse, representations of Irish attachment to the land need to be reassessed. Ecofeminist discourse has argued that under the surface of the pristine wilderness of the western United States lies traditional, white, western privilege. The reassessment of landscape, emphasizing the ethical dimension of neo-colonial domination of the environment, is something that is central to postcolonial Irish studies. The impact of postcolonial ecocriticism on Irish literature highlights the inequalities embedded in the idea of an Irish attachment to landscape.

Although there have been many books examining the role of the

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42 Ecofeminist discourse, for example, has challenged the traditional dominative rhetoric of man versus nature. Val Plumwood is the most prominent of these critics arguing that the “category of nature is a field of multiple exclusion and control, not only of non-humans, but of various groups of humans and aspects of human life which are cast as nature” (4).

43 Rosi Braidotti has pointed out that “Ecofeminism raises the issue of the structural interconnection between the domination of women, natives and the domination of nature” (*Transpositions* 112).
landscape in Irish literature and on the Irish psyche (most importantly Tim Robinson’s work) the books that deal with ecocriticism explicitly are Tim Wenzell’s *Emerald Green: An Ecocritical Study of Irish Literature* (2009), Christine Cusick’s edited collection, *Out of the Earth: Ecocritical Readings of Irish Texts* (2010), Eamonn Wall’s *Writing the Irish West: Ecologies and Traditions* (2011), and Eóin Flannery’s *Ireland and Ecocriticism: Literature, History, and Environmental Justice* (2016). Wenzell’s study is expansive, beginning with the hermit monks of ancient Ireland and finishing with the poets Patrick Kavanagh, Louis MacNeice, Seamus Heaney, and Michael Longley. There is a valid concern about the impact of the urban sprawl on the Irish landscape. Christine Cusick’s edited collection, *Out of the Earth: Ecocritical Readings of Irish Texts* (2010) is a mix of first-wave ecocritical analyses of text and postcolonial discourse of space and place in Irish studies. What is evident in the collection is the exploration of landscape as a tool of colonial enterprise. An article, “‘Sympathy between man and nature’: Landscape and Loss in Synge’s *Riders to the Sea*”, written by Joy Kennedy O’Neill, examines *Riders to the Sea* and its use of the landscape as a symbol in this postcolonial discourse. She writes that the Irish relationship with place is an ambiguous one, arguing that *Riders to the Sea* “is not pastoral, romantic, or sublime but is, rather, a blend of uniquely Irish ambiguities towards place” and that “[f]amines, forced removes, and struggles against the rocky turf for farming have created, historically, an often uneasy sense of place for Irish writers” (15).

The collection finishes with an interview between Cusick and the geographer and cartographer Tim Robinson, in which the latter explains his term, the echosphere. This is a concept where the history and memory of a

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45 Wenzell has a negative view of the rise in urbanism and the eradication of rural landscapes in Ireland. He writes in his introduction, for example, about “a new menace…rising across the Irish landscape in the form of urban sprawl” (1).
Robinson argues that literary prose rather than geographical cartography can capture a deep reading of landscape. He broadens cartographic reading of place to include prose, saying that “Cartography of particular places can imply something on that general theme, but ultimately only prose, and prose at length, recursive and excursive, can begin to map it and act out the building-up of the overarching, underpinning, encircling, realities of sky, land and sea out of uncountable glints of detail” (209). The collection follows a line of development between postcolonial studies and complicating romanticized landscapes in the Irish aesthetic.

In the preface to Writing the Irish West: Ecologies and Traditions (2011), Wall claims that “ecocriticism is at the heart of this study because ecological visions are at the heart of Western writing, both in the United States and Ireland” (xiv). His first chapter acknowledges the debt ecocritical thinking has towards geography, including an essay on Tim Robinson that examines Stones of Aran: Pilgrimage and Stones of Aran: Labyrinth. The work of cultural geographers such as Tim Robinson has had a huge impact on the spatial turn in Irish Studies. Tim Robinson explores the physicality of place through an experiential lens. He is using the process of deep-mapping to gain an understanding of the landscape of the Aran Islands. Robinson layers the ideological and symbolic value of the islands with a deeper cartographic charting of the area:

For over a hundred years Rousseauistic nostalgia and the complexes of nationalist emotions were wonder-working ingredients in the Aran spell, interacting strangely with academic objectivity and personal vision. Celticists of every specialism made the pilgrimage to Aran. (Pilgrimage 8)

Robinson does acknowledge that he is part of trend of visitors drawn to the island as a pilgrimage. When mapping Inis Meáin (which he describes in Stones on Aran: Labyrinth), he visited the site, Cathaoir Synge or Synge’s Seat. He

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46 Robinson defines the concept in detail in his article, “The Irish Echosphere”. He writes that in “the West of Ireland…nature has room for its ways and so does humanity” (11).
sees his work in direct conversation with Synge. At the site of Cathaoir Synge, Robinson tries to channel his predecessor but fails: “I would like to use Synge’s vision of it to situate myself on that black edge, the beginning of my work, but at this crucial moment he is alienated from me” (Labyrinth 9). Robinson goes on to describe how he had previously accused Synge of being mistaken over the root of the Irish word for the maidenhair fern, dúchosach (black-footed). In fact, it was Robinson who was mistaken and is “caught out in a petty rivalrousness” (Labyrinth 9). The incident shows that Robinson’s work is not mapping in a traditional sense (as in the mapping as measurement that I discuss in relation to Translations), but a profound engagement with the landscape.

Robinson’s time on the Aran Islands led him to develop, in Eamonn Wall’s words, “a deeper understanding of the complexity of the landscape of the island, and the ways it had been layered by the passing of time. These contacts drew him deeper into the dimseachas, or lore of place” (2). Robinson’s work in creating deep-maps (and his subsequent walking through the landscape in order to understand fully the typography) reflects the cultural practices of the Islanders themselves. Wall describes this walking as a spiritual act linking people to place and that for, the Aran Islanders, “the circular motion of the walk around the island is a living link to their ancient past, where the circular was a privileged pattern” (13). This notion of the sacredness imbued in a particular place (which is then performed through ritualistic rites) is inherent in cultural heritage. This performance of place is found in the West of Ireland and, in particular, the coastal islands. For Luke Gibbons, “Ireland and the United States would seem to be the outstanding examples of countries in which the myth of the west has been elevated to the level of national ideal” (23-4). This

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47 He quotes from Synge’s The Aran Islands: “I seem to enter into the wild pastimes of the cliff, and to become a companion of the cormorants and crows” in his own text (8-9). This is an interesting quotation as Synge himself has described the Aran Island women as “tropical sea-birds”, indicating an ethnographic tendency to categorise the natural world (CW II 76).

48 It appears that this type of rural landscape operates in much the same way as the rural landscape was represented in American literature as studied in first-wave ecocriticism. Aldo
connection to the rural west as a national ideal led to a rejection of the modernizing impact of industrial progress and urban growth. Dominating the mind-set of an emigrant culture (as illustrated in books such as Frawley’s *Memory Ireland*), this national ideal moved across the global world. The imagined place of the west ignores progress and cultivates an image of the rural that still persists even with the rise of urbanification. This research will bridge the gap between traditional perspectives on nature, which frames the natural landscape, and current new materialist ecocritical work that problematizes the binary of nature and culture.

The Western seaboard has traditionally held sway in the Irish cultural imagination and its hold extends over its environmental discourse. Eóin Flannery’s *Ireland and Ecocriticism: Literature, History, and Environmental Justice* (2016) broadens this traditional perspective by bringing key ecocritical debates to bear on a cultural canon immersed in postcolonial language. He explores how the key subjects in ecocritical discourse (such as ecofeminist and new materialist critiques) will widen the established postcolonial framework of Irish studies. Flannery notes in the introduction that “postcolonial studies has always been attuned to the politics of space and place and to the ecological traumas of exploitation” (4). Postcolonial ecocriticism with an emphasis on materiality allows us to merge two strands of Irish discourse: cultural literary history and an ambiguous relationship with the landscape. Examining a wide range of poets, travel writers and historical figures and combining environmentally minded philosophical and scientific tools such as deep-time perception, the Gaia complex, and the Anthropocene with ecocritical frameworks, *Ireland and Ecocriticism* brings an interdisciplinary praxis to Irish studies.

Leopold’s *A Sand County Almanac*, for example, illustrates what Greg Garrard terms a “place-based ecocritical pedagogy” which formed part of an evolving ecological consciousness that established deep ties to the landscape (*Ecocritical* 235). Garrard writes that *A Sand County Almanac* “is an extraordinary testament to the interanimation of a scientifically informed narrating consciousness and a deeply known place” (235).
Throughout his analysis, Flannery points to a tendency (in truly environmental literature) to create works that pulls away from the individualistic and towards a global mode of dwelling in the world. Belfast-born poet, Derek Mahon’s “New York Time”, for example, is entrenched in the material with “garbage trucks” and “refuge barges” symptomatic of to a preoccupation with waste. There is a focus on the material, both manmade and animal, not as by-products, but as the fundamental matter of our existence. In “Beached Whale”, Mahon highlights the enormity of what is left behind: “entrails strewn on the mud, the stomach/stripped and the organs – heart, liver” (*Autumn* 30-31). These details are offered not to belittle the animal’s worth but to memorialize its existence, a means, as Flannery states, to offer “ecological enchantment” (44). These are explorations of scale touching on the impact of human modernization through the merging of human and non-human detritus. But there is also the cultural context in which a poet writes about the rural west of Ireland and seeing the “moral struggle” in what is “an ethically ambiguous enterprise” (46).

In writing about the West of Ireland, Flannery also examines Mahon’s sensitivity toward the culturally significant part the West plays in Irish literature. Poems such as “Synge Dying” are where Mahon amalgamates the modern with the folk traditions as Flannery notes: “Aran is a hoard of things past, it is stadially anterior to the historical narrative of urban modernity” (46). Mahon’s nod to Synge highlights the anxiety that contemporary Irish poets face in aestheticizing rural landscape. The appropriation of a rural way of life for political and cultural ends has been, perhaps, a well-trodden road in the Irish literary enterprise and the concern is to avoid the romantic implications of that aesthetic.

Flannery’s analysis of the environmental issues in the work of Paula Meehan and Moya Cannon illustrates how apposite ecofeminist discourse is in Irish ecopoetics. Flannery notes that there is a “broad consensus that the oppression of women is inseparable from the on-going degradation of the non-human environment” (59). Advocates of a posthumanist discourse, such as Rosi
Braidotti, Serpil Oppermann and Stacy Alaimo, have according to Flannery, adopted a “materially embodied openness to non-human nature” (61). This material turn subverts the anthropocentric foundations of the Western patriarchal system arguing that our bodies are connected to the social realm through agential materiality. Meehan, for example, demonstrates a “resistant ethic of embodiment” and an attempt to move beyond – while acknowledging the limits – of the traditional rhetoric and language of human representation (67). Meehan sees herself as “the professional memory of the tribe” and there is clearly, a deep relationship to landscape and a sense of its disappearance in her work (65).

That attempt at remembrance through landscape is what connects Meehan’s work to that of Tim Robinson, who Flannery tackles in the third chapter. As evident in the other publications in this literature review, Robinson has become renowned for illuminating the depth of place in the West of Ireland, particularly the Aran Islands, through his mapping, walking and documentation. For Flannery, Robinson “exemplifies, the mutually sustaining bonds between the materialities of place and representations of such locations” and that this shows Robinson’s work to be “ecocritical avant la lettre in an Irish context” (91). While bemoaning the intrusion of various tools of modernity on the Irish landscape (and he is clearly invested in the oral traditions of the Western seaboard), Robinson responds, not by romanticizing in ways that the Literary Revivalists have, but by meaningfully mapping a vanishing landscape. In doing so, he captures and comments on a narrative of landscape that sometimes falls foul of fervent rhetoric. Flannery notes that Robinson “does not subscribe to a version of non-human nature as wildly pristine and independent of human

49 In *Irish Pastoral*, Frawley talks about how the “Aran Islands had come to be seen by Revivalists as an outpost of ‘pure’ Irish culture” (82). Because it retained the Irish language as the primary means for communication, Frawley argues that “the islands rooted off of Ireland’s western coast consequently became the site where the past might be visited, a geographical space of cultural memories: the Aran Islands were, in effect, deemed a museum” (82).
influence” (98). Robinson’s use of walking as a process of knowing, his sensitive analysis of the motivations behind the local naming of place, and his attempts to recover knowledge of the locality, all serve to universalize his work. Flannery argues (through Michael Cronin) that as an example of the “dynamic relations...between local ecologies and global ecologies”, Robinson’s work is truly global (95). But even if Robinson is eco-cosmopolitan (as Heise outlines), his work is not “a license to revert to an undiluted myth of origin” but a way “through an informed engagement with and attachment to one local place, we can become more attuned to, and empathic with, the idea of ‘locality’ on a global scale” (107).

Walking as a process of knowing is also evident in John McGahern’s *Memoir*. Flannery sees McGahern’s slowness as a “resistant agent against the erotics of speed” (132). The idea of speed linking to modernity while slowness and cyclicality illustrates rootedness in the rural is where, Flannery argues, McGahern’s landscape lies. Indeed, walking as a way of knowing is evident in many of Flannery’s examples and the work of Rebecca Solnit, in particular *A Book of Migrations* (discussed in the fourth chapter) point to an external physicality and dependence on the landscape for creative sustenance. The book finishes with an examination of Roger Casement’s *Congo Report*, which outlines the appalling abuse of colonial Congo by the then Belgian sovereign, Leopold II. The Report (along with Casement’s later *Amazon Jungle*) details the collapse of both the social and natural world in these regions and documents their exploitation in the pursuit of wild rubber. The examination of an historical figure such as Casement serves, according to Flannery, to situate colonial repression within a broader systematic violence perpetuated on the Global South. The current environmental crises emerge from a system of abuse where “nature is evacuated of agency” (222). This system of exploitation and othering results in “the non-human environment” being “destroyed” and with it “the cultural and social ecosystems of its human inhabitants dissipate at the same time” (246). Casement’s work, Flannery writes, “cannot but be read in postcolonial and ecocritical terms” (254). Flannery begins *Ireland and*
Ecocriticism seeking to “provide a critical space to exhibit the ways in which Irish Studies…partakes of the political and philosophical energies of ecocriticism in the broadest sense” (19). What transpires is how crucial this field of study is for shedding light on how ecological debates can enrich our understanding of Irish cultural history and literature.

The interaction between Irish identity and cultural memory of place has largely emerged from academic interest in Irish studies as part of a global postcolonial network. Before examining texts’ relation to the global Irish diaspora, I want to look at Emilie Pine’s *The Politics of Irish Memory: Performing Remembrance in Contemporary Irish Culture* (2011). Pine argues that “Irish culture is obsessed with the past” and situates this within a global drive towards remembrance (3). The reasons behind this obsession is that the “past can act as a counterpoint to the present: where the present is changing, the past can be fixed; where the present is increasingly globalized, the past is reassuringly insular” (7). Pine has built her argument around the premise that Ireland’s remembrance of the past is essentially a traumatic one. She argues that the tendency towards anti-nostalgia which “sets up a boundary between a traumatic past and the relative security of the present” and “selective remembering” has resulted in a remembrance culture unable to authentically remember its own past (14). This reflects one of the central themes of this dissertation: that the depiction of the natural world (and an ambiguous relationship with place) is at the centre of the Irish cultural narrative. Pine sees current modes of remembering as problematic particularly in an Irish context.

Using Friel’s representation of the Ordnance Survey as an example of this, she states that, “*Translations* typifies the tendency of Irish culture to refashion the past so that it is read exclusively under the sign of trauma” (7). Pine’s research is interesting in examining the cultural implications of dysfunctional memory practices. In much the same way as the past haunts the landscape, Pine sees the culture of remembrance shaping the Irish mind-set. I would like to build on this idea of remembrance as a central trope in Irish cultural performance but extend it to include an ecocentric rather than an anthropocentric framework.
Oona Frawley’s *Irish Pastoral: Nostalgia and Twentieth-Century Irish Literature* (2005) also explores Irish remembrance and nostalgia. She examines the trope of nostalgia which she argues is “intimately connected” with nature in Irish literature (2). She traces the word nostalgia from its roots in the Greek *nostos* (home) and *algos* (pain), to its present-day sentimental manifestation and builds on Bachelard’s idea of memories representing the “unrecoverable past” (3). She makes the point that nostalgia is a feature of postcolonial cultures and communities with high emigration and argues that Ireland fulfils both criteria. What emerges is a colonial ideology that, she writes, “involves the movement and subsequent settlement of ideas” (35). In Ireland, colonial ideology has resulted in “the increasing difficulty in separating ‘English’ and ‘Irish’ conceptions of nature and landscape in Irish literature” (35). This feature of Irish literature (which, she argues, is also compounded by the colonial attitude of European Romanticism) creates a “new strain of pastoralism that would dictate, in part, the tenor of the Revivial” (35).

Irish pastoral differs from the normative English pastoral because it contains, Frawley notes, “not only idealizations of culture lost under colonial rule, but also critiques of that rule itself” (5). The Irish relationship with the natural world is underscored with an anxiety as a result of colonial dispossession. Events such as the mapping of the Ordnance Survey scheme in the 1830s and the Great Famine that followed severed a traditional land connection created by agriculture. According to Frawley, nature could “no longer be seen as a neutral force; instead, it was a force that betrayed arbitrarily, weighing life and death lightly” (45). The loss of confidence in nature as

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50 Greg Garrard has noted that at “the root of the pastoral is the idea of nature as a stable, enduring counterpoint to the disruptive energy and change of human societies” which I take to mean that inherent in the creation of the pastoral genre is modernization (*Ecocriticism* 56).

51 Frawley reiterates Bachelard’s argument that “while memories represent the theoretically unrecoverable past, ‘the more securely they are fixed in space, the sounder they are’” which, she argues, is evident in Irish nostalgia: “Bachelard’s idea suggests a possible explanation for the intersection of particular, localized place and nature in Irish literature” (3).
provider created a split between the land and the community that farmed it, and “the physical and psychic disruption to the Irish landscape was enormous” (45).

The loss of language, and ability to describe the natural world, resulted in a nostalgic longing for the past that is a central feature of the Irish Revival. Frawley argues that, “the adaption of (and return to) a traditional pastoral nostalgia within Irish culture corresponds, unsurprisingly, to the development of an urban society that, prior to the era of the Revival, was relatively small” (53). J.M. Synge moved from this urban area to the Aran Islands in search of a more authentic Ireland. Frawley likens Synge’s trips to the Aran Islands to Henry David Thoreau’s sojourn at Walden Pond: an attempt at a return to a simpler life. She argues that for Synge the Aran was a space where the “natural world played a dominant role, and which became a repository for ideas of what the “real” Ireland had been: not only simple and pure, but natural. This “natural” state of Aran existence would become key to Synge’s interpretation of the islands (83). The West of Ireland became a repository for a more authentic Ireland but Synge also sought to complicate what was a simplistic narrative. In his trips to the islands, he wanted to learn, in depth, the language and interact with the rural community. This environment is unique and Synge, according to Frawley, hoped by “immersing himself in the landscape” to “gain access to this ‘concord’ with nature, which is not to be found elsewhere in this modern world” (84). This desire or (what Frawley terms) “pastoral longing” is evident in Synge’s ethnographic account of life on the islands (85). While Yeats and Gregory were challenging the easy stereotype of the stage Irishman, Synge was searching for a community that illustrated the virtues of a lost pre-modern age. Frawley writes that Synge was hoping “to find a way of bridging the gap

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52 Their desire to eradicate the stage Irishman would result in the creation of another one-dimensional character, as noted by Lionel Pilkington, “replacing a stage caricature with an idealistic alternative is not quite the revolutionary gesture that it seems. Buffoonery or ancient idealism – what both versions have in common is their assumption of a single fixed identity that can be established as nationally representative and that is at a distance from the contemporary modernity of the audience (Theatre 12).
between himself and the natural world as separately evolving entities” (86). However, Synge’s attitude was to change over the course of his stays on the islands. He realized that he also harboured simplistic or romanticized ideas about the islanders. According to Frawley, Synge allowed himself to “edit” his account of the islands to fit his preconceived notions of the place as wild and pre-modern (90). This account has more to do with the urban modern community that Synge left than the West of Ireland, as Frawley states, “like all pastorals, Synge’s offers a critique of the culture of which he is usually a part” (92).

Synge’s position of privilege meant that he did not work and places him outside the island community that he seeks to integrate with. Frawley argues that this privilege contributes to his “pastoral thinking, and to the analysis of the ‘natural’ from the position of the ‘cultural’” (94). But what set Synge “apart from the other Revivalists” was his “willingness to confront his own nostalgia” (95). This development in his thinking is evident in The Aran Islands as he moves from seeing the islanders as exotic to being increasingly aware of the dangers they faced. According to Frawley, this development is from a colonial to a postcolonial mode of thinking; from a “reflexive to a critical nostalgia” (98). Synge’s nostalgic longing evolved from an idealism that was forged in the urban centres of Europe to a more nuanced understanding of life on the islands. She argues that Synge moves from a belief that “in nature is a purer, more satisfactory life” to one where (after writing The Aran Islands) “nostalgia is itself misplaced” (102). Synge is crucial to the development of a more nuanced understanding of the Irish West because he evoloves from “participating in the realm of Irish pastoral politics” to engaging “both Irish and classical pastoral forms while simultaneously demythologizing their power” (103).

Another Irish playwright, that Frawley argues, engages “with the Irish tradition in which nature is a site of nostalgia” is Samuel Beckett (122).

53 Nevertheless, nostalgia, as a practice, is detrimental to our understanding of nature, as Donna Haraway has argued, “We must find another relationship to nature besides reification, possession, appropriation, and nostalgia” (“Otherworldly” 65).
Frawley makes the point that Beckett’s plays use the natural world “as a bank of memories of an imagined time before the plays began” (122). His representation of landscape stems from both his experiences during the Second World War and “reflects a personal attachment to place that dictated much of his childhood existence” (122). The diminishing landscape is a feature of Beckett’s work as a whole. From a solitary tree in *Waiting for Godot* to an all-but-disappeared landscape in *Endgame*, Beckett’s environments are conceptual in that they reflect the psychological mentality of the characters. Frawley states that it is possible to conclude that the “absence of landscape and nature in Beckett’s drama is as significant as their presence might be in Synge’s. The impossibility of attaching oneself to an unrecognizable landscape impacts on characters’ abilities to remember, and it is that *impossibility* of memory…that haunts Beckett’s works” (134). These barren landscapes are telling in that the relationship between person and place becomes one of disconnection. The characters have become cut off from the environments that they would traditionally call home. Frawley argues that the Irish nostalgia deviates from other forms of nostalgia in that “nature becomes a site from which to express the longing and mourning for lost or threatened culture” (156). Attempts at preserving the rural Irish past (a central tenet of the Irish Revival) is being criticized as early as in Synge’s work at the turn of the twentieth century. Frawley’s study situates nostalgia at the centre of an Irish relationship with colonialism.

Oona Frawley has also edited a collection, *Memory Ireland: Diaspora and Memory Practices* (2012), which examines how Irish memory practices migrate. She notes in the introduction that, “Settlement abroad necessitates the production of a new kind of memory and imagination, one that no longer relies upon daily physical interaction with a landscape and a people” (4). That book draws on extensive and varied expressions of Irish identity ranging from Joyce’s *Ulysses* to Celtic tattoos as icons of Irishness. This fluidity illustrates not just the diverse subject matter discussed but also the wide-ranging communities that lay claim to Irish culture. The collection examines how
cultural identity is remembered, transmuted and performed. Aiden Arrowsmith examines the influence of inherited ideologies on second generational remembering. Focusing on literature (fictional and autobiographical) from the Irish diaspora in Britain, Arrowsmith argues that imagined notions of Irishness are central to second generational identity construction. This “performative identification” is perpetuated through cultural production (15). Envisioning a homeland that is steeped in loss and emigration is still a part of Irish diasporic cultural performance. Katrin Urschel focuses on Ireland as a “site of memory” in contemporary Irish-Canadian literature (36). Asserting that diasporic memory is constructed, Urschel argues that it is the chronotype rather than the place itself that is imagined in this second generational remembering. Her description of imagined or remembered place as self-referential chimes in well with the main argument of this thesis which asserts that theatrical performances of place are conceptual.

The second section of Memory Ireland focuses on the ways in which memory is enacted and how Irish identity has become detached from place. These practices “embody memory materially” and emerge through the diffusion of cultural memory through physical practice (129). Joep Leerson argues that James Joyce’s Ulysses is emblematic of the internal cultural migration between the English and Irish language in the nineteenth century. Joyce’s exploration of the concept of metempsychosis can be applied across all of Irish cultural practice. In that same exchange of one language with another, Katie Brown makes the point that the Irish turned to music as a means of expression. After the decline in the Irish language, the interlinking of music and cultural expression has led to music becoming a means for the transmission of a nationalist ideal. Taking the ballads of the Young Irelanders by way of Moore’s Melodies, as emblematic of an increased nationalism, Brown examines nationalists that brought “cultural memory alive through chords, keys, bolder strains, and tones of defiance” (160). The power of music to reinforce community and engender cultural heritage and identity is something that is evident in Synge’s accounts of the West of Ireland. In his essay, “In West
Kerry”, Synge describes a music session: “The whirl of music and dancing in this little kitchen stirred me with an extraordinary effect. The kindliness and merrymaking of these islanders, who, one knows, are full of riot and severity and daring, has a quality and attractiveness that is absent altogether from the life of towns” (CW II 256). Strong cultural community is aligned with the rural west. Memory Ireland maps a rich tradition of Irish diasporic cultural practice which focuses – like much academic work done in Irish studies – on the communities that have a troubled relationship with their environment through dispossession, famine, and emigration. This is a vital critical discourse that has laid the foundation for how culture emerges from place.

Helen Lojk’s The Spaces of Irish Drama: Stage and Place in Contemporary Plays (2011), devotes a chapter to Brian Friel’s Translations. Lojk argues that the notion of objective mapping of landscape is impossible. The aim of the Ordnance Survey was ultimately to destroy what she calls “the symbiotic relationship of people and place” (20). Focusing on Friel’s production of place on stage, Lojk argues that the sappers “are concentrating on the scientific measurement of space that their government has deemed most useful, and that they believe will enable them to exert control over the landscape and over the Irish who inhabit that landscape” (25). The colonial measurement of space is used as a device to govern rather than proffer a deeper understanding of the environment. Lojk links this “measuring mentality” to “a clearly partial understanding of landscape” (25). She also notes that when Ballybeg’s inhabitants look out through the window, their growing separation from their environment is evident through “the absence of geographical descriptions” (25). They have become disconnected from their environment and do not see it as natural or even representative of the pristine landscapes of pastoral visions of the countryside. Their environment is a backdrop for cultural rather than natural phenomena: “[W]hat the characters describe is almost never the land’s geographical features. Rather, they describe what humans are doing in the space. For them, landscape is the setting for human activities” (19). Lojk’s research assesses the hierarchy of belonging that differentiates various
inhabitants of a given landscape – namely native and non-native – and as such forms part of the postcolonial discourse within Irish studies.

Catherine Nash, in her article, “Irish Placenames: Post-colonial Locations”, examines Friel’s work as a “cultural exploration of questions of identity…prompted by the inadequacies of romantic and exclusive versions of Irishness in the face of armed conflict in Northern Ireland” (458). She highlights the cultural politics of placenames in both the North and West of Ireland. In the North she writes that the population looking to preserve place names “are faced with both traditional republican associations of the language and the danger that their efforts are read as validating a specifically Gaelic, rather than mixed, heritage for the region” (458). Whereas, in the West, efforts to conserve place names “could be criticised for supporting a romantic version of Irishness located in the least-Anglicized West, an imaginative geography that was so central to Irish nationalism” (458). The cultural implications of naming the environment are central to Translations.

Nash does critique her perceived over-simplification of transliteration happening over the course of the Ordnance Survey, rather that gradually over centuries. She writes that these narratives, that rely too readily on “placename lore”, often “overlook the complex processes of placename evolution, diversification, intervening centuries in favour of the drama of nineteenth-century mapping and naming” (465). Friel is a dramatist and Translations does offer a performance of the events of the Ordnance Survey. Nash argues, that the play can be read both as a “re-enactment of a particular moment in Ireland’s colonial history and as an allegory for Irish experience of colonialism, power, resistance, and intercultural contact” (457). The use of language to denote cultural ownership of the landscape is questioned by Friel who, Nash states, “questions the existence of an uncorrupted pool of Irishness deep within the Irish language, or an essential Englishness in the English language” (467). For

54 There is an origin myth about the Irish language allowing for a deeper connection to place. When Synge arrived on the Aran Islands he was “surprised at the abundance and fluency of the foreign tongue” which illustrates his preconceived notions about the unpolluted cultural
Nash, this idea that there is a deep-seated sense of identity in the Irish language and Irish place names (both in the North and the West of Ireland) needs to be examined as a way of “reconceptualizing cultural location and a critical sense of place” (468).

Patrick Lonergan’s *Theatre and Globalization* (2009) examines international performances of Irishness. Lonergan argues that the branding of Irish theatre is part of a broader tendency towards global commodification. This leads to the development of an imagined rather than a concrete evocation of place, as he notes, “the transformation of theatre worldwide is just one example of a paradigmatic shift from geographical to conceptual spaces” (17). Conceptual places can then be exported to a wider global diaspora. Lonergan argues that the “branding of Irish theatre has had a detrimental effect on more nuanced representations of Irishness and consequently representations of Irishness have narrowed as Irish identity has expanded” (188). The impact of globalization on multiculturalism and the flattening of cultural traditions have threatened to oversimplify and stereotype both people and landscape.

Even when taking place in an auditorium, the process of place-making and the concretization of space has always been a principal component of theatre performance. Geocriticism and the expansion of spatial discourse and geographical metaphors into literary studies has produced many theorists concerned with the production of space (and consequently of place). Irish theatre scholarship has followed suit with Christopher Morash and Shaun Richards’ seminal study on the spatial turn in Irish theatre, *Mapping Irish Theatre: Theories of Space and Place* (2013), which puts broader spatial

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55 Geocriticism and ecocriticism are complimentary discourses with mutual interests but whereas geocriticism is in the discipline of geography, ecocriticism focuses on ecology and literature.

theorists such as Lefebvre, Ubersfeld, Tuan and Nora alongside the peculiarly Irish theatrical motifs of colleens and country kitchens. Morash and Richards expand on the traditional rural and urban binaries of Irish theatre. They query these underpinnings, asking if “theatre in performance creates an event that is by definition local, why is theatre – particularly Irish theatre – so often considered in the context of the national?” (18). The authors move between global theorists and resolutely local ideas such as the Irish tradition of dinnseanchas and the “unspoilt spaces of the West” (41). Although complimentary, the work differs from the concerns in this thesis in that the framework in Mapping Irish Theatre is geocritical as opposed to ecocritical.

The first chapter, “Making Space”, contends that the concept of a national theatre “is actually a misnomer” (124). As theatre is inherently local, the depiction of rural shebeens on an urban stage illustrates the disparity between theatrical performance and imagined nationhood. There are tantalizing glimpses of the alternative national aesthetic that ran counter to the peasant plays of the early Abbey Theatre57: the Gordon Craig screens commissioned by Yeats, and the “non-representational utopian theatre space” of Edwards and Mac Liammóir at the Gate Theatre (24). What is evident in the years following the foundation of the Irish Free State in 1922 is the impact that embedded idealism had on the construction of a distinctly Irish theatre. As Morash and Richards argue in the second chapter, “the real enemy in Cathleen Ni Houlihan is not the colonial power but the deeply entrenched sense of place in the rural domestic interior that is the very embodiment of a fantasised Irishness” (46). That “fantasised Irishness” – which has subsequently sustained contemporary authors such as Martin McDonagh and Enda Walsh – is central to this dissertation. A performed nationalism that has resulted in an anxiety of place that is still evident in contemporary Irish culture.

57 Morash and Richards write that the “realism of the Abbey’s first decade became increasingly reified as the expression of a period that produced a stable, ‘certain’ Irish space” so any experimental work was soon eclipsed by the performance of their stereotypical type of Irish place (52).
“Spaces of Modernity and Modernism”, the title of the third chapter, might seem surprising given that so much Irish theatre has a reputation for being resolutely anti-modern but Morash and Richards persuasively argue that such a reputation is unfounded. The Abbey plays were not realist in a traditional sense but a “curious kind of hybrid realism”, the Abbey being an institution that dismissed true realism and naturalism as “modern urban forms” (49). Theirs was a self-styled authentic folk theatre grounded in the west of Ireland and their brand of authenticity became more potent through the repeated use of specific sets and props. A deep connection, termed the “monad of realism” by the authors, opposed a vigorous deconstruction of realist representation in Europe (56). These processes contributed to the deep rooted place-attachment in the Irish theatre that is evidently more of a memorialisation than a representation of authenticity. What transpires is theatre as lieux de mémoire, a place that is open to Martin McDonagh’s parodic challenges in such plays as The Cripple of Inishmaan (1997), but which also incorporates the heavy sense of loss and nostalgia that are evident in the work of Friel and Murphy.

Moving into contemporary theatre, the final two chapters explore the global and the local repercussions for place-attachment. The touring company Druid Theatre is an example of theatre that, while focused on the local, is exportable globally. As part of their rehearsal process for staging Synge, their journey to Inishmaan was, according to Morash and Richards, “clearly taking the specificity of place as a factor in understanding his work to the ultimate level, transmuting the Aran Islands from inspiration into the inevitable destination of all analysis” (134). The historical connections and long-standing theatrical references point to centrality of place in Irish drama, one that shows no indication of faltering given the strong growth of site-specific theatre. Site-specific productions such as the 2007 Ouroboros tour of sites managed by the OPW and Druid’s performances on the Aran Islands (both examined at length in this thesis), illustrates the strength and growth of site-specific performance in Irish theatre in recent years.
More problematic is the connection that Samuel Beckett has to the Irish landscape.\textsuperscript{58} Many studies have challenged the notion of placelessness in Beckett.\textsuperscript{59} Eoin O’Brien’s \textit{The Beckett Country: Samuel Beckett’s Ireland} (1986) provides a close literary analysis of Beckett’s texts linking details found there to sites in Ireland. John Harrington’s \textit{The Irish Beckett} (1991) is the first book-length study on Beckett’s relationship with Ireland. Seán Kennedy’s edited collection \textit{Beckett and Ireland} (2010) seeks to contextualise Beckett’s oeuvre within an Irish framework. Kennedy notes that, “details consonant with an Irish setting occur with a suggestive insistence throughout Beckett’s oeuvre” (98). In \textit{Samuel Beckett and the Problem of Irishness} (2009), Emilie Morin examines the difficulties in making easy connections between Beckett and an Irish sense of place. She argues that when Beckett’s work appears in French, the effect is a making strange, “[r]efferences to Irish place names lose their original meaning in the transposition into French but retain their specificity, becoming defined solely in terms of their exoticism and/or their degree of translatability” (63). Morin argues that the Irish settings in Beckett’s work “generates inconsistencies of meaning” (64). She recognizes that Beckett’s work complicates the assumed static nature of landscape.

Beckett was hugely influenced by another Irish writer whose work mirrored his own in its complex relationship with Ireland, James Joyce. Attending Joyce’s funeral in 1941, Carola Giedion-Welcker recalled his last words to her: “You have no idea how wonderful dirt is” (277). His work

\textsuperscript{58} Adorno has argued that in Beckett’s work, “the surplus of reality amounts to its collapse; by striking the subject dead, reality itself becomes deathly; this transition is the artfulness of antiart, and in Beckett it is pushed to the point of the manifest annihilation of reality” (39). This critique of Beckett’s work as the annihilation of reality has seen an argument emerge that his work is without significant ties to place.

\textsuperscript{59} Lawrence Buell has made the point that the “stark blasted tree in \textit{Waiting for Godot}” functions differently depending on the site the performance is taking place on: “Gogo and Didi’s mysterious tie to this non-place, as well as their inability to leave it, takes on more meaning when witnessed in \textit{whatever} kind of environment than on the printed page” (Future 48-9; emphasis in original).
overflow with excess: the detritus and the waste of modern urban life. The expansion of ecocritical discourse into the mechanics of modern living has laid the groundwork for books such as *Eco-Joyce: The Environmental Imagination of James Joyce* (2013). Anne Fogarty opens the volume saying that “James Joyce is an urban writer” (xv). Joyce’s ability lay in – amongst other things – his merging of the increased mechanization of modern urban living with the systemic inter-dependence of human and environment. The collection points to a move towards the material, not only in Joycean Studies, but Irish modernism in general. The urban spaces that the majority of these writers inhabit are where the most promising scholarship in the environmental humanities is currently being undertaken. My analysis of the city space and Beckett’s *Not I* is part of this materialist discourse in urban ecology.

Another book that has examined space and place – and to a lesser extent ecocritical theory – in Irish theatre, is Richard Rankin Russell’s, *Modernity, Community and Place in Brian Friel’s Drama* (2014). The interlocking of community and environment, combined with the related performance of place, are central to Richard Rankin Russell’s study of Friel’s drama. In his introduction, he states that “the subject of place in drama, especially in non-American drama, is severely undertheorized” (2). In Irish theatre studies, Rankin’s claim can been countered somewhat by pointing to recent publications such as Lojek’s *The Spaces of Irish Drama* which devotes its first chapter to Friel’s *Translations*, and, more recently, *Mapping Irish Theatre: Theories of Space and Place*, both discussed here. Rankin Russell’s contribution to the discussion examines “the impact of modernity on communities” (1). He asserts that “it might seem odd at first to pair drama, which is part of culture, with the environment”, but given the growth of ecocritical theory, which Rankin Russell addresses in this book, the coupling seems valid (2). My own research will show that ecocritical thinking has foregrounded an Irish preoccupation with place within a broader environmental framework.

*Modernity, Community and Place in Brian Friel’s Drama* consists of five in-depth studies of Friel’s most celebrated plays: *Philadelphia, Here I
Come (1964), The Freedom of the City (1973), Faith Healer (1979),
Translations (1980), and Dancing at Lughnasa (1990). Rankin Russell argues
in the first chapter that Philadelphia, Here I Come stages a double event:
Ballybeg and Philadelphia. His research is very much influenced by Edwards
Casey’s Getting Back into Place (1993) which sees place as more than a
geographical location but as an event. Rankin Russell argues that, “Casey’s
insistence that place is an event enables us to understand that Gar’s vacillation
about emigrating, and then his final decision to go, constitute only the latest
development in the event of place that Friel so thoughtfully stages” (32). The
largest intrusion in Gar’s Ballybeg is modernity. Its shadow looms large over
Gar’s imminent departure to America and permeates his imagination. As
Rankin Russell observes, Gar’s “acceptance of ‘filming’ memories signifies his
immersion in late modernity and adoption of a more mechanical mode of visual
perception” (63). Ironically, this mechanisation of memory serves to alienate
Gar from a Ballybeg on the cusp of modernity. He remains trapped between
two places, his psyche “technologized”, his split characterisation symptomatic
of a divide between individual and place (62). This gulf between the material
modernity of the real environment – both rural and urban – and the conceptual
landscape that haunts Irish cultural representation is central to my own research.

Rankin Russell’s application of Una Chaudhuri’s term, geopathology,
signifies the disorders that emerge from over-attachment to place. Chaudhuri
uses the term to identify a neurosis between person and environment in modern
realist drama. She claims that this “problem of place – and place as problem”
appears “as a series of ruptures and displacements in various orders of location,
from the micro- to the macrospatial, from home to nature, with intermediary
space concepts such as neighbourhood, hometown, community, and country
ranged in between” (55). The final two chapters in Rankin Russell’s book
examine Friel’s two most popular plays, Translations (1980) and Dancing at
Lughnasa (1990). Such is the abundance of criticism focusing on language and
naming in Translations (a feature of post-colonial and post-structuralist theory),
that it has come at the expense of the play’s environmental context. This
“flattened commentary” Rankin Russell argues, “neatly divides nature and culture, which Friel instead perceives as always connected” (156). Rankin Russell also makes use of Edward Casey’s assertion that the people who live in a landscape are as marked by their environment as they, in turn, have marked it. This movement of people from an environment they would deem a homeland to another (in Friel’s case, his characters move to a place that is openly modern) and the impression left on their cultural memory is profound.

This research intends to expand on the space and place framework, which is geocritical, by giving a materialist reading of the performances. What transpires in the literature above is the dependence of the spatial turn in Irish studies on postcolonial discourse. In reviewing Cusick’s *Out of the Earth* in 2012, Greg Garrard has observed that “ecocriticism has made, as yet, little headway within Irish studies” (“*Out of the Earth*” 109). He calls for a “serious rather than merely rhetorical commitment to environmentally-orientated analysis” (110). My use of the term, conceptual ecological environments is an attempt to think ecologically and to broaden the framework of place to include both traditional environments (such as the West and North of Ireland) and non-traditional environments such as digital and radiophonic performance spaces.

### 1.4 Conclusion

Lawrence Buell has pointed out in that, “[h]uman beings are biocultural creatures constructing themselves in interaction with surroundings they cannot not inhabit, all their artefacts may be expected to bear traces of that” (*Writing* 2). Given the present ecological crisis, literary and performance studies need to have a deeper understanding of the natural landscape – and that includes *un*natural landscapes. Drawing from ecocritical theory, this dissertation examines how the natural environment is translated into representational space – theatrical, radiophonic and digital. Using key texts from three playwrights spanning the twentieth century, (and the theorists elaborated upon in this introduction), this study analyses different types of place: the West of Ireland as a rural ideological landscape, the cityscape as a site of sustainability, the
radiophonic environment as a material interplay between actor and listener, the
North as a contested landscape, and digital environments. This thesis will look
at rurality and urbanism not in opposition but as a part of an environmental
ecology. The notion of the golden age of rural life, what Raymond Williams has
termed “a myth functioning as a memory”, will be examined from the urban
perspective from which it emerged (Country 43). The notion of natural
environments being culturally conditioned prompts research questions such as
the following: How has our representation of the environment impacted on our
relationship with the natural world? Can new digital environments enhance our
understanding of nature? How can twentieth century theatrical representations
of place help us to think ecologically? The aim of this dissertation is to bring
these disparate theatrical representations of the natural world together under the
umbrella of conceptual ecological environments. It will allow us to see,
thematically, the emergence of an aesthetic that directly addresses nature in
Irish theatre.

Digitization has given us the tools to see both the mediatized theatrical
environment and environmental landscapes in a different light. The final
chapter contends that the digital networks, where global communities have
become interconnected, create a more dynamic way of imagining ourselves in
the environment. Patrick Lonergan argues that there is an “interesting
conceptual parallel between globalization and digitization: both involve the
transformation of the physical into the virtual. As a result, both have become
interlinked, often to the point of being indistinguishable (186). Digital
representations of landscape can foster a debate on how natural environments
(when separated from the unhelpful nature/culture binary) contribute to the
construction of our cultural identity. With a renewed understanding of what it is
to be in the environment (thanks to new materialist analysis) we can embrace
digital landscapes as an opportunity to bridge the nature/culture divide.

Much of the recent debate within the digital humanities has been
somewhat utopian in nature: thinking of digital tools as more than an extension
of print culture. This utopianism is derived from the fact that the digital sphere
is, arguably, more openly democratic than print culture, uniting people and creating global communities and movements. H. Lewis Ulman argues that it is books that are the successful virtual environments and that “text is a familiar medium whose material embodiment – paper and ink – has become all but transparent to highly literate readers” (351). I would argue that as the digital tools are still visible and evident in their structure, this offers the opportunity to access a new virtual digital environment before the structure that supports it disappears in much the same way the paper and ink of print culture has. Ulman goes on to say that ecocritics have a lot to offer digital theorists writing that their “allegiance to the real and knowledge of how people experience ‘the shock of the real’ make their input invaluable if the architects of cyberspace are to construct digital landscapes that foster healthy relationships with real ecosystems” (355).

Through my exploration of simulated digital, radiophonic and performed environments, I will attempt to gather different types of performed landscapes under the umbrella term of conceptual ecological environment.

Digital media has a large part to play in the ongoing performance of these theatrical landscapes and, as such, needs to form a part of this thesis. Of course, these digital worlds also become legitimate landscapes. As Sidney Dobrin notes (in his introduction to a Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism special issue on Digital Environments), “virtual worlds and digital environments exceed the representational; they are themselves natures and environments in and with which humans and non-human forge relationships” (205; emphasis in original). This is true but in order to maintain some parameters on the scope of the thesis, I will be examining virtual landscapes in much the same way as the theatrical landscape – as representative only. If I was to focus on digital landscapes as real environments in themselves, then I would need to do the same for the scenographic elements of the theatrical plays. The remit would prove too broad for this thesis and would not serve to answer the question this research asks: how are Irish theatrical landscapes conceptual ecological environments?
Chapter 2

Conceptualizing the West

2.1 Introduction

One of the most performed landscapes in Ireland is the rural West. There is an impression in travelogues and ethnographic accounts that the region is pristine, untouched and wild. But as Boivin et al have argued, “‘Pristine’ landscapes simply do not exist and, in most cases, have not existed for millennia. Most landscapes are palimpsests shaped by repeated episodes of human activity over multiple millennia” (6393). Analyzing Riders to the Sea, The Well of the Saints, and the DruidSynge tour, this chapter examines the notion of place as a living archive: a collection of narratives tied to a specific geographical environment. Synge’s texts (that form the basis for these theatrical re-enactments of place) correspond to environmental texts, as argued in Buell’s The Environmental Imagination. Establishing the power of the natural world in the Irish narrative and examining how the physical landscape is represented on stage, this chapter explores how the imagined environment of the west of Ireland is culturally constructed.

The first section, “Riders to the Sea” looks at the rural west of Ireland as a site of memory or lieu de mémoire to use Pierre Nora’s term. More imagined than real, Riders to the Sea was Synge’s homage to the Aran Islanders. This

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60 Eóin Flannery has reiterated this point saying that the “West of Ireland was a site of ‘counter rational’ and neo-Romantic expressions of disillusionment, as well as the primary imaginative locale for mid-late nineteenth century Irish nationalism” (100).

61 1. The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history.
2. The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest.
3. Human accountability to the environment is part of the text’s ethical orientation.
4. Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text. (Environmental 7-8)
thesis contends that the islands can be read as a heterotopic site inverting and reflecting the space of community. The second section “The Well of the Saints” explores the role of the marginalized in the Irish narrative. The third section “Druid/Synge” examines Druid Theatre Company’s global tour of Synge’s work and aims to show how the West can be performed as a constructed archive of place. Just as the Aran Islands could be seen as a heterotopic site inverting Irish space, the performance of Druid/Synge on a global platform served to frame the conceptual image of Ireland as rural.

Synge’s keen interest in the natural world is detailed in his accounts where, for example, he kept detailed records of collecting birds’ eggs. He wrote of “three distinct moments of rapture” in collecting the eggs: the “finding of the nest”, “the insertion of the egg successfully blown” into his collection and the “exhibiting” of the egg (8). The ecological damage of egg collecting notwithstanding, Synge was clearly heavily influenced by nature, writing that “Natural history did [much] for me….To wander as I did for years through the dawn of night with every nerve stiff and strained with expectation gives one a singular acquaintance with the essences of the world” (9). He carried his interest in natural history through to his playwriting and sought to create plays that were accurate accounts of vanishing natural landscapes.

Furthering Axel Goodbody’s observation that “literary lieux de mémoire can…serve an important function as localizations for a utopian vision of human reconciliation with nature”, this chapter will argue that Synge’s lieux de mémoire serve to create a vision of the relationship between the human and nonhuman world (65-6). I will argue that Riders to the Sea, The Well of the Saints, and Druid/Synge are conceptual ecological environments because they focus on creating spaces which are occupied by people living between the cultural and the natural world. Examining how environmental narratives created during the foundation of the state have shaped a more ambivalent Irish relationship to place, this chapter contends that the aesthetic idea of the natural landscape as a keeper of memory is central to the nature/culture binary that has emerged from a modern urban perspective.
In staging the world of the Aran Islanders in *Riders to the Sea*, Synge insisted on authenticity. For the original production, that insistence was illustrated in his determination to use real items delivered directly from the island. Ann Saddlemeyer writes that Synge went “so far as to order thick flannel and pampoties, the traditional Aran footwear, from the west” (“Introduction” xv). These are theatrical props whose importance lay in their authenticity, being the actual clothing used on the island. First performed on the 25 February 1904, *Riders to the Sea* was the performance of an environment that was already receding in the face of modernization. Joseph Holloway lauded the production in his diaries saying that “Mr. Synge has given us an intensely sad – almost weirdly so – picture of the lives of the humble dwellers on an isle of the West” (35). These humble dwellers were already in 1904 living an antiquated life. In his ethnographic account of Aran, this timeless antiquity was symbolized by what Frawley describes as the islanders “seeming puzzlement at Synge’s clock: the island becomes literally timeless” (*Irish* 86). The audience in *Riders to the Sea* were in Christopher Morash’s words “co-celebrants in the ritual of mourning” (*History* 175). The environment that the audience witnessed onstage at the Abbey was already fading from actual lived experience.

Synge’s play opens in a cottage kitchen and is set on “an island off the West of Ireland” (3). The script does not give a specific geographical marker but the assumption is, given the motifs, traditions, and Synge’s own ethnographic interests, that the Aran Islands is the location. The small world that makes up the play also serves to narrow the generalized Irish space into the concrete, physical space of the stage. The importance of the everyday tools of living, as revealed in Synge’s insistence on their authenticity, is illustrated in their specific descriptions in the stage directions: “nets, oil-skins, spinning wheel” (5). This specificity links the community to the rural landscape outside
the confines of the stage space: the nets and oil-skins to the sea and the spinning wheel to the animals that the group are dependent on.\textsuperscript{62} As \textit{Riders to the Sea} opens, it is Cathleen who is spinning at the wheel while Maurya is “lying down, God help her, and maybe sleeping, if she’s able” (5). There is delineation throughout the play between the active Cathleen, who attempts to change the family’s fortunes, and the passive Maurya. Oona Frawley describes the play as a “sublime feminine tragedy: Maurya’s awareness of the threat of the sea, garnered through the loss of her husband and her sons, has granted her a fearful connection with the natural world”\textsuperscript{63} (“Shadow” 19). Maurya’s awareness of the threat of the sea leads her to inaction and forms part of an emerging dystopian connection with nature.

Cathleen despairs at Maurya’s inaction and understands the reasons why Maurya’s only remaining son, Bartley, has decided to go back to the sea: “It’s the life of a young man to be going to the sea, and who would listen to an old woman with one thing and she saying it over” (11). This repetition reflects a general stasis in the play and is part of its cyclical structure as a whole. The lack of linear progression suggests an inability to escape being part of the natural environment. This small world is also evident in the circularity of the play’s structure which flattens the temporal dimensions.\textsuperscript{64}

\textsuperscript{62} Not only representing the lives of the islanders in the objects they own, these fetishized items reflect the connections between \textit{Riders to the Sea} and the fatalism found in Greek drama: the objects have symbolic significance. The nets suggest not only the family’s livelihood as fishermen but their ensnarement. The weightiness lent to the props alongside the opening “barely audible tap, tap, tap, of the spinning wheel…developing a steady, relentless build” as Christopher Morash noted introduced the audience to the gravitas of the unfolding events onstage (\textit{History} 131).

\textsuperscript{63} In, \textit{A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful}, Edmund Burke defines the sublime as “[w]hatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime” (36).

\textsuperscript{64} The bread that Cathleen initially baked for Bartley’s journey and the white boards first bought for Bartley’s coffin also return at the end of the play. Cathleen says: “We have fine white boards herself bought, God help her, thinking Michael would be found, and I have a new
Maurya laments the men in her family who have drowned: “There was Stephan, and Shawn, were lost in the great wind” (21). She appears to incant as the stage directions note that she cannot hear Nora and Cathleen talking. She continues: “There was Sheamus and his father, and his own father again, were lost in the dark night…There was Patch after was drowned out of a curagh that turned over” (21). When the keening women come into house after Michael’s body has been recovered she responds, “half in a dream” to Cathleen: “Is it Patch, or Michael, or what is it at all?” (21). Maurya passivity and, as Frawley has noted, her “fearful connection with the natural world” leads to an acceptance of the natural power of the sea and its impact on the lives on the island (“Shadow” 19). Synge saw the Islanders’ hazardous existence as a direct result of their dependence on the sea. This is widely recounted in his ethnographic study of the islands, *The Aran Islands*, written in 1901, after extended periods on the Aran Islands beginning in May 1898: “I could not help feeling that I was talking with men who were under a judgment of death. I knew that every one of them would be drowned in the sea in a few years and battered naked on the rocks” (162). Here is the emergence of a narrative of the natural environment that is overwhelmingly negative.

*Riders to the Sea* opens with a direct reference to place, as Nora asks of Maurya’s whereabouts: “Where is she?” (5). Nora has brought a bundle which contains “a shirt and a plain stocking [that] were got off a drowned man in Donegal” (5). There is a weightiness attached to material objects. They connect the islanders to their environment and are a means of identifying and understanding what has happened at sea. The place the islanders occupy is very different from the space occupied by the urban audience that would be gathering to see the production. Referencing Yi-Fu Tuan’s premise that “all places are small worlds”, Morash and Richards argue that *Riders to the Sea* matches the small world of the Aran Islands with that of the stage (*Mapping* 76). They argue that, through the significance and symbolism instilled in the

cake you can eat while you’ll be working” (25).
items onstage, the lives of the characters are evoked for the urban audience: “Aran is one such ‘small world’, but so too is the stage. When there is a homology between scenic space and reference, the stage’s place-producing powers are further intensified in a condensation of an already condensational space” (Mapping 76). The use of the everyday items and the stage setting in the cottage kitchen would evoke a specific place in an urban audience. The capacity of the stage is to produce a conceptual environment evoking a natural world where the sea dominates the lives of the islanders.

The role of the natural world and the outside imagined space of the play impacts upon the domestic space of the cottage. Nora’s arrival with the shirt and plain stocking and the resulting interaction with Cathleen are punctuated by the cottage door being blown open by a gust of wind. The cottage interior which extends to the boundaries of the physical stage is then surrounded by stormy weather. The power of the wind and the sea constantly threaten the lives within the cottage/stage space. Cathleen asks Nora, “Is the sea bad by the white rocks?” to which she replies, “There’s a great roaring in the west, and it’s worse it’ll be getting when the tides turned to the wind” (5, 7). Maurya reiterates the statement, “He won’t go this day with the wind rising from the south and the west” (7). When Bartley enters he too mentions the wind and its connection to Michael’s body: “how could it be washed up, and we after looking each day for nine days, and a strong wind blowing a while back from the west and south” (9). The power of the natural world is directly connected to the fate of the men in a way that was becoming increasingly alien to urban audiences. The lives of the islanders seem fatefully destined to be lost at sea.

Similarly to the everyday objects that belong to the house taking on symbolic significance in the midst of tragedy, the natural world – and the emergence of a dystopian conceptual environment – also serves a symbolic function. Maurya suggests that Michael’s body might wash ashore and makes a direct connection with the symbolic signs of nature that she sees: “If it isn’t

65 Just as the sea is seen as provider and destroyer in the context of the play so Maurya as mother (whose name is not unlike the Irish word for sea – muir) both nurtures and destroys.
found itself, that wind is raising the sea, and there was a star up against the moon” (9). When Maurya realises that all her sons are dead she reaches a point of being unable to react, as she says, “I’ll have no call to be up crying and praying” (23). The fatalistic sense that the lives of the community are in the hands of the sea and the natural world is shown in the powerlessness of the Islanders. Oona Frawley makes the point that “Synge repeatedly notes the threat of drowning in The Aran Islands, and variously experiences exhilaration, terror and profound dejection – all aspects of the sublime– in the face of the churning sea” (“Shadow” 17). Keening in the play is also a response to the sublime in nature. In The Aran Islands Synge describes the collective grief of the Islanders in the form of keening not only to mourn the dead but to acknowledge the sublime power of the natural world: “In this cry of pain the inner consciousness of the people seems to lay itself bare for an instant, and to reveal the mood of beings who feel their isolation in the face of a universe that wars on them with winds and seas” (CW II 75). Here Synge describes keening as the ritualistic emotional purging of a community that is normally stoical in the face of tragedy. Maurya, however, remains unmoved throughout the keen. She has accepted the relationship that the Islanders – and by extension the imagined Irish island as a whole – have with the natural world.

The islands form (in essence) what Pierre Nora describes as a lieu de mémoire, a place “where memory crystallizes and secretes itself” (“Between” 7). It is a space where our notion of the past and our collective memory, however constructed, have become irrevocably entangled. Nora explores the split between history and memory and likens history to a “critical discourse that is antithetical to spontaneous memory” (“Between” 9). Collective memory lies in the physicality of spaces, set apart from the meta-narrative cultivated within

66 Synge wrote in his diary in 1899: “I cannot say it too often, the supreme interest of the island lies in the strange concord that exists between the people and the impersonal limited but powerful impulses of the nature that is around them” (CW II 75).
historiography. This chapter contends that, for Synge, as for his contemporary audience, that physical connection between the Aran Islands and our collective memory still existed. In the intervening one hundred years, however, the connection between Irish identity and the Aran Island community has been lost. What is left is a conceptual ecological environment. What makes a conceptual ecological environment is a place where the concept of identity is tied to a geographical area. The Aran Islands are beyond historiography (to build on Nora’s point): the people who live there embody a never-changing, eternal past. Their environment is fixed and they are a living archive.

The following are examples of how Riders to the Sea reduces Aran to a conceptual ecological environment. Firstly, the memory of Aran as a lieu de mémoire does not connect with the reality of place or environment. Christopher Morash and Shaun Richards argue that “for the predominantly urban audiences who watched Riders to the Sea such peasant characters were increasingly becoming a spectral presence in Irish life” (Mapping 103-4). The world that Synge portrays was not as untamed as he represents on stage. According to Morash and Richards “the sense in Riders of an enclosed, unmapped authenticity is at odds with the actuality of the Aran Islands that Synge recorded in his journal, where there are fifteen references to America concerning letters and actual or intended voyages” (Mapping 107). Life for the Aran Islanders was, in Synge’s time, connected to the global world, with a network of correspondence between those on the island and émigrés. These civilizing and modernizing global links were far removed from Synge’s description of a “wild

67 Nora claims that memory “takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects; history binds itself to temporal communities, to progressions and to relations between things. Memory is absolute, while history can only conceive the relative” (“Between” 9).

68 Synge differentiated between the Aran Islanders and peasants on the mainland of Ireland and Europe, at least on a visual level. He wrote in notebook, “What a joy has been [lost] by the condition of our poor [on the mainland] whose grey miserable life has struck all colour from their clothes…The dull red of the petticoats especially if surmounted by a deep blue shawl is more quietly fair than any peasant costume I have met in Europe” (CW II 54).
crowd” at the train station in Galway city displaying the “half-savage temperament of Connaught” (122). He created a world apart from the reality of an emerging modernity with its ever increasing global connectedness.

Synge saw heroism in the islanders’ existence. There is a parallel in Synge’s rendering of the islanders in his ethnographic work and his creative work. Describing a fishing expedition he took part in, Synge notes that, “if we were dropped into the blue chasm of the waves, this death, with fresh saltiness in one’s teeth, would be better than most deaths one is likely to meet” (97). He saw the islanders as representative of the Irish past, living out hard lives on the western seaboard far removed from his own upbringing in Dublin. In Riders to the Sea, the inevitability of that hardship is illustrated alongside the inhabitants’ reliance on fate or God’s will. Maurya accepts her pain as a suffering she must endure. Malcolm Pittock describes the islanders as, “not so much individuals as typical representatives of that community” (qtd. in Cardullo 98). Synge’s portrayal links the islanders’ reliance on a natural world to a life more akin to Pierre Nora’s pre-modern communities. This makes the plays more conceptual than realistic.

Riders to the Sea is a performance of a conceptual environment. There is evidence of the increasing modernization and cosmopolitanism of life (as it was then changing) on the Aran Islands, which Synge omits from his representation of the island on stage. The historical context for the creation of

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69 It is also worth remembering (as noted earlier), that Synge expressed surprise at the “abundance and fluency of the foreign tongue” on Aran (50). Clearly, the islanders were not as insulated from outside influence as he had assumed before his arrival.

70 Shawn Gillen describes Synge’s ethnographic account of the islands as a work of creative nonfiction: “a pastiche of lyricism, reportage, precise description, and dramatic vignettes rendered in journalistic detail” (109).

71 For example, there is evidence of this network in his ethnographic account of the Island. He describes a conversation with an Aran Island woman: “Today she has been asking me many questions about Germany, for it seems one of her sisters married a German husband in America some years ago […] and this girl has decided to escape in the same way from the drudgery of the island” (CW II 143).
the play is integral to the play itself. Seamus Deane links the fatalism in Synge’s work to the connection between nationalist and romantic desire, noting that for “Synge, the cause is always lost. The order of things is not regenerated. Traditional Irish life, in Wicklow or in the West, is changed only to the extent that it becomes conscious of its bereavement from authentic value” (“Synge” 53). Revival attempts to recreate an authentic Ireland is complicated in Synge’s work. The environment he creates is infused with the loss and the hardship of a community living a marginal existence. Rather than the romanticized rural west that proliferated on the Dublin stage, Synge’s landscape was raw. The world of Riders to the Sea is a community which has atrophied. Deane goes on to describe Riders to the Sea as symbolic of that degeneration: “Within this frame, every object – the clothes of the drowned Michael, the white boards for the coffin, the cake on the griddle – shines with the pathos of the human artefact in the fact of the hypnotic and obliterating force of the sea” (“Synge” 60-1). The aestheticization of the islanders is an attempt at creating a heroic future rather than an accurate performance of the past.

The play is essentially about how urban space remembers and aestheticizes. The performance of place on the Irish stage has been suffused with notions of rural authenticity. This is the foundation for what Adorno calls a “cultural landscape, which resembles a ruin even when the houses still stand” (85). Not authentic natural beauty, they are environments that are part of “the cult of the ruin” and are more to do with culture than nature (84). Maurya makes a distinction between the island and what she calls “the big world” (13). She sees them as contrasting: “In the big world the old people do be leaving things after them for their sons and children, but in this place it is the young men do be leaving things behind for them that do be old” (13). Her viewpoint is vital to understanding the significance the Aran Islands has as a site of representation for the rest of Ireland. As Riders to the Sea exists essentially for the audience, Maurya’s comments on the wider world reflect the audiences’ impression of rural island-life. This mirroring suggests Foucault’s idea of the heterotopia which is a site where a community’s codes for living are essentially
inverted. He defines a heterotopia as an “effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites…are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted” (24). The function of a heterotopia is to reflect and invert the viewer’s world in a mythic ritualized mode of seeing. Heterotopias are conceptual in that they are idea-based and ecological in that they encompass the interconnectedness in that community.

Heterotopias are closed systems or spaces that reflect the surrounding community, isolated and penetrable at the same time. This thesis argues that the West as performed in *Riders to the Sea* is a heterotopia in that it is a closed system that reflects broader society. Foucault describes a “pure and simple opening, but that generally hides curious exclusion. Everyone can enter into the heterotopic sites, but in fact that is only an illusion – we think we enter where we are, by the very fact that we enter, excluded” (26). The visitor must perform certain rites to gain entrance. The enactment of this sanctified rural space within an urban space creates a heterotopic site. This site is a conceptual ecological environment for the reasons outlined above and, as such, it is significant for understanding an Irish relationship with place.

### 2.3 The Well of Saints

Synge saw vagrancy as a type of rural bohemianism. He wrote that, “[m]an is naturally a nomad…and all wanderers have finer intellectual and physical perceptions than man who are condemned to local habitations” (*CW II* 195). Countering the modernity of the early twentieth-century urban spaces, Synge’s idea of vagrancy was a means of connecting with the landscape and living outside of restrictive norms. The main protagonists in *The Well of the Saints*, the Douls, a married couple, are vagrants who sit on the cusp between the social

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72 The theme of vagrancy and marginalization will also be examined in my discussion of Samuel Beckett’s *Not I*. These are points in the Irish narrative where environment is embodied in the performance of the marginalized individual.
urban sphere and the natural rural space. The setting is rural: “some lonely mountainous district in the east of Ireland” (69). First produced in 1905, the play is circular in structure (like Riders to the Sea) with the main protagonists, the Douls, ending the play where they begin: blind, ostracized and at the place where they beg for money. Joseph Holloway describes the play, in his diary entry on 1 February 1905, as “Mr. Synge’s harsh, irreverent, sensual representation of lyric and dirt” (53). The way the environment is represented in The Well of the Saints relates to two research questions: how does Irish theatre reinforce the rural and urban divide and why are the marginalized geographically closer to their environment? This section examines the motif of blindness in The Well of the Saints and suggests that this disability is associated with deviance amongst the surrounding community, ultimately resulting in the marginalization of the Douls. The Douls’ desire to return to blindness advocates a return to nature and rejection of modernity for the urban audience.

Synge spent time in France and was writing both in English and in French. Katherine Worth makes the point that “his notes on The Well of the Saints are half in French, half in English” (122). Although Synge was an accomplished linguist and it was not unusual for him to write his diaries in English, Italian, French and English throughout his travels, his notes on The Well of the Saints illustrate the influence of a traditional French farce, Moralite de l’Aveugle et du Boiteux. The farce is a medieval play involving two tramps, one blind, one crippled, who are healed by Saint Martin only to curse the favour. Yeats’s 1926 play The Cat and the Moon was based on the same story and the use of a couple locked in co-dependency which evolved as an Irish schema.

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73 The Well of the Saints is about a marginalized couple living in a rural area and Not I is about a marginalized person living in an urban area.

74 This Irish comic double act is also evident in Beckett’s work, Waiting for Godot, and Endgame, and O’Casey’s with characters such as Joxer, Captain Boyle and others.
There is also the recurrence of motifs from Irish folklore in Synge’s work. This manner of folklore collecting and reimagining the past was also evident in France and the work of Breton folklore collector Anatole Le Braz’ *La Légend de la Morte en Basse Bretagne* (1893) and *Au Pays des Pardons* (1894) were hugely influential on Synge’s study of the Aran Islands. Another novel based on Breton fishermen – which Synge brought to the Aran Islands – was *Pêcheur d’Islande* by Pierre Loti (1886), a writer Synge described as “the best living writer of prose” (qtd. in Gillen 133). The representation of marginal communities as keepers of memory linked directly to our past was central to Loti’s work. Synge admired Loti though there is evidence in his notebooks that he changed his mind accusing both Pierre Loti and Emily Lawless (whose 1892 novel *Grania* described life on Inishmaan) of romanticizing the past. He wrote that, to “write a real novel of the island life one would require to pass several years among the people, but Miss Lawless does not appear to have lived there. Indeed it would be hardly possible perhaps for a lady [to stay] longer than a few days” (103). Not only was Emily Lawless disingenuous in her account of the islands but she was also unable to write an accurate story given her gender and class. But, Synge goes on to say, “if she has erred has not done so as deeply as Pierre Loti in his *Pêcheur d’Islande*” (103). Synge displayed a desire for authenticity when describing culturally marginal communities in his accounts and his engagement with literature and travel-writing of the late-nineteenth century.

From the opening scene, the Douls are trying to establish themselves in relation to the setting, their place and where they are in the world. The play opens as the Douls “grop in on left and pass over to stones on right” (71). They look for a place to beg for coins from the locals on their way “to the fair of Clash” (71). Although neither can see, it is clear from the outset that beauty is important to them. They are described as ugly and weather-beaten but they have been given the impression by the local community that they are beautiful. Mary’s vanity is initially both determined and influenced by the opinions of the sighted locals. She describes “white beautiful skin – the like of my skin”
although she has never seen herself (71). She believes the locals “saying fine
tings of my face, and you know rightly it was ‘the beautiful dark woman’, they
did call me in Ballinatone” (71). Martin, however, is sceptical of what he hears:
“I do be thinking in the long nights it’d be a grand thing if we could see
ourselves for one hour, or a minute itself, the way we’d know surely we were
the finest man, and the finest woman, of the seven counties of the east” (73).
While Mary is blind not only in fact but also, metaphorically, to the lies of the
locals, Martin begins to question what they tell him.

The motif of blindness connects *The Well of the Saints* to Greek
drama in the same way that female tragedy did in *Riders to the Sea.*
Blindness is used as a tool to illustrate not just an ignorance of reality and
the truth but also that the blind can “see” more than the sighted. Just as
Teiresias saw the truth that Oedipus Rex was blind to, and in blindness
Lear finally sees, sight and wisdom is ultimately attained through ritual.
Blind to the attitude of the community, the Douls live their lives in
ignorance. While living on the margins of the local community, they are
often an object of amusement and ridicule. Their blindness makes them
dependent but they also remain outside the community and are treated
suspiciously. This suspicion is expressed through outbursts such as
Timmy’s towards Martin: “Oh the blind is wicked people and it’s no lie”,
but also through the physical experience of place as the Douls are
physically living by the well, at the margins of the communal space (119).
When they are sighted they take their place within the community but
when they are again blind they retreat to the margins.

In *The Well of the Saints*, the Douls seek a return to both metaphorical
and physical blindness. In the third act, as the pair are reconciled, they begin to
recreate the illusory world they had lived in before gaining their sight through
language:

There’s the sound of one of them twittering yellow birds do be coming
in the Spring-time from beyond the sea, and there’ll be a fine warmth
now in the sun, and a sweetness in the air, the way it’ll be a grand thing
to be sitting here quiet and easy, smelling the things growing up, and budding from the earth. (131)

The language indicates that this conceptual world is a return to nature and their eagerness to leave the community suggests their desire to return to this world.

As the play progresses, the couple become embroiled in various arguments with the locals and become embittered with each other. Throughout *The Well of the Saints*, the Douls have been lied to and deceived by the local community. When Martin makes advances to Molly she responds by differentiating not only between herself and the marginalized, but also between the rural and the urban community: “Go off now after your wife, and if she beats you again, let you go after the tinker girls is above running the hills, or down among the sluts of the town, and you’ll learn one day, maybe, the way a man should speak with a well-reared civil girl like me” (123). Molly’s response and her delineation between Martin, a vagrant, and “a well-reared civil girl” is reiterated throughout the play. Timmy sees Martin as an interloper and views him and Mary suspiciously. He notes their behaviour as being outside of the cultural norm stating to Martin that, “it’s a queer thing the way yourself and Mary Doul are after setting every person in this place, and up beyond to Rathvanna, talking of nothing, and thinking of nothing, but the way they do be looking in the face” (111). Timmy reacts violently to the insults the Douls hurl at Molly. He sees them as transgressors, breaking from the cultural values that bind the urban community.

The character that is supposed to be sensitive to the needs of the marginalized, the saint, is also metaphorically blind. He consistently refuses to listen in the third act as Martin asks not to have his sight restored: “We’re not asking our sight, holy father, and let you be walking on and leaving us in peace at the crossing roads, for it’s best we are this way, and we’re not asking to see” (139). Mary agrees: “Let us be as we are, holy father, and then we’ll be known again as the people is happy and blind” (143). The saint responds to their pleas
with anger and misunderstanding. He judges them incapable of making that decision for themselves: “If it was a seeing man I heard talking to me the like of that I’d put a black curse on him would weigh down his soul till it’ll be falling to hell; but you’re a poor blind sinner” (145). The community that surrounds the Douls is trapped in cycles of judgement and superficiality.

The community depicted in *The Well of the Saints* is incapable of progressive, rational thought. There is a hierarchal structure in the community where the most progressive and high-minded individuals lived in the most populated and urban environments. When the play was first performed in 1905 on the Abbey stage Thomas Keohler, reviewing for *Dana*, speculated as to the ability of rural communities to see the artifice in the story:

> there are thousands of people in this country who believe implicitly in the possibility of such a miracle taking place in this particular manner, and if the play should ever happen to be produced in rural districts, it would most likely tend to strengthen this belief, and in so far as it did so, would be allying itself to the already too numerous forces in the land opposed to intellectual progression. (qtd. in Thorton 129)

Keohler claims that the play should not be produced in rural districts where the audiences would think that the playacting is real. The fear that backwardness was prevalent in the rural districts of Ireland was a dominant one. These are ideas that have formed since the growth of the urban and rural divide in the wake of the industrial revolution. Greg Garrard writes that the “view of the universe as a great big machine” began to put in motion the drive to have a wild and untamed space (*Ecocriticism* 61). Wilderness is a “recent notion” that functions as “a place apart from, and opposed to, human culture” (60). Fear of the backwardness of untamed rural areas became a common trope in cultural discourse and Keohler’s concern over the inability of rural dwellers to understand theatre illustrates this division between nature and culture. Not only are the Douls wild and untamed but the rural audience would be unable to remain objective and rational.
The Douls refuse to adapt to the community and their strict codes of rural life. As P.J. Mathews writes, *The Well of The Saints* “celebrates the imagination and heroism of the dissident who refuses to be coerced into conformity at the behest of the moral majority” (*Cambridge* 3). The Douls realize too late that the wilder world that they have made for themselves is more suited to their needs. Martin professes to want to see: “I do be thinking in the long nights it’d be a grand thing if we could see ourselves for one hour, or a minute itself” (73). When he does gain his sight, he loses the world that the couple had created for themselves: their conceptual environment begins to unravel. The Douls (like the Aran Islanders) operate as counterpoints to the increasing modernity of Synge’s world. They live in rural environments but not the romanticized pastoral scenes that form so many nature aesthetics. Although Mathews has called the actions of the Douls dissidence (and they certainly show a rebellious attitude towards a second attempt to restore their sight), they are also returning to a world where they are cocooned from the reality of an emerging modernity. Blindness is linked with a regression not only from community and the surroundings but from the encroaching spaces of modernity.

The first act ends with a speech from the saint, reprimanding the Douls for their vanity, but both the Douls and the community are increasingly immune to saintly interventions. As Nicholas Grene notes, “no one on stage, least of all Mary and Martin, is likely to respond to the ascetic ideal of sainthood, for they are all irretrievably secular” (117). The miracle that they have just witnessed seems to go unacknowledged as the pair seems unimpressed by its outcome. There is a crisis of confidence in the religious figure (and by extension the Church) in the play and it is worth noting Lynn White’s point that “for animism the Church substituted the cult of the saints…but the cult of saints is functionally quite different from animism. The saint is not in natural objects” (10). Whereas pre-Christian beliefs would have a genius loci in each natural

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75 Greg Garrard argues that “no other trope is so deeply entrenched in Western culture” (*Ecocriticism* 33).
object be it a stream, hill or well, White argues that this connection was lost with the overlay of Christian belief systems. If this is the case, then the Douls’ loss of confidence in the abilities of the saint might be heralding a return to the more natural form of pre-Christian worship that White refers to.

The narrative of the community in *The Well of the Saints* is a fable. What is lost by the community in their rush toward modernization is a connection to the well and, by extension, the natural environment. White argues that with the loss of spirits in objects such as wells, man’s “effective monopoly on spirit in this world was confirmed, and the old inhibitions to the exploitation of nature crumbled” (10). This disconnection from nature set in motion the belief that the natural world was exploitable. Spirits were now to be found in religious men rather than natural objects. The change heralded a new mode of reason where nature, as Greg Garrard explains, was “now conceived as an enormous, soulless mechanism that worked to knowable natural laws” (*Ecocriticism* 62). The division in *The Well of the Saints* is between the natural site of the well, and the emerging cultural and religious framework that sanctions the exploitation of nature. And the division between the natural (the Douls) and cultural (the community) is reinforced as both sides accuse the other of blindness. 76 Having been rejected by the locals, the play ends at the well where the couple began their journey. They are vagrants, living outdoors and outside the boundaries of what the community deems conventional. *The Well of the Saints*, is an allegorical play that highlights the increasing divisions between the natural and cultural spheres. 77

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76 Just as Mary had judged the community at the beginning of the play, saying “they’re a bad lot those that have their sight”, so Timmy responds to the Douls’ transgressions: “Oh, the blind is wicked people, and it’s no lie (73, 119).

77 For Yeats, the flattening of the theatrical image into a symbolic image and the play’s cyclical structure was a successful method of delivering the message of Irish patriotism and beauty. Describing himself in a 1937 essay as “Synge’s convert”, he noted that, “It was certainly a day of triumph when the first act of *The Well of The Saints* held its audience, through the two chief patrons sat side by side under a stone cross from start to finish” (*CW II* 23).
The play’s linking of religious and cultural practice leaves the premodern site of the well as a more natural landscape. The play was influenced by a religious story told to Synge by blind storyteller Martín Ó Conghaile on the Aran Islands, (named Old Mourteen in Synge’s account, *The Aran Islands*). Martín told Synge the legend of a well that cured blindness on the islands. The main protagonist in the story, the mother of a blind boy, is party to a miracle:

Then she went out with the child and walked up to the well, and knelt down and began saying her prayers. Then she put her hand put for the water, and put it on his eyes, and the moment it touched him he called out: “Mother, look at the pretty flowers!” (*CW II* 56)

When Martin’s sight is restored it too is deemed a miracle albeit a soon to be unwelcomed one: “Oh glory be to god, I see now surely...I see the walls of the church, and the green bits of ferns in them, and yourself, holy father, and the great width of the sky” (93). With regained sight his surrounding environment emerges and it becomes evident that they desire a return to the conceptual landscape that they have imagined.

Although the influence of Synge’s travels is evident in the script, it is in his home place of Wicklow that *The Well of the Saints* is set. Synge travelled widely through Wicklow on foot. In his essay “The Vagrants of Wicklow”, Synge states that in “all the circumstances of this tramp life, there is a certain wildness that gives it romance and a particular value for those who look at life in Ireland with an eye that is aware of the arts also” (*CW II* 208). In the opening lines there is an emphasis on where the Douls are as they “grop[e] to try and recognise the environment or the landscape they occupy (71). In “The Vagrants of Wicklow” Synge casts the life of a vagrant in a positive light, wherein lie the “many privileges”: “The tramp of Ireland is little troubled by the laws, and lives in out-of-door conditions that keep him in good-humour and fine bodily health” (202). Synge also travelled in this mode, free to camp where and when he liked. Elaine Sisson notes that on his “solitary trips through Wicklow and Kerry, Synge does not so much travel through Ireland as within it; he sleeps in ditches, rests lying by the side of the road” (55). Mary Burke writes that “Synge’s description of peoples of the road undoubtedly draws from the subversive
discourse of the bohemian that saturates the Parisian cultural scene during the period in which he resided there” (Tinkers 101). She argues that Synge’s interest in the vagrant is linked to his interest in a native and more authentic culture: “Synge elevates the wanderer as the noble remnant of a threatened native culture that had valued expression and freedom over social climbing, avariciousness and close-mouthed conformity” (“Well” 47). Although there are points in Synge’s ethnographic accounts where he discusses the more negative characteristics of a life of vagrancy, overall, the freedom to travel is seen as positive rather than genuine penury.

The fact that the Douls choose to remain vagrants, over the settled and more modernized choices that the community offers, shows they prefer their nomadic way of life. Synge associates the image of the vagrant with a life of authenticity, less attached to the social symbols of a cultured and urban life. In both The Shadow of the Glen and The Playboy of the Western World characters are leaving a settled home for a life in the roads. In The Shadow of the Glen the tramp is given no personal name and referred to only as a tramp. He entices Nora to leave and join him as he returns to a natural environment and a more authentic way of living: “Come along with me now, lady of the house, and it’s not my blather you’ll be hearing only, but you’ll be hearing the herons crying out over the black lakes” (57). Just as the hard lives of the Aran Islanders were pitted against the power of the sea in Riders to the Sea, so the lives of the Douls are seen as more natural; their waning world a consequence of the modernization of Irish life.

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78 Synge does write about the more negative characteristics of the Wicklow vagrants. He distinguishes between what he thinks are genuine nomads and drunken wanderers searching for “ferns and flowers”: “If their sales are successful, both men and women drink heavily; so that they are always on the edge of starvation, and are miserably dressed, the women sometimes wearing nothing but an old petticoat and shawl – a scantiness of clothing that is sometimes met with also among the road-women of Kerry” (206)
Synge clearly valued what he thought was the wildness in a primitive culture and what it could teach an urban audience:

The absence of the heavy boot of Europe has preserved to these people the agile walk of the wild animal, while the general simplicity of their lives has given them many other points of physical perfection. Their way of life has never been acted on by anything much more artificial than the nests and burrows of the creatures that live round them. (CW II 66)

He felt that their primitivism was something that needs protecting. He wrote that “[t]ribes of the same natural development are, perhaps, frequent in half-civilized countries, but here a touch of refinement of old societies is blended, with singular effect, among the qualities of the wild animal” (66). Synge’s differentiation between the Aran Islanders and other rural tribes, as he calls them, marks the islands out as distinctive.

The wild nature of the Douls is illustrated in Martin’s response to Timmy’s arrival at the crossing. Timmy wants to tell him “I was coming to tell you it’s in this place there’d be a bigger wonder done in a short while” (77). Martin contemplates what the wondrous thing that Timmy is talking about could be: “I never hear of anything happen in this place since the night they killed the old fellow...and threw down his corpse into the bog” (77). Like Pegeen Mike’s complaint in The Playboy of the Western World that “there’s a great gap between a gallous story and a dirty deed”, violence is common trope in Synge’s work (169). Mary interjects to give her own suggestion as to the wonder: “Maybe they’re hanging a thief, above at the bit of a tree? I’m told that it’s a great sight to see a man hanging by his neck” (77). The use of violence, and the attraction that Synge’s characters have to it, denotes a moral ambiguity. This moral ambiguity is a part of the complication of these rural characters that is evident in Synge’s work. 79 In discussing the violence in The Playboy of the

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79 Morash and Richards have highlighted this trope in Synge’s Playboy: “Christy is a character who is too big to be contained by the realist set, so that a play which appears realist is in fact carrying out a critique of realism per se, in that the energy and language of the characters are in excess of the environment that ostensibly produced them, and which now must contain
Western World, Christopher Murray argues that the acceptance of patricide by the surrounding community creates a moral dilemma for the audience and results in their “the orthodox moral position” being challenged (Twentieth 85). The audience then become “implicated in the conspiracy” when they share in the community’s pleasure at Christy’s disclosure (85).

The same moral ambiguity is evident for the audience in The Well of the Saints. The community, and the audience by extension, see the Douls as vagrants and outsiders. The moral dilemma arises when the audience side with the Douls against the community, just as they are on Christy’s side in The Playboy of the Western World. The role of the vagrant or outsider is linked directly to the audience rather than the broader cultural or potentially urban community that surrounds him. Although the saint also lives a nomadic existence, there is the implication that the Douls are not like the rest of the community. The saint is deemed a respectable vagrant whereas the Douls are not. In fact there is a hostility between the Saint and the Douls with the Saint marking the Douls’ blindness out as the defining difference between them and the community: “Men who are dark a long while and thinking over queer thoughts in their heads, aren’t the like of simple men, who do be working every day, and praying, and living like ourselves” (77). The desire to return to a world of blindness is the antithesis of the onward progression central to an emerging modernity that the community and by extension the saint sees himself as part

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80 There is also enmity between a married couple, part of the travelling community, and a member of the clergy in The Tinker’s Wedding. In both plays, the tramps and the travellers are seen as guardians of an older Irish culture, one more in tune with the natural world and semi-aware of encroaching modernity. Mary Burke notes that for Synge, “tinkers and tramps are the custodians of local and autonomous values within a broader rural order that is acquiescing in the conformity and homogeneity required by modernity, prosperity and the Catholic Church’s imposition of standardised devotional practice” (“Well” 45). Although the saint is a vagrant in The Well of the Saints, he is not an outsider. The Douls are not only outsiders to the community but when given the choice they remain outsiders.
of. The mechanics of sight would be a necessary part of progressing in a world that values individual ability.

Reminiscent of the way Oisín is cursed in Yeats’s epic *The Wandering of Oisin* to live as a “creeping old man, full of sleep, with a spittle on his beard never dry”, the Douls are cast out of the communal space (389). However, while Oisín seeks salvation in the Christian church, Martin turns from it. Instead he associates peace with the life of vagrancy, a life not unlike the life the saint himself is living. Whereas Oisín ultimately turns to the structured, communal, and sanctioned religion, Martin and Mary retain their connection to the pre-modern space of the well. They desire is a nomadic way of life not because of religious piety but because of a need for escape from a modern urban environment. There is a gap between the wilderness and civilization in the play that neither Martin nor Mary can cross. The language of the community cannot extend to the Douls.

The great significance of this lesson for the Douls and for the audience is grounded in what Nicholas Grene has called “the very specificity of the local” (*Interpreting* 40). There is a clear division between illusion and reality throughout but the play is always rooted in the local. The play is a critique of the conventional norms of Irish communal life and pits a nomadic subculture (the vagrant or traveller) against the community and its moral guardian, the Catholic Church. The Douls symbolise an Irish culture that was being lost, subsumed into the conformity of emerging modern values. They are unwilling to work for a living as opposed to begging and living from hand to mouth. They remain voluntarily dependent on others. The choice the Douls made is antithetical to an emerging modernity; to be faced with the nature/culture divide and to choose nature.

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81 Martin sees solace in the same predicament: “I’ll be letting my beard grow in a short while – a beautiful, long, whole, silken, streamy beard, you wouldn’t see the like of in the eastern world” (131).
2.4 *DruidSynge*

Both *Riders to the Sea* and *The Well of the Saints* have characters that live in conditions where nature has a huge impact on their lives. They also accept that this is part of their integral identity. The influence that the West of Ireland had on Synge’s writing is evident in both plays. But how his work has subsequently been performed as an example of national theatre is also crucial to thinking about the conceptual environments that are being aestheticized. Druid’s decision to perform Synge’s entire repertoire in one sitting did more than provide a theatrical novelty for audiences. Described by Fintan O’Toole as “one of the greatest achievements in the history of Irish theatre”, the production offered an opportunity to explore Synge’s part in the mythologization of the rural west of Ireland (“Playing” 12). This section will analyse Synge’s work in performance and examine how the physical landscape in his plays are represented on stage. With the current discourse around the conservation of the local in the face of global domination\(^\text{82}\), the role of Druid theatre in problematizing the concept of Irishness has challenged conventional thinking about Irish cultural identity in performance. Druid’s dynamic reinterpretation of the work of Synge (one of the stalwarts of the Irish literary canon) and their re-imagining of his oeuvre, condensed into one day, allowed the audience to re-engage with traditional notions of Irishness. Exploring Synge’s six plays as one performance demanded new energies of both performers and audience. The full performance lasted eight and a half hours in the theatre with nineteen actors playing a total of thirty-nine parts.\(^\text{83}\) To that end, I will examine *DruidSynge* as a single entity; not six separate plays but one performance. I will be drawing

\(^{82}\) See also Ulrich Beck (2002) and Benedict Anderson (1991)

\(^{83}\) The plays were designed to be seen as one performance. Critic Charles Isherwood notes that:

“Ms. Hynes has designed the cycle to be seen as a whole and orchestrated it like a symphony, with comedy and pathos emphasised in different measures as one play succeeds another” (“Nasty” 6).
from all six plays and I will be exploring how that performance fits into and responds to Irish cultural identity as portrayed on the global theatrical stage.\textsuperscript{84}

Founded in Galway in 1975, Druid theatre works to explore the identity construction at the core of Irish literary life. The first professional theatre company to be established outside of Dublin, Druid established itself as a company based in and responding to the west of Ireland.\textsuperscript{85} Re-staging the seminal works of the Irish literary canon and supporting new playwrights such as Martin McDonagh, Marina Carr and Enda Walsh, the company explores the idealized notion of the rural islander as a longstanding example of Irish identity. This section contends that Druid use commonly occurring scenography established in the peasant play genre and in doing so questions how those visual metaphors became central to the language of the Irish theatre.

The use of sites of memory or \textit{lieux de memoire} to reinforce Irish cultural narratives is central to understanding how the natural landscape is performed on the theatrical stage. The natural landscape of the West functions as the embodiment of the local within the global, reflecting Michael Turnpenny’s argument that, “[c]ultural sites, places and artefacts can … be considered to be physical representation of perceptions of the self, community and belonging and their associated values” (299). The use of sites of memory is

\textsuperscript{84} For the purposes of this thesis, I will be referencing the 2007 Wildfire Film/Druid live recordings of all six performances.

\textsuperscript{85} Druid have brought many theatre productions to the Aran Islands. They performed \textit{The Playboy of the Western World} at Synge’s cottage on Inis Meáin in 1982 (even though \textit{Playboy} is set in County Mayo) and performed \textit{DruidSynge} in its entirety on the islands in 2005. Morash and Richards have pointed out that Druid’s engagement with the West reached new heights on their journey to the Aran Islands where “a field trip to Inishmaan was deemed crucial to the rehearsal process” (134). This close tie between the plays and Synge’s personal response to Aran resulted in a set that became “an expressionist emanation of [Synge’s] emotional state. This is clearly taking the specificity of place as a factor in understanding his work to the ultimate level” (\textit{Mapping} 134). Spatial authenticity (even when that particular place is not the place of the play) transcends all other forms of interpretation.
not exclusive to the Irish narrative but the use of the Aran Islands in particular corresponds to each of Pierre Nora’s three periods of memory. The first period is pre-modern, the peasant societies who were the holders of true social and collective memory. The second, the modern or industrial era, marks the beginning of a consolidated heritage and the creation of an historicised memory. The final period is contemporary memory and this is where the Druid Theatre’s work lies. The use of nostalgia is far removed from its original aim to preserve an authentic past. As Frawley argues in *Irish Pastoral*, Synge’s initial attempts to “recover, remember and commemorate Irish cultural forms of the past” led to the “reshaping” of his (and Yeats’s) nostalgia, “making it more critical – and intensifying it” (156). The nostalgic desire to capture a

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Fig 1: Opening scene from *Riders to the Sea*. Still from Wildfire/Druid documentary, 2007.

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86 As Nora points out, these *lieux de mémoire*, “Make their appearance by virtue of the deritualisation of our world – producing, manifesting, establishing, constructing, decreeing, and maintaining by artifice and by will a society deeply absorbed in its own transformation and renewal, one that inherently values the new over the ancient, the young over the old, the future over the past” (“Between” 12).

87 Nora argues that this contemporary modern memory “relies on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image” (“Between” 13).
disappearing identity in the West was a central trope in Synge’s work and something Druid sought to recapture in their productions.

If we were to take, for example, the opening scene in the Druid production of *Riders to the Sea* (Fig. 1) and apply the distinctions that Nora posits. The first phase, the pre-modern, is the society where true memory belonged in the sense that the communities’ shared experience and mutual inter-dependence meant that collective or folk memory could exist. The population on the Aran Islands, in the time that Synge was visiting and writing, shared this pre-modern sense of inter-dependence. As Morash and Richards have noted,

Synge’s observation that on the Aran Islands “few of the people are sufficiently used to modern time to understand in more than a vague way the convention of the hours” makes clear the extent to which the West was seen as free from the metronomic pressures modernising the rest of Ireland. (42)

This idea of pre-modern societies being spared from the pressures of modernization – and indeed the insistence that the Aran Islands was still operating as such at the turn of the twentieth century – is evident in the opening scene in *Riders to the Sea*. The accoutrements of pre-modernity are shown in this scene – the earthen floor, the country cottage, the spinning wheel – take on a shared significance of loss. These are objects on the point of disappearance at the time that Synge was framing them in the context of a theatre play. The tropes of manual labour (the spinning wheel, the home baked bread) where to disappear with industrialization, only to return as nostalgic imaginings of the past. This thesis argues that the use of these symbols in the opening scene – and the ritualistic baking of bread – does not provide a way of connecting with the past, but fetishizes the pre-modern. Luke Gibbons notes that, “through the healing powers of imagination and hindsight, the past was idealized to the extent that it receded from the present. Memory…became a way of disconnecting from, rather than connecting to, the past” (49). The scene show in Fig. 1 plays upon contemporary forms of nostalgia, and, as Gibbons points out, this result in a distancing rather than a uniting effect. The framed poverty on the
Druid stage – with its symbols of the past – establishes a site of memory. This site of memory is as performed as any other play. Nora has stated that, “[m]emorial sites exist because the social environment of memory exists no longer, the surroundings in which memory is an essential component of everyday experience” (Realms 1). I argue that the Aran Islands have moved through each of these stages of memory and in DruidSynge become a contemporary archive of place.

Premiering during the Galway Arts Festival at the Town Hall Theatre in Galway on 29 June 2005, DruidSynge was performed as a series of double bills on consecutive days and in their totality on 3 and 14 July. Following on from their performances in Galway, the full cycle was also performed at the Olympia Theatre in Dublin on 6 and 13 August and at the Edinburgh International Festival at the Kings Theatre on 27 and 31 August and 3 September. That year’s tour of the production culminated in two full cycle performances on Inis Meáin, one of the three islands comprising the Aran Islands, on 9 and 11 September. In 2006, the production travelled to America, performing at the Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis on 27 June and 1 July before moving to the

**Fig 2**: Beginning of Act 2, *The Playboy of the Western World*. Still from Wildfire/Druid documentary, 2007.
Gerald W. Lynch theatre for the Lincoln Centre Festival, performing seven performances of the full cycle between 10 July and 23 July.88

Directed by Garry Hynes, the cast of nineteen featured Druid founders Marie Mullan (who appeared in five of the six plays) and Mick Lally, and also included Eamon Morrissey, Catherine Walsh and Aaron Monaghan, amongst others. The design team included Druid stage designer, Francis O'Connor, lighting designer Davy Cunningham and Kathy Strachen as costume designer, creating a production where six plays created to be performed separately could function together in a coherent way. Reviewing the performance, Normand Berlin noted that *DruidSynge*:

> gave us a fresh look at Synge by putting all of his plays together in one day to make one single experience, finding the connection in theme, character, props, multiplying the acting roles, prodding us to hear echoes within plays and between plays, framing the cycle with dark plays that capture Synge’s dark vision of life. (102)

During the course of the single day event, the first performance *Riders to the Sea* began at 2 pm and was followed directly by *The Tinker’s Wedding*. After an intermission came *The Well of Saints* from 3.20 and *The Shadow of the Glen* from 5 pm. Then a 90 minute dinner interval was followed by the final two plays, *The Playboy of the Western World* and *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, which were separated by a further fifteen minute break. The total performance ran from 2pm to 10.30pm with four intervals in total, prompting journalist Michael Billington to remark that: “the event acquires a quasi-religious quality turning the audience into a communal congregation. What gives the Synge-cycle its unique interest is that it traverses, in chronological sequence, a dramatist’s entire career” (14). This marathon production allows Synge to be performed in a new and innovative context, the world that he created functioning as a microcosm, for a total of eight and a half hours.

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88 For an in-depth examination on the critical reception of *DruidSynge* in America, please see José Lanter’s article, “We’ll Be the Judges of That”: The Critical Reception of *DruidSynge* in the USA in *Irish Drama: Local and Global Perspectives*. Carysfort Press, (2012): 35-47.
Druid’s decision to perform Synge’s work was not without precedent in their repertoire. The first play performed by the Druid Theatre Company was Synge’s *Playboy of the Western World* on the 3 July 1975. The following year came *The Shadow of the Glen* and *The Tinker’s Wedding*, with a re-staging of *The Playboy of the Western World* in 1977, 1982 and 2004. The 1982 production proved to be a definitive one, with David Nowlan of the *Irish Times* stating that “it has drawn as clearly and as cruelly as might once have provoked riots the narrow-eyed, small minded peasant society in which this realistic drama can only be fully credible” (8). Lionel Pilkington writes that the production “inaugurates a rambunctious and refreshingly anti-romantic interpretation” with actors that had “local accents, visibly dirty hands and mud-encrusted feet” (“Playboy” 161). Hynes’s production, Pilkington notes, “conveyed an impression of a theatrical energy that was directly related to the company’s own auto-chthonic relationship to the play’s West of Ireland location and source” (161). The self-reflexivity that is evident in Synge’s work simultaneously allows for a complex and problematized view of the Irish peasantry while establishing Synge himself as the leading creator of the traditional Irish peasant play.89

Druid’s 1982 production delivered Synge’s work to a modern audience and challenged romantic illusions of rural Ireland, but it was a 2004 production of *Playboy* which prefigured the cycle that afforded Synge’s work a new perspective. Adrian Frazier argues that it introduced a type of “postmodern paddywackery” which opened up a new dimension to the work (115):

Now in 2004, through a sort of feedback loop in the Syngean tradition of Irish drama, *The Playboy* manifests the traits of...more recent playwrights and productions. Their radical and postmodern

89 Synge’s own description of *The Playboy of the Western World* shows he saw the play as “a comedy, an extravaganza, made to amuse” and the fact that he was eager to restore “the sex-element to its natural place” (Fallon 116; *Letters* 74). His viewpoint was clearly at odds with others, such as Joseph Holloway, who (in 1907) decried the play as “the outpouring of a morbid, unhealthy mind ever seeking on the dunghill of life for the nastiness that lies concealed there” (81).
aestheticizations of Irish rural life inspire at non-naturalist and almost 19th century melodramatic extravaganza. (124)

Contemporary playwrights, in particular Martin McDonagh, whose Leenane trilogy epitomizes this postmodern paddywackery, could build on a tradition of romantic ideas of the rural West. Druid’s productions of Synge’s work layers contemporary, melodramatic tropes over plays which already have issues of identity and authenticity as their main theme. The DruidSynge cycle was a deconstructed Synge for an audience well versed in how the peasant play, and the rural Irish peasant within it, operated as a synecdoche for the rest of Ireland. As Garry Hynes notes:

Once you design a set for The Playboy, everybody in the auditorium knows what play is about to go on. I wanted to get away from that. The Ireland of that time seems now only to exist in stage terms…It doesn’t seem to have a connection to anything any longer, other than a connection to itself. (qtd. in Frazier 89)

In Dublin, which had historically been the hub for the Revival and emergence of the rural west as the idealized image for Ireland, Druid performances have channeled Synge’s original desire for authenticity and challenged the romanticism of later Abbey playboy productions. Druid directly challenges the stage aesthetics of the Abbey, as Morash and Richards note, “the space evoked by a Druid production of Playboy is less Mayo than the dramatic image of that space as inherited from the earliest Abbey productions” (Mapping 128). Though Synge wrote about the rural west of Ireland, the claim to ownership of that construct or image lies not in Galway but in Dublin, the urban centre where the plays where first performed. Although the premiere of the DruidSynge cycle was in Galway, in their original context all the plays except for The Tinker’s Wedding, were premiered in Dublin. The performance of Irish cultural identity normally radiates from the capital but, as Lionel

90 For example, Ben Barnes has written that the “bizarre tradition of casting the Widow Quinn as an aged crone has only served to reinforce the idea of the play as fairytale or pantomime rather than the exuberantly savage act of theatre that Synge envisaged” (147).
Pilkington has written, an “early emphasis on authenticity and presence was to become Druid Theatre Company’s distinguishing feature (“Playboy” 161). This tour made a point of making the West its point of departure.

Edinburgh was DruidSynge’s first venture outside Ireland, where it was performed as part of the Edinburgh Arts Festival. Reviewing the performance in the Guardian, Michael Billington illustrates one of the complications in globalizing localities: “It helps, I suspect, to see the work in Galway itself. J.M Synge may have been Dublin-born, bourgeois Protestant but his abiding subject was Ireland’s wild west. And although Galway today is a cosmopolitan town...Synge’s language is never far away” (14). This comment points to the regionalism in Synge’s work although it is worth noting also that, according to Nora’s division of periods of memory, Synge’ work was created in the modern era and unable to form a concrete connection to folk memory. It is, in a modern sense, site-specific, focused on a particular place with all the associations of that place. Synge uses specifically Hibernian syntax, such as Martin’s in The Well of Saints: “There isn’t a wisp on that grey mare on the ridge of the world isn’t finer than the dirty twist on your head”, that would be associated by some as specific to the west of Ireland (97). The language was a localizing factor in the cycle insulating this world from outside influence, but the tour was also travelling beyond Irish borders. The Edinburgh International Arts Festival is a global event where the notions of cultural identity can be enacted at an international level. Moving from the rural west of Ireland as an idealized, emotive world created by the country as a whole, the imagery in DruidSynge becomes a microcosm for how Ireland is viewed globally.91

91 Gregory Castle notes, of The Playboy of the Western World, that performance becomes “self-reflexive, meta-discursive; and it is at this point that it can begin to function as part of a strategy of cultural translation, whereby ‘eccentric’ or ‘marginal’ rituals can become accessible in a ‘dominant’ discourse without suffering the violent and wholesale transmutation of native ritual into Western social text” (268).
In countering the crude stereotyping endemic in traditional images of the stage Irishman, Synge constructed archetypal characters that invited reflexivity on the part of the audience. The stage Irishman became a self-conscious performer in Synge’s plays often deliberately parodying themselves. Lionel Pilkington has made the point that “the stage Irishman holds a powerful potential to expose some of the anxieties and uncertainties that give rise to the stereotype in the first place” (Theatre 12). The image of the stage Irishman can be subverted on an Irish stage but when that archetypal characters (and setting) tours internationally, it can be accepted as a reasonably accurate representation by the audience and this is evident in the international response to DruidSynge. In performing cultural identity, and through that performance re-enforcing the perception of what it is to be Irish, this image operates exclusive of all others at a global level.

In performing all of Synge’s plays in one day, Druid demonstrates that it is through performance that cultural identity is formed. When cultural identity becomes short-circuited, whereby a marginalized community can be representative of an entire nation, the key is recognizing this as a construct rather than a reality. In a global context, however, the opportunity that DruidSynge offers in challenging cultural stereotypes and delivering a more complex view of Ireland fell short on a global stage. José Lanters examined the mixed reception that the 2006 tour of DruidSynge got in America: “Synge does not have the iconic presence he has in Ireland, and DruidSynge consequently had a different impact on that side of the Atlantic…and there was little agreement on whether Synge’s works were overly familiar or totally unknown to American audiences” (36). The difference between how critics perceive Irishness globally and in a specifically Irish context, or how Irishness is performed, needs to be acknowledged. Many of the US critics that Lanters talks about try to connect the Synge plays with other Irish playwrights, notes that the names of Beckett, McDonagh and McPherson were most often evoked. The

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92 Examples of the stage Irishman are Conn in The Shaughraun (1874) and Myles-na-Coppleen in The Colleen Bawn (1860), both written by Dion Boucicault.
issue here is the question of reception rather than performance. Lonergan has noted that:

It is vital that we do not fall into the trap of authenticating one kind of response while deriding another – but it is equally vital that critics bring an awareness of how local preoccupations shape their understanding of globally diffused plays. (223)

The translatability of a production from one country to another is dependent on that country’s impression of a particular identity. A large part of this thesis is the examination of how the Irish landscape is aestheticized by theatre practitioners. One of the reasons that the *DruidSynge* tour is crucial is that it is global in its outlook and transcends the nationalistic representations of Irishness.

As the Aran Islands came to be a heterotopic site for the rest of Ireland, it became the nexus for the mythologized notions of the country’s identity. Tim Robinson neatly describes Aran as, “that forlorn outcrop of want, [which] was to become one of the chief shrines of this Ireland of the mind” (qtd. in Guibert 136). *DruidSynge* was performed on Inis Meán in a large stone circular fortress, Dún Chonchúir. The only site-specific performance on the tour; Dún Chonchúir provided the layering of histories and the focus for both the Synge’s personal experience and the space for the resonant cultural identity as experienced in Ireland and abroad. The site formed in essence a *lieu de mémoire*, a place “where memory crystallizes and secretes itself” (“Between” 7). The Aran Islands are a conceptual ecological environment where notions of the past and collective memory have become embedded in the landscape, a space that touches on pre-modernity for a postmodern audience.

### 2.5 Conclusion

Examining the West of Ireland as a conceptual environment, I sought to examine how the material landscape is represented on stage. The first section looked at *Riders to the Sea* and its place in establishing the power of the natural world in the Irish narrative of place. As humanity sought dominance over the
natural world, the lives of the peasants in the west of Ireland illustrated just how dangerous a place the natural world was. Maury’s resignation in the face of multiple drownings is alien to an emerging urban community who would not be risking their lives on homebuilt curraghs at sea. *Riders to the Sea* and the lost place of the West, the *lieu de mémoire* that has been established within the Irish narrative, can be read as post-colonial, but it can also be read as environmental. This is an aestheticization of nature that moves the Irish narrative beyond the physical boundaries of place and into a broader discourse of environmental crisis.

Just as *Riders to the Sea* destabilized the boundaries between the human and the natural world, *The Well of the Saints* challenges the dehumanization, social exclusion, and alienation of two blind beggars. Returning to the borderland between culture and nature, the Douls represent, for the urban audience, the wilderness from which the audience are alienated. Raymond Williams challenges the notion of the wilderness as a place people would want to visit, “[t]here are some true wildernesses, some essentially untouched places. As a matter of fact (and of course almost by definition) few people going to ‘nature’ go to them” (*Problems* 77). This is why the community fears the Douls, because they represent what Williams calls true wilderness. They are not a part of accessible nature that people would be a part of.

*Druid/Syng*e explores authenticity in the performance of a specific type of Irish identity. This constructed identity exists as an illusory creation and a parody. The performance of memory as a cultural practice has been central to the re-iteration of Irish cultural identity. Within the creation and performance of cultural identity, the move toward the symbolic allowed for a simplified narrative designed to convey an ideological politicized message in the most effective way. The beginnings of this methodological approach are apparent in the Celtic mysticism of the Anglo-Irish Literary Revival which contributed to a very narrow romanticized image of Irish nationhood.93

93. The movement called for a return to the simplified authenticity of the peasant life of the Aran Islands, where “the Irish peasant was fundamentally ‘created’ and characterized for
Druid’s touring of Synge’s work is not real or live but versions of the same image, readable, translatable. Performing memory as cultural practice as evidenced in Druid’s work explores theatre not as a medium for uniqueness as championed by Walter Benjamin.\(^{94}\) The process is akin to digital performance (discussed in Chapter 5 of the thesis) where the virtual narratives constructed through digitization can effectively expand the theatre audience. Through digitization, performance never disappears but is constantly re-generating itself, the end result being, not a theatre archive, but a web of different narratives.

Nora’s study of *les lieux de mémoire* was an attempt to historicise memory and to acknowledge its role in the construction of identity; memory and – as a consequence – identity as socially constructed. This production of memory through community reached a point, in the foundation of an emerging modernism, which separated the modern world from collective memory and a deep relationship to the rural landscape.

The central thesis in this chapter contends that the imagined place of the west of Ireland is culturally constructed and forms a conceptual ecological environment. Synge used his time on the Aran Islands to aestheticize a conceptual space where Irish identity can be problematized. From *Riders to the Sea*, *The Well of the Saints* and through to *DruidSynge*, these are environments where the conceptual space is crucial. But they are also ecological environments because there is a holistic understanding of the relationship between things: between the physical landscape such as the sea or the well, the human input, be they characters or audiences and Synge’s original narrative of place.

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\(^{94}\) See “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936), page 98.
Chapter Three

Beckett’s Fragmented Environments

3.1 Introduction

If the West of Ireland is seen as a place where conceptual ideas of identity are concentrated, then the work of Samuel Beckett challenges the very notion of environmental embodiment. The impact of modernization (and its implications for the environment) is evident in Beckett’s plays. His conceptual environments are a powerful commentary on the porousness of the modern subject. The apocalyptic connotations in *All That Fall* and *Not I* are part of a broader narrative of place: one that reflects the anxieties of a post war Europe. This chapter examines the relationship between environmental risk and modernist writing in two of Beckett’s plays, *All That Fall* and *Not I*, and finishes with a performance analysis of Pan Pan’s innovative staging of *All That Fall* and *Embers*. These performances reflect Beckett’s own interest in matter as the ultimate human condition.

James Knowlson recounts a story of the young Beckett gathering stones from the beach in Greystones, Co. Wicklow and, bringing them back to his own garden, where he would place them in the branches of trees to protect them, “he came to rationalize this concern as the manifestation of an early fascination with the mineral…He linked this interest with Sigmund Freud’s view that human beings have a prebirth nostalgia to return to the mineral state” (29). This interest in the mineral state and its links to the prenatal universal is evident in Beckett’s work. Moving from the landscapes that Synge fictionalized for urban audiences, here I will explore the impact of modernization and technology on theatre. Just as certain visual images have become shorthand for environmental crises – the oil-covered sea-bird, for example—so the theatrical space has become a shortcut to visualizing aesthetic evocations of the environment.

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3.2 All That Fall

First broadcast on BBC radio on 13 January 1957, All That Fall pushed the boundaries of Beckett’s work, introducing a specificity of place (his own hometown) and a concreteness that would soon all but vanish from his stage plays. The one-act play follows the journey of Maddy, “the big pale blur”, as she journeys to and from Boghill railway station to collect her husband, “poor blind Dan”, on his birthday (176, 183). Maddy is in her seventies – and struggling with various ailments – her presence is heralded (and maintained throughout) by the “sound of her dragging feet” (172). Described by BBC producer Donald McWhinnie as “a mixture of realism and poetry, frustration and farce” the play is made up of three sections: the walk to Boghill train station, waiting at the station for her husband’s train to arrive, and the return journey (133).

Sinéad Mooney has noted that All That Fall is very much set in Beckett’s Protestant past and the concrete allusions to place support this claim. Boghill is based on Beckett’s own Dublin suburb of Foxrock and there are many mentions in All That Fall of real characters and incidents from his own childhood. The play was originally named Lovely Day for the Races and the text refers to its setting near a racecourse. Maddy says that the “entire scene, the hills, the plain, the race-course with its miles and miles of white rails and three red stands, the pretty little wayside station…I see it all” (185). Beckett’s childhood home, called “Cooldrinagh”, was located close to Leopardstown racecourse, on the periphery of Dublin. Maddy mentions Connelly’s van, a common sight in Foxrock as William Connelly ran a local store and Beckett’s

96 Beckett wrote in a letter to Irish writer, Aidan Higgins, dated 6 July 1956, showing his plans to set the play in Ireland: “Have been asked to write a radio play for the 3rd and am tempted, feet dragging and breath short and cartwheels and imprecations from the Brighton Rd to Foxrock station and back, insentient old mares in foal being welted by the cottages and the Devil tottering in the ditch – boyhood memories” (qtd. in Knowlson 428).
mother May was, according to Eoin O’Brien, “a regular customer” (22). The setting of *All That Fall* in Boghill not only concretises the environment in the real Dublin suburb of Foxrock but places the Rooney’s community in distinctly Protestant-class surroundings.

The environment that *All That Fall* depicts is midway between rural and urban. Like Lawrence Buell’s description of toxic environments as “a network or networks” where the boundary between nature and culture have become porous, Boghill is a place where humans are both enmeshed in and modified by their surroundings (657). The play opens with stage directions for “Rural Sounds. Sheep, bird, cow, cock, severally, then together” but later Beckett calls for them to be distinctly mechanical and false (172). As mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, when the BBC first recorded the play for broadcast, their suggestion for actual recording of the rural sounds was rejected by Beckett, who wanted “human approximations” (Homan 120). The non-realistic sounds reinforce two points: that the radio broadcast narrative exists through language alone, and the increasing intrusion of the urban with its mechanizations upon the rural.

After setting off on her journey to the train station the first person that Maddy meets is Christy. Described in the cast list for the play as a carter or dung-carrier, Christy is heralded with the sound of his cart and its “approaching cartwheels” (172). This is the first of three vehicles (indicating the increasing modernity of which they are a part) that interrupt the sound of Maddy’s shuffling footsteps. All three of them prove to be malfunctioning in some way. Maddy immediately recognizes Christy’s hinny pulling the cart: “I thought that hinny was familiar” (172). The appearance of the hinny is the beginning of a series of allusions to various forms of infertility throughout the play, which collectively attest to the use of motifs of infertility. For Daniel Albright, “the hinny – an undesirable crossbreed between donkey and horse, as

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97 Sidney Homan notes that in *All That Fall*, “the vehicles and the people have only their external sounds as a claim to existence, and that existence is frighteningly short-lived as each new sound supplants all previous ones” (118).
opposed to the esteemed mule – itself represents a sterile blurring of category; it is the beast-equivalent of a word in a dead language” (108). The hinny symbolizes a dead-end, a regression not only for Maddy but in the Boghill community.

Anna McMullan argues that these early “flesh-bound” female characters that Beckett produced gave way, in later plays, to bodies “on the borderline between the material and the imaginative” (Theatre 81). Beckett’s early female characters wrestle with materiality. Their bodies lie outside of the procreative nuclear families advocated in contemporary society. However, if Maddy is to be equated with the motif of the sterile animal one could arguably place her more in the realm of the natural than her husband Dan whose suggested infanticide is an active rather than a passive undertaking. 98 The feminization of nature forms a large part of ecofeminist discourse 99 and something that I will not delve into here albeit to say that Maddy’s desire for dissolution into the environment is hindered by the modern and capitalist impression of the natural environment as unproductive. They are unproductive because these spaces are unavailable to farming, planning, and urban development. Even agricultural land is a cultured rather than a natural landscape. Unproductive nature is in many ways the wasteland of modernity.

The sterile animal is a danger to contemporary society. Lee Edelman discusses this practice of modernity to exclude and alienate (what he calls reproductive futurism) with regard to queerness in “The Future is Kid Stuff: Queer Theory, Disidentification, and the Death Drive” (1998). Without the child symbol of futurity, the narrative of modernity – linear and progressive – begins to break down. The negation of the mantra of modernity, be fruitful and multiply, is, according to Edelman, the moment signalling the “radical

98 When Maddy learns why the train was delayed the implication is – although it is not made definite – that Dan Rooney was responsible for a child’s death, as Jerry tells her: “It was a little child fell out of the carriage, Ma’am. [Pause.] Under the wheels, Ma’am” (199).

99 Alaimo, for example, notes that, “most feminist theory has worked to disentangle woman from nature” (Bodily 5; emphasis in original).
dissolution of the contract, in every sense social and symbolic” (23). Maddy’s desire to return to the mineral state is radical in its opposition to modernity and the drive towards hetero-normative futurity. Her death drive, I argue, and the radical act of dissolution that she aspires to, is a move towards correcting the fantasy of the future. This is an important point because it places her as the other in the material environment.

Beckett’s characters in All That Fall are estranged from their environment. In the opening interaction with Christy the conversation seems strangely disconnected. As they exchange pleasantries the tone of the dialogue becomes stilted: “Why do you halt? [Pause] But why do I halt? [Silence]” she says (172). Maddy’s unsettling language suggests a slippage in understanding, meaning becoming increasingly unstable and unreliable. Language is shown to deteriorate within the play, as Maddy says: “do you find anything...bizarre in my way of speaking? [Pause.] I do not mean the voice. [Pause.] No, I mean the words” (173). The world that Maddy is part of seems to be dissolving. When Christy offers her “a small load of dung” she seems interested, saying “Dung? What class of dung?” (173). She says that she will ask Dan but instantly seems to forget her enthusiasm and changes her mind: “Dung? What do we want with dung, at our time of life? [Pause]” (173). Her thoughts appear fragmented and disjointed; the dung, a traditional and natural means of increasing soil fertility – and the antithesis of their declining fertility of the characters – is initially accepted and then abruptly rejected.

As she leaves Christy, Maddy becomes unreasonably upset by the hinny’s refusal to move along the road, the animal’s inertia is reflected in Maddy’s own difficulty in moving due to her obesity and various ailments. There is a sense that Maddy herself is the sterile hinny; unable to hold the animal’s gaze, she retreats: “Oh this is awful! [She moves on. Sound of her dragging feet.]” (173). She becomes increasingly agitated by her own physical inadequacies, saying: “oh let me just flop down flat on the road like a big fat jelly out of a bowl and never move again! A great big slop thick with grit and dust and flies, they would have to scoop me up with a shovel” (174). She begins
to lose solidity. I argue that the play illustrates Maddy Rooney’s body, not as an individual entity, but as part of its material environment. For Maddy, the deterioration of the body and how it is subsumed into the environment creates unease. Maddy’s crumbling self-determination signifies the collapse of the person into their environment.

Maddy is upset by memories of the past that remind her of her infertility and infirmity, saying: “Oh I’m just a hysterical old hag I know, destroyed with sorrow and pining and gentility and church-going and fat and rheumatism and childlessness” (174). She calls for her child that died, but just as suddenly as she is overcome with grief she is distracted: “There is that lovely laburnum again” (174). When she begins to lose herself in memory she attaches herself to an object in her environment. In the case of the laburnum, it appears again on her return journey towards the end of the play. In the second occurrence, instead of being described as “lovely” it is “losing all its tassels”, illustrating the growing decay as the play progresses (196). As Maddy dissolves into the environment, it too loses its fertility and a seeping toxicity of place emerges. This environmental toxicity traces the increasing exploitation of the environment in the ongoing, progressive futurity (to use Lee Edelman’s term) of modernity. The state of the material network between body and environment has become noxious.

The motif of infertility continues with the next encounter. Maddy’s second interaction is with Mr Tyler who arrives beside her on his bicycle. Paralleling the first encounter with Christy (where Maddy opened the conversation by asking about his sick wife), now she enquires after Mr. Tyler’s sick daughter. He explains that “they removed everything, you know, the whole ... er ... bag of tricks. Now I am grandchildless” (174). Illness and regression rather than growth have become a common part of the lives of this community. Illustrating the disconnection between Maddy and the people she interacts with, Mr. Tyler’s serious comments about his daughter’s illness and infertility are quickly replaced with the first of many sexual innuendoes that run throughout the play. When Mr Tyler suggests that he lay his hand on her shoulder as he is
unsteady on his bike Maddy’s response is “No, Mr Rooney, Mr Tyler I mean, I am tired of light old hands on my shoulders and other senseless places, sick and tired of them” (175). In the derisive manner that these innuendos are performed they serve to illustrate the uncoupling of sexual desire from fertility and procreation. Mr Tyler curses “the wet Saturday afternoon of my conception” (175). Maddy later reiterates the sexual confusion, asking Mr Tyler, “[w]ill you get along with you, Mr Rooney, Mr Tyler I mean, will you get along with you now and cease molesting me?” (176). As the binary between natural and unnatural begins to breakdown in the play, the sexual confusion and split between sex and procreation radicalizes the actions of the play as they become oppositional to traditional notions of progressive modernity.

Maddy’s difficulty in expressing herself in the world is shown in her comment to Mr Tyler: “It is suicide to be abroad. But what is it to be at home, Mr Tyler, what is it to be at home? A lingering dissolution” (175). As the world around her slowly recedes from her grasp she is left floundering. For Brynhildur Boyce this struggle indicates that “the natural world is slowly deteriorating but, significantly, is not quite dead. It undergoes not a conclusive fall so much as a sustained collapse” (504). This sustained collapse happens gradually as Maddy begins her journey to the station, and then slowly returns, finishing at the place she started where the play concludes. The conversation veers between Maddy’s hysterical and regressive fits and the bawdy and somewhat puerile humour, such as when Mr Tyler says, “[m]y back tyre has gone down again. I pumped it hard as iron before I set out. And now I am on the rim” (175). For Sidney Homan the sexual innuendos associated with Christy’s dung cart, Mr Tyler’s bike and Mr. Slocum’s car “[underscore] the limited pathetic physicality of their sounds and, by implication, of their owners” (119). The pathetic physicality of the play’s characters serves to remind the audience of the disjunction between the natural and unnatural environment in the play. It is as if these characters are aware that they are part of a radio play.

The farcical nature of their activity continues. There is a disconnection between what they are doing and what the listener is hearing. They stop
listeners can hear the cessation of steps), but it is only after the sound breaks that Maddy suggests they stop: “Let us halt a moment and let this vile dust fall back upon the viler worms” (175). There is a time-lapse, a cessation between what is being spoken and the actions of the characters. Although Mr Tyler has said that he is “doubly late, trebly, quadrupedly late” he now stops and extols the virtues of being alive, saying “ah in spite of it all it is a blessed thing to be alive in such weather, and out of hospital” (175-6). Being alive is something that Maddy challenges: “Speak for yourself, Mr Tyler. I am not half alive nor anything approaching it” (176). Her existence in the play is diminishing as she progresses along her journey. With this statement she seems to deny that she exists at all. She begins to alternate between sobbing and anger: “Have you no respect for misery” (176). She talks about Minnie, the child she lost: “In her forties now she’d be, I don’t know, fifty, girding up her lovely little loins, getting ready for the change” (176). This image illustrates not only the extreme and unnatural emotional changes that the characters experience in the play but the recurring motif of infertility.

Her desire for connection seems to continually fail, yet her physicality is all the more present in her attempts to relate to other people and the world around her. For Jeff Porter, Maddy’s body “is indomitable, as though Maddy had been granted special dispensation through being made out of sound” (439). The irony is that Maddy’s body, in its radiophonic invisibility, is more real and tangible than many of the bodies used in Beckett’s work. Porter argues that her attempts to connect with others may be proving futile, but there is strength in the materiality of her disintegrating body. It may not be creating a coherent human form, but – in its fragmented parts – there is a power in its materiality. The body that is made out of sound is reiterated throughout the play; for example, at the station an earlier farcical exchange is repeated as Tommy the station porter attempts to get her out of the car in which she is stuck. Maddy chastises him for speaking to Mr Slocum instead of helping her, saying: “Don’t take any notice of me. I do not exist” (179). Her existence, established within the framework of a radio play, relies on sound and her continuing denials and
confusion serves to destabilise the actions of the play. When Tommy does finally help her out of the car she’s not sure, saying: “Am I out?” (180). She is uncertain as to what is happening around her. Her surroundings seem unstable and she frequently wonders where and what she is doing.

Her odd disjointed behaviour, reiterated by the hyper-stylized and non-realistic soundscape, seems fragmented as if she is always relapsing. She seems aware that her body is failing and wants to be disembodied, saying: “What’s wrong with me, what’s wrong with me, never tranquil, seething out of my dirty old pelt, out of my skull, oh to be in atoms, in atoms! [Frenziedly.] ATOMS!” (177). But does Maddy exist at all? She does not exist as a corporeal body.

There is the uncertainty that she or that her surroundings exist, as she says: “I am not half alive nor anything approaching it” (176). Descriptions of her range from “a big pale blur” to “quivering like a blancmange” (183,189). She lacks definition, concreteness. As previously stated, she wants to “flop” (174).

Maddy Rooney is not the material body as a whole but one broken down into its constituent parts. The sound of dragging feet, the effort it takes to speak, the “puffing and panting”\(^\text{100}\) that Beckett described in a letter to Nancy Cunard, indicate not only the material process but that process in decay, the body as boundary disintegrating.

Having arrived at the station Maddy has a conversation with Mr Barrell, the station master, where it is indicated that this is her first venture out of the house for a while. The home is a place where Maddy can comfortably waste away, not bothered by the trials and efforts of everyday life: “Would I were lying stretched out in my comfortable bed, Mr. Barrell, just wasting slowly, painlessly away” (180-1). Mrs Rooney’s inability to express herself or to explain herself sufficiently to others causes ruptures in her dealing with the outside world. As Maddy forces her way through a group that is gathering to watch the commotion at the station, she thanks Miss Fitt for escorting her: “I

\(^{100}\) ‘In the dead of t’other night got a nice gruesome idea full of cartwheels and dragging and puffing and panting which may or may not lead to something.’ Letter to Nancy Cunard, 5\textsuperscript{th} July 1956 (Letters of Samuel Beckett: Vol 2 631).
am sorry for this ramdam Miss Fitt” (185). Her language is so archaic and detached that it provokes a reaction in Miss Fitt as the stage directions call for her to repeat the word, ramdam, “[in marvelling aside]” (185). While Mr Tyler and Miss Fitt have a conversation about Miss Fitt’s mother, who is apparently due on the last train, Maddy interjects, “Do not imagine, because I am silent, that I am not present, and alive, to all that is going on” (185). Her presence seems to be challenged, and called into question. She only exists through the medium of sound. Maddy is established through a process of speaking and listening (by way of a machine) rather than a body. Non-human, process-driven narratives are arguable evident in a play like All That Fall. The fact that Maddy is dissolving into the environment is a movement from form to matter.

As the train approaches the platform in front of the waiting group, the scene again descends into farce:

TOMMY. [Excitedly, in the distance.] She’s coming. [Pause. Nearer.] She’s at the level crossing! [Immediately exaggerated station sounds. Falling signals. Bells. Whistles. Crescendo of train whistle approaching. Sound of train rushing through station.]. (187)

There is an alignment here between Maddy’s sexual nonconformity – in her unproductive yet sexual physicality – and the arrival of the train. The mechanics in the play have all been retrograde; they breakdown. The successful arrival of the train, with its futuristic imagery of modernity and progress, is as absurd as Maddy’s various failures on the way to the station. Both Maddy and the train are broadcast through the mechanics of radio and their success at arriving in the station seems impossible. The arrival of the train points to the culmination of the play which then regresses: “[Noise of station emptying. Guard’s whistle. Train departing. Receding. Silence.]” (187). When Maddy finally meets her husband she is thrilled. This contrasts with Dan’s response:

MRS ROONEY. Kiss me!
MR ROONEY. Kiss you? In public? On the platform/ Before the boy? Have you taken leave of your senses? (188)
Although Dan accuses Maddy of taking leave of her senses it becomes clear that he too is retreating from his. When Maddy wishes him a happy birthday he does not remember an earlier conversation they had about it:

MRS ROONEY. Don’t you remember? I wished you your happy returns in the bathroom.
MR ROONEY. I did not hear you.
MRS ROONEY. But I gave you a tie! You have it on! [Pause.]. (188)

This it is also a play about the loss of selfhood in the face of modern technological advances. The dissipating self that Maddy Rooney experiences comes from a breakdown in communication seems to mock the very medium in which the play is set. She flows via sound across the boundaries of the radio set.

Analogous to the way communication breaks down to a radiophonic, sub-corporeal or chemical level throughout the play, with Dan’s arrival the weather also begins to worsen. At the beginning of Maddy’s journey the weather is good as she exclaims: “What Sky! What light!” (175). Here beginning the return journey, the weather worsens:

DAN ROONEY. [...]Curse that sun. It has gone in. What is the sun doing? [Wind]
MRS ROONEY. Shrouding, shrouding, the best of it is past. [Pause.] Soon the first great drops will fall splashing in the dust. (189)

Mrs Rooney’s response has a deadening effect. They struggle down the step of the station with the stage directions calling for “[...Panting. stumbling, ejaculations, curses. Silence.]” (190). When Maddy stops suddenly (having remembered that she didn’t find out why the train was late arriving), Dan becomes agitated: “I get a little way on me and begin to be carried along when suddenly you stop dead! Two hundred pounds of unhealthy fat! What possessed you to come out at all?” (191). He consistently evades Maddy’s questioning about what had happened. When the Lynch twins start jeering at them (as is a common occurrence) his tone darkens and he asks the question, “Will they pelt us with mud today, do you suppose?” (191). Within this ruined and apocalyptic environment, the Rooneys are subject to the tragedy of their own making.
The sequential and mechanical sounds of the animals perhaps herald their destruction, as Maddy says:


Dan’s language is destructive and negates his own relationship, family and home life. He cannot or will not acknowledge their surroundings saying, “I dream of other roads, in other lands. Of another home, another – [He hesitates.] another home” (192). He begins to explain the moment when he realised that the train was at a standstill. He was in the carriage debating whether he should retire. He adopted what Beckett describes in the stage directions as a “narrative voice” torn between the “horrors of home life” and his “silent, backstreet, basement office...and what it meant to be buried there alive” (193,194).

Just as the weather begins to deteriorate on the return journey so the natural environment begins to mutate and decay. Topics that had been touched on at the beginning of the journey such as the laburnum, the hinny and dung return. As they pass the previously “lovely” laburnum, she now notices that “it is losing all its tassels” (174,196). She arbitrarily wonders can hinnies procreate: “You know hinnies, or jinnies, aren’t they barren, or sterile, or whatever it is?” (197). She becomes more erratic asking Dan: “Do you want to buy some dung” (197). They stop and start on their journey, compelled to continue yet the world around them seems to be dissolving. In the closing moments, Schubert’s Death and the Maiden which had opened the play begins.

Maddy sees that Dan is crying. They begin to discuss the mass for the following day when Maddy quotes Psalm 145 from which the title of the play is derived, “the Lord upholdeth all that fall and raiseth up all those that be bowed down” (198). Their mutual response is to “join in wild laughter” (198). The play ends with the Rooney’s moving on as they have done previously.

There is an ambiguity indicating that perhaps Boghill is not as strictly delineated as it seems. For Ciaran Ross, “Like Maddy’s jellyish body, Boghill
also lacks solidity. For all its hints at an Irish setting, it sinisterly turns out to be that indeterminable topos, the spacing of a ‘resemblance’ that has nothing to resemble’ (21). The fact that this indeterminable topos is invisible to the eye of the listener, because it is a radio play, and only imagined through exposition creates a sense of unease. The notion of Boghill as both place, Foxrock, and the other (that interminable topos, as Ross describes it), reverberates with Maddy’s own inability to make sense of where she is. She is concerned about what she describes as her “bizarre” way of speaking (173). She calls her very existence into question: “I am not half alive nor anything approaching it” (176). Indeed, she seems to desire non-existence or at least a trans-corporeal existence: “Oh to be in atoms, in atoms” (177). The community of Boghill exists in a vacuum, a negative space that they continuously try to maintain – but that effort is doomed to failure. The fact that All That Fall is a radio play means that place – and consequently identity – are fleshed out only through sound.

There is a continuous stream of mechanical vehicles – a cart, bicycle and car that break down – all of which are evidence of an uncertainty towards progress and modernization. Emily Morin notes that the sound effects used by Briscoe and McWhinnie in the original BBC production in 1957 “accentuate the play’s ambivalent relationship to an industrial modernity, by associating spatial movement with unpredictable and potentially threatening correlations between human and machine” (9). The attempting and failing of progression are evident not just in the various vehicles but also the technology used in the broadcasting of the narrative and the biomechanics used in the hearing of that narrative.

101 Beckett’s interest in representing the anxiety of man as a material entity can also be found in his appreciation for Cezanne’s landscapes which he describes in a letter to Tom McCreevy: “Cézanne … seems to have been the first to see landscape and state it as material of a strictly peculiar order, incommensurable with all human expression whatsoever. Atomistic landscape with no velleities of vitalism, landscape with personality à la rigueur, but personality in its own terms, not in Pelman’s landscapality” (qtd. in Knowlson 197).

102 These correlations between human and machine speak to a fear that is evident in the
Alaimo’s theory of trans-corporeality may be framed by *All That Fall* because she seeks redress for the damaging impact of polluting matter, its agency and a more complex understanding of the material human body and its surroundings. She argues that matter has hitherto been “reduced into manageable bits or flattened into a blank slate for human inscription” (“MCS” 10). This thesis contends that the material breakdown of Maddy Rooney’s body is an stimulating – if not positive disintegration – rather than the “lingering dissolution” Maddy herself sees it as. Through the idea of trans-corporeality, Alaimo argues that we as humans can regain our sense of being in the world rather than standing outside it. She notes that “the environment has been drained of its blood, its liveliness, its agency, its ecologies and its creatures – in short, all that is recognizable as ‘nature’ – in order that it is a mere empty space, an uncontested ground for human development” (“MCS” 10). Human beings should not see themselves as fenced from their environment but a part of it. We are enmeshed in our environment and only through decentring the human body can we move more fluidly across bodily form and environmental nature.

Karen Barad’s concept of agential realism, the idea that matter is not passive but has agency is also relevant to Maddy radiophonic disembodiment. The relationships between matter, or intra-action, causes the individual to exist. She argues that:

[Matter] is not little bits of nature, or a blank slate, surface, or site passively awaiting signification, nor is it an uncontested ground for scientific, feminist, or Marxist theories. Matter is not a support, location, or referent, or source of sustainability for discourse. Matter is not immutable or passive. (“Posthumanist” 821)

To think of matter as active rather than passive in *All That Fall*, we can see that becoming disembodied does not mean that agency can be dismissed. The absence of language does not necessarily signify the absence of the human body. After all, Maddy herself says “do not imagine, because I am silent, that I am not present, and alive, to all that is going on” (185). With the theme of biotechnological developments that form part of the argument against transhumanism.
decomposition and dematerialization that is prevalent in *All That Fall* – as evident in the motifs of infertility, the hinny, the Rooney’s dead child, the prevalence of dung – there is also a sense of reconfiguration: of matter moving across bodies and environments. Material is reformed throughout and although matter de-solidifies and the mechanics sometimes fail there is continual change and flux throughout the play. The focus of the play is on the material dissolution of the body. Where other works by Beckett focus examine the body as an ever increasing imprisonment, Maddy (perhaps because she possesses a radiophonic body) does not stop moving. But she also never ceases to comment on that movement. Her ability to move surprises her, as if she herself is not in control of it.

To think about matter as agential shows discourse and discursive practice as not just human-centred. Matter is a process rather than a thing, and storied matter is central to Maddy Rooney’s body and its environment in *All That Fall*. Karan Barad challenges the hegemony of language and argues for a performative understanding of the world around us, a move from “questions of correspondence between descriptions and reality to matters of practices/doings/actions” (“Posthumanist” 802). Barad argues that we cannot stop from “accounting for our part of the tangled webs we weave” (*Meeting* 384). This move from description to action is very much part of the experiential breakdown that also forms part of a radio play, collective listening. Embodiment – and as a consequence physical action – never happens in the case of a radio play. So when we think of the materiality of the body it is not in the physical presence of the body but in the body imagined. The materiality emerges, materializes through the disembodied presence of the character. There is a compartmentalization of the senses; we cannot see but we hear. As an audience we are broken down into our individual parts: separate rooms, separate houses, across towns and cities. Listening to *All That Fall*, we are reminded of our own materiality and the biomechanical processes of the body. It is a reminder that a focus on the materiality of the body challenges, what Alaimo terms, the “fantasies of transcendence” (“States” 477). The process of
saying and language is above all material and as this thesis contends, it is recycled and reframed: materiality reformed.

### 3.3 Urban Sustainability and Not I

The growth of the urban landscape has been at the core of modernity. The United Nations’ Population Division predicts that there will be 9.7 billion human beings on our planet by the year 2050. Many of this population will live in urban centres and the growth of cities forms a central trope in many apocalyptic visions of the future. But why does the rise of urban space necessarily correlate with an unsustainable future? Apocalyptic narratives predicting the end of society have not always formed part of the history of the West. Greg Garrard has noted that the “prospect of an imminent eschaton or End of Time opened up for Judeo-Christianity in the two centuries on either side of the Christian Year Zero” (*Ecocriticism* 86). The emergence of apocalypse as a trope – and its connection to the unsustainable growth of the human population – is surely a discourse that needs to be countered in contemporary narratives. Apocalypse signaling the end of mankind is a prevalent symbol, spurring the sense of emergency that environmental discourse finds itself in.

The escalating population has a lot to do with the growth of the apocalypse as a symbol of the unsustainable drive towards the future. Lawrence Buell has pointed out that “Apocalypse is the single most important master metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal” (*Environmental* 285). This is growth on an unprecedented scale. Dipesh Chakrabarty has aptly noted, that what has emerged in contemporary discourse

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104 Buell has defined sustainability as “a mode of subsistence and more specifically a rate of agricultural or other crop-yield that can be maintained without detriment to the ecosystem” (*Future* 148).
is “[t]he challenge of having to think of human agency over multiple and incommensurable scales at once” (“Postcolonial” 1). This section examines how the urban city has moved from the utopian idea to the apocalyptic nightmare and suggests that the cityscape and its immensity of scale has inspired more sustainable practices, and corresponding narratives, for the human population. I will be reading Beckett’s *Not I* through the lens of sustainability and suggesting that prevalent fears of unsustainable growth have not necessarily been the only way to read modernist narratives of the city.

The emergence of the apocalyptic landscapes of the mind, the post Second World War wastelands of modernity, the polluted, the disenfranchised, and the aesthetics of apocalyptic fiction, is part of a more extensive, and fraught, narrative of place. Although Samuel Beckett’s texts became more self-generating in his later years and increasingly unhooked from concrete depictions of place, the material traces of place (in particular the post Second World War landscape) are evident in his work. These material traces of spatial experience, and the perceived unsustainability of the city, are what emerge in an ever-increasing toxicity of place. But is a viable and sustainable city not an option? Are urban inhabitants not greener and more viable in their consumption than the rural population? Can our narratives of the city be read as green texts?

The ecological anxiety that, I argue, is evident in work such as Beckett’s *Not I*, indicates a submergence in the broader urban landscape. This fusion between person and landscape, however, is truly urban with an energy that sustains rather than depletes.

Early twentieth-century modernism has had its impact on social spaces and the emergence of the cityscape as a symbol – both negative and positive – of human advancement and progress. But why has the city come to symbolise unsustainability? Lee Rozelle examines the interplay between modernist writers and urban environments and finds “modernist representations of urban spaces” prefigure the “awe and terror of our current crisis” (101). Their work anticipates contemporary narratives in, as Rozelle notes, “an awe-inspiring and terrifying (post)nature” (101). The suggestion is that modernist writers describe spaces
that cannot be equated with traditional natural sites and the growth of this (post)natural urban space is detrimental. But the growth of urban spaces lessens humanity’s impact on the rural environment. Nevertheless, the unsustainable cityscape has become the visual iconography in representations of the urban environment in modernist literature. This is an inversion of the utopian ideals of urban living: the emergence of a space dedicated to the human exchange of culture, business and government.

So how does the negative portrayal of the city figure in its evaluation as a more sustainable model for living? Modernity has created a condition that is antithetical to romanticized ideas of the urban environment. There is no nature; the condition of modernity is that both man and environment have become mechanized. How do we visualize urban centres – and urban networks – in contemporary culture? Does urban space impair the freedom we attribute to more rural sites? Is the alienating and ominous fragmentation of space in contemporary culture conducive to the performance of urban space and large-scale surveillance? In her seminal work, *A Cyborg Manifesto*, Donna Haraway states that “we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are all cyborgs” (191). Have we and the environment that surrounds us become automated and, if so, how should we represent that automation? I argue that it is in this modern urban cityscape that *Not I*’s protagonist, Mouth, resides, and that *Not I*’s portrayal of urban living is, essentially, a positive one. The location of the urban population (and its networks) in a relatively small geographic area creates a sustainable future and *Not I* is representative of how the human body interacts with those urban networks.

Beckett wrote *Not I* – in English in the spring of 1972 – and produced a play designed (in his own words) to work on the “nerves of the audience, not its intellect” (qtd. in Knowlson and Pilling 195). It is a play that closes down the theatrical space so that the focus is not on a figure or an actor onstage but on a body part: a mouth. The narrative is rushed, vaguely coherent and delivered in an anguished, prolonged torrent of words. The text is divided into four distinct
movements and is repetitive and circular in structure reiterating much of the same imagery throughout. Although dense and barely coherent in places, there is a narrative in the story that can be broken down into an introduction and four movements. This narrative is emblematic, I argue, of modernity and the energy released in the course of the play is suggestive of a sustainable, ecological and progressive model for living in urban space.

The play’s breathless and aggressive syntax reflects a life lived at a prodigious pace and vulnerability in the face of the ever-increasing speed of modern urban life. She starts with the birth: “…out…into this world…this world…tiny little thing…before its time….” (376). She sees herself and narrates her life in the third person, arguably, a modern tick of storytelling evident in social media. She is unanchored from family, having had a traumatic upbringing, and was abandoned at birth: “…parents unknown…unheard of…he having vanished…thin air…no sooner buttoned up his breeches….” (376). She lives her life on the margins, not speaking for the most part, but occasionally erupting into rambling and verbose rants that she cannot control:

MOUTH. mouth on fire…stream of words…in her ear…practically in her ear…not catching the half…not the quarter…no idea what she’s saying…imagine!..no idea what she’s saying!..and can’t stop…no stopping it…she who but a moment before…but a moment!..could not make a sound. (380)

The way the play is structured, the rhythm, the speed, and the urgency, is symptomatic of a pace of life that urban modernity offers. Jeremy Miller and Michael Schwartz have noted that to “possess speed is to be modern; to control speed rather than be controlled by it is perhaps the most important form of contemporary power” (17). The notion that speed is linked to modernity is a well-established truism but in Mouth’s case, the impact is destabilizing.

One of the most crucial points in Not I (and the reasoning behind the title) is Mouth’s inability to accept a traumatic experience as her own. The title refers to a negation of the self and she insists on speaking in the third person, “what?..no!..she!..SHE!” (377, 379, 381, 382). This denial illustrates Mouth’s
consistent evasion of personal responsibility and awareness. She is unable to process information or to create a linear narrative that allows her to live comfortably in her surroundings. The result is a circular, ceaseless performance from where neither the narrator nor the audience can escape. Alec Reid noted after seeing the play that: “I knew with every fibre of my being that I had been deluged in a flood of anguish from which I could not escape even though I could not know with what or whom I was involved. My first words were, ‘I have been scour’d’” (14). Like Maddy Rooney in *All That Fall*, there is an ambiguity as to whether Mouth is a concrete body or not. Paul Lawley has noted the mouth has no form. He writes that it “is a function rather than a being, a conduit through which pour the words which testify to being. Thus it cannot be silent, ‘half open’ or otherwise, *and* embody a presence as the narrated She can, for in itself it is a no-thing, a ‘no matter,’ an absence” (250; emphasis in original). But although it is formless, the voice is female, and we can also make certain assumptions from the narrative about her life, such as her abandonment as a child, her marginalization, and that her psychological state is fragile.

But how is the environment represented in *Not I*? How does the theatre space reflect the world outside? Various critics have argued that the stage space that makes up Mouth’s world is psychosomatic. Brian Gatten states that we are in Mouth’s purgatorial world. He argues that the catastrophic event that happens at Croker’s Acres is her death and she is trying to piece together her life’s narrative: “everything we see on stage is a projection of Mouth’s imagination, or else a metaphorical representation of her existential state in life” (96). The environment is depicted as a space that reflects Mouth’s state of being. She and her surroundings are intertwined. Her world as it is represented on stage is the ceaseless, surface white noise that is associated with living in the modern urban environment. Paul Lawley claims that what matters in *Not I* is the “magnetic” stage image:

> It is unignorable, attracting the text to itself and thus insisting upon a present-tense dimension to the story. The text hovers in panic between a past other, of which and whom it can safely talk, and a present self.
(hopelessly fragmented though that is), which it must continue to deny: Not I. (247)

This stage image is the depiction of a modern life, lived at a phenomenal pace. Fragmentation and the wish for oblivion, that Lawley notes, are prevalent in our modern urban society but it is not necessarily a destructive way of living. The dissolution of the body into the environment is, perhaps, an urban way of being, where the emphasis is not on the individual but on the collective. The power of the stage image in Not I and the world that it represents is not, I argue, her purgatorial world or her psyche, but urban modernity. The flood of anguish that is emitted throughout the performance, the deliberately confined, closed down space of both actor and audience, the circular pattern with its endless cycle of futile repetition are all expressions of urban modernity.

If Not I relates to the modern landscape, what kind of place does it depict? She embodies urbanism and performs that spatial practice (to use Michel de Certeau’s term) on the stage. Her bodily fragmentation, her anxieties, her endless circular narrative is not that of a corporeal body. We should not be looking to anthropomorphize the body part but should instead accept her as a fragment of living modernity. Mouth has become the modern body and, as such, has become technologized. She refers to her body as “the whole machine” (380). She talks about being disengaged from herself as a whole, saying “some flaw in her make-up…incapable of deceit…or the machine…more likely the machine…so disconnected…never got the message” (378). Perhaps her narrative is not singular but multiple. Rather than separating her from her environment through embodiment, we should see her as part of her environment in the way that an embodied person is not. The city is made up of thousands of individuals that in many ways cease to be individual and operate as one, in order to have a streamlined and cohesive community on a much greater scale than historically known. Mouth has become a fragmented part of urban modernity in the sense that the energy and forcefulness of her disjointed narrative creates a stage space where body and environment break down into one entity.
The key to *Not I* lies not only in the narrative gushing forth but in the tensions between Mouth’s denial of the self that has trapped her in the present tense, and her wish for oblivion. In many ways, Mouth is also a vestige of past ways of living. The modern urban body is one that interacts with its surroundings on a much more intuitive scale. So how does a mouth on a stage transmit self-awareness to an audience? It is not a body, but a piece of a body. The stage image is of the body fragmented. It is the tension that rests between she and I that exists on the stage for the audience, a stage that is for the most part dark. Mouth has been described as an orifice and her monologue described as a bodily purging, a physical act. For the audience the blackness of the space around the mouth and the impression of the mouth as symbolic of all bodily orifices triggers, in the words of Anna McMullan, a “body…turned inside out, and continually recycled by the voice as waste material” (‘Performing’ 150). There is no presence and no physical body on stage that would form a traditional performance. What is being performed is the absence or the end of the individual and the beginning of the body that has become totally immersed in the urban environment. It is interesting to link this idea with Daniel Dennett’s image of the self as constructed through the material we gather in our environment. The self creates a constant narrative, devised as we make sense of the world around us: “We (unlike professional human story tellers) do not consciously and deliberately figure out what narratives to tell and how to tell them; like spiderwebs, our tales are spun, but for the most part we don’t spin them; they spin us. Our human consciousness and our narrative selfhood is their product, not their source” (417-8). The narrative that we weave to form our own core identity is a direct response from our environment and our sensory connection with it. Perhaps *Not I’s* Mouth is an attempt to overcome that split in that relationship between body and environment.

If we are a product of a narrative generated from our surroundings then what space is surrounding the talking mouth in *Not I?* Mouth’s anguished monologue certainly reflects the uncertainties associated with urban living. In 1940, Walter Benjamin writes about encountering the city. He made the
observation that “fear, revulsion, and horror were the emotions which the big city crowd aroused in those who first observed it” (327). He describes moving through traffic which: “involves the individual in a series of shocks and collisions. At dangerous crossings nervous impulses flow through him in rapid succession, like the energy from a battery…Thus technology has subjected the human sensorium to a complex kind of training” (328). This energy, the nervous impulses that Benjamin talks about, reflects Mouth’s nervous energy. The experience of moving through the city is impossible given that Mouth is just that, a mouth, but through her performance that external urban world is brought inside into the space of the auditorium.

In his chapter “Walking in the City”, Michel de Certeau argues that “every story is a travel story – a spatial practice” and that the urban space of the street emerges through the embodied person (115). In moving through the city we make use of urban space that we cannot see objectively but feel through our senses resulting in a more insightful way of engaging with the city, as opposed to attempts at map-making and the objectification of the urban experience. He uses New York as an example of these two modes of engaging with urban space. Firstly, there are our attempts to negotiate the urban landscape through mapping or reading the landscape and turning it “into a text that lies before one’s eyes” (92). This omnipresent viewpoint – where we stand outside the urban space as a voyeur – is challenged by engaging with the city through walking. This is the experience of imagining the city as a spatial practice. Mouth’s spatial practice in Not I is one of moving through a distinctly urban space. Not unlike Stacy Alaimo’s concept of trans-corporeality, Mouth has become the porous body with the technological tools of modernity flowing through her. I would argue that literary texts such as Not I show an awareness of this flow of energy between, and are conscious of the body and its place in the environment. The concentrated networks within an urban environment, and its inhabitants, create a confluence of energies that are regenerative and are, thusly, sustainable.
Alaimo’s concept of trans-corporeality allows us to pick up on Lawrence Buell’s networks of modernity but to move towards the notion of networks of materiality, where matter moves fluidly between human and non-human. Alaimo discusses the ethical and political implications of thinking about the space between the human and what she calls more-than-human nature. She points out that “imagining human corporeality as trans-corporeality, in which the human is always inter-meshed with the more-than-human world, underlines the extent to which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from ‘the environment’” (Bodily 2) I argue that, in much the same way, the impact of the networks of modernity has affected Mouth in Not I. She makes manifest the physiological impact of living in a modern landscape. This focus on the materiality of body is a process that allows us to narrate on different scales, overcoming the challenge of thinking along microscopic versus macroscopic modes of perception that the anthropogenic debate has generated. Mouth could be deemed an example of the emergence of the trans-corporeal body with barely perceptible interchanges between itself and environment. These interchanges result in entanglements where the body can never be separated from the environment. Matter thus is agential and illustrates or narrates the global inequalities that have become a feature of the contemporary climate crisis. The porous body is steeped in the networks of materiality to which it is exposed.

Mouth illustrates that porosity in Not I. The tropes of living in urban modernity – such as the energy, the technology, and the urban space itself – are central to Mouth’s way of being. We negotiate urban space differently to rural space, as de Certeau notes, “The networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces: in relation to representation, it remains daily and indefinitely other” (93). The fragmentation of the narratives of negotiated space is represented in Not I. Our bodies succumb to the urban space and we become hive-like, communicating in new and distinctly modern ways. De Certeau’s method for negotiating the city
moves away from the voyeuristic experience of the urban city as text and into a more sincere experience of moving through urban space. This is a creative act understood and practiced by those who live “down below” (93). It is in the interacting with the environment at ground-level that the individual begins to break down.

This breaking down of the body into the landscape is not always seen a progressive and radical act. In *Rambling as Resistance*, Jason Kosnoski challenges Michel de Certeau’s idea of walking in the city by suggesting that in our contemporary modern urban city, the fragmentation of spaces and our inability to transcend them is destructive: “Individuals face more and more observation, control and discipline through both spatial and temporal strategies upon the body, yet the fragmentation of spaces, cities and regions ensure that individuals do not traverse the entirety of their environment with freedom or creativity” (127-8). So which position does Mouth take? Is her engagement with her surrounding a creative act, embracing how the city and its intrinsic modernity have evolved? There is evidence in *Not I*, supporting Kosnoski’s assertion, that urban space actually impairs our freedom. There is a repeated ray or beam of light – which she mistakes for the moon – that shines on Mouth and hints at the ubiquitous surveillance devices used in monitoring urban populations. She describes the beam of light as omnipresent, “always in the same spot” (378). Its presence is relentless and searching, “ferreting around…painless…so far…ha!...so far” (381). She initially thinks the beam of light is the moon but then changes her mind, “probably not…certainly not always the same spot …now bright…now shrouded…but always the same spot…as no moon could…no…no moon…just all part of the same wish to…torment” (378). This beam of light is unnatural, penetrating and threatening. In much the same way as large-scale surveillance is used in a modern context, the effect is heightened anxiety and tension.

The alienating and ominous fragmentation of space is certainly evident in *Not I*. This enclosing of urban space is essentially an argument that returns the body to that of the viewer, framing rather than immersed in the
environment. The contemporary urban landscape contains within its geographical spaces the concerns that are prevalent in much of Beckett’s work: alienation, loneliness, paralysis. Yet the word landscape itself is problematic. Cultural Geographer John Wylie describes landscape as “a tension between proximity and distance, body and mind, sensuous immersion and detached observation. Is landscape the world we are living in, or a scene we are looking at, from afar?” (Landscape 1). In much the same way that de Certeau distrusts attempts at mapping or creating an objective viewpoint of the city, the narrative of Not I is immersed totally within the city space as opposed to attempting to frame it impartially. This challenges attempts to describe the city as landscape. Raymond Williams argues that “the very idea of landscape implies separation and observation” (Country 120). He describes a framed environment, to be looked at from a distance, and something (in the same way scenery in a theatre might be) not to be interacted with. These definitions of landscape suggest an inability to be part of an environment that is being narrated.

These tensions between the body and its environment, between being both immersed and outside the space, are reflective not just of the audience in the theatrical space but in Mouth’s way of seeing herself. She does describe her environment – a “little mound in Croker’s Acres”, a “busy shopping centre” or the “godforsaken hole” where she was born – as something that stands outside of herself (380, 379, 376). However, in his work, Landscape and Memory, Simon Schema notes that we are: “accustomed to separate nature and human perception into two realms, they are, in fact, indivisible. Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock” (6-7). It could be argued, in accordance with other critiques of Not I, that the traumatic event that has instigated Mouth’s denial of identity has left her unable to place herself in the world. She remains outside her environment, a voyeur; in much the same way that de Certeau argues, her experience of place is only a simulacrum of the true urban city. Mouth cannot truly know her environment and that is at the core of her trauma. However, rather than seeing the landscape (from the
traditional Western mode), as something to be framed or looked upon – following from Raymond William’s notion of landscape as implying separation and observation – I contend that Mouth is fully immersed in her environment. The environment in Not I does not represent the traditional landscape, framed and separated from the body or observer that experienced it, but a landscape of modernity.

The urban cityscape does not exist in opposition to the rural mode of living but as a part of an emerging environmental ecology. The notion of the golden age of rural life emerges from the urban perspective. The natural world has become a tool with which we can ask questions about culture. The theatrical space is bound by the physical confines of the urban place but it gives us access to nature and the natural world through performance. Through the memories that she evokes in her monologue and her concrete engagement with the space of the stage, Mouth exists in the throes of modernity. Circular rather than linear, a world where the body in space is not articulated with the entire body – but fragmented. From the outside in, Beckett’s theatrical landscape internalizes the elements of modernity that form the urban landscape and performs that urbanism in Not I.

Not I is a play that embodies and narrates the complex processes that are a part of the modern, urban landscape. But can the city, as represented in literary texts and plays such as Not I, move beyond the apocalyptic vision of the future and can there be a more sustainable and progressive outlook for urban modernity? Timothy Morton has stated that there is no longer such a thing as a natural landscape; that the condition of modernity is that both man and environment have become mechanized. That labour is hidden and aestheticized and has resulted in the creation of “Junkspace” – a phrase borrowed from architect Rem Koolhaas to denote our contemporary urban spaces. Morton argues that, “Capitalist thinking, and Capitalist machinery, actively ‘disappear’ the workers who operate it…Humans ‘man’ the machines: more than ever, human beingness is now revealed as a product of mechanical processes” (Ecology 86-7). Rem Koolhaus offers us this concept of the Junkspace as the
ultimate wasteland of modernity, a place “so extensive that you rarely perceive limits, it promotes disorientation by any means (mirror, polish, echo)” (175). Mechanized and disenfranchised, there are no human forms in Not I but human parts. The result is a white noise, an automated art-form that is symptomatic of a broader apocalyptic environment.

What these impressions of modernity – the speed, fluidity and shine – do have, is the ability incite a fear of the city as a nexus for environmental crisis. Apocalyptic narratives have deemed the city as the site for a failed humanity. But as the majority of humanity now live in urban areas, there is a need for new narrative that sees the city not as a harbinger of environmental devastation but a citadel for sustainability. The impacts of the networks of modernity, auto, telephonic and internet, have certainly affected visual culture. This contemporary aesthetic of the urban make manifest the physiological impact of living in a modern landscape. Not I opens up a space that reflects this prevalent urbanism and in Mouth (its protagonist) creates a figure that embodies the energy, the interdependence and the precariousness of urban living.

We must remember that Not I is a performed rather than a real representation of an urban space. Corina Martin-Jordache notes that “Beckett’s cities seem to have gone a long way from the proud city-states of antiquity or the enlightened cities of the renaissance. They are the exhausted cities of the twentieth century modernity, post-Waste Land cities” (366). What of Beckett’s plays? What of the theatrical space itself? Does it perform the same urbanism or urban space as the descriptions of the depleted cities as described by Martin-Jordache? Can the figures that populate Beckett’s theatrical landscape internalise the elements of modernity that form part of the cityscape and perform that urbanism? And is that urbanism sustainable? I wanted to examine, in this section, how place is registered in Not I and what kind of place it is. How does the theatrical space of Not I relate to the modern cityscape? How do spaces of interiority such as the theatre itself or the thought process evoked in Not I describe or link to these exterior places? I have argued that the emergence
of the apocalyptic landscapes of the mind in his work is part of a broader narrative of place, one that reflects society’s deepening material and environmental anxieties. But, I also want to point out that these are urban spaces that imitate the circular, ceaseless energy that is generated in the city.

The anxieties, of which urban centres form a large part, emerge with the attempts to encounter and narrate our own materiality and interaction with the space around us. The interconnectedness of the body in the environment, being and language, the biological and the mechanical is central to modernist narratives of the city. The social history of the body and the inequalities perpetrated on it is evident in Mouth’s attempts to interact in an urban environment. The fragmentation of the body in *Not I* goes some way to remedy this hierarchy of belonging in social space. Matter becoming agential – be it a body part, or humanity as a geological force – allows for narratives that supersede traditional representations of social communities, be they urban or rural.

### 3.4 Pan Pan’s Staging of Beckett’s Radio Plays

The aim of this final section is to examine how sound in performance can be seen as conceptual ecological environments. Disembodied oration is central to both *Not I* and *All That Fall* and here I want to examine what it means for plays with an emphasis on sound to be performed. Buell argues that toxic discourse “unsettles received assumptions about the boundaries of nature writing and environmental representation generally” (“Toxic” 640). I want to analyse Pan Pan’s staging of *All That Fall* and *Embers* as representative of toxic ecological environments in Buell’s sense of the term toxic.\(^{105}\) The characters in these plays have difficulty remembering and being in their environment. The result is an

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\(^{105}\) Buell states that “[c]ontemporary toxic discourse effectively starts with Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*” (645). The discourse “inverts and democratises the pastoral ideal: a nurturing space of clean air, clean water, and pleasant uncluttered surroundings that is ours by right” (648).
uneasy relationship between the body and its surroundings. The move from a strictly aural radio play to a more immersive performance piece has also shifted the boundaries from singular to collective listening. Did this change highlight the theme of environmental toxicity that is central to Buell’s idea of toxic discourse? Was the performance still a radio play? Does the performance venue represent a conceptual environment? This section will look at the staging of Beckett’s work for radio and see how changing the medium for transmission ultimately changed the character of the play.

Pan Pan’s radical staging of Beckett’s radio plays began with *All That Fall* at the Project Arts Centre in Dublin in August 2011 and has since incorporated *Embers*. Co-founded by Gavin Quinn and Aedín Cosgrove in 1991, the company creates experimental theatre that transcends traditional

![Set for Pan Pan’s *All That Fall*, Photographer Ros Kavanagh](image)
modes of theatrical production. Both their productions of *All That Fall* and *Embers* succeed in capturing the various separate elements of theatrical performance – not only the audio and the visual but also the immediacy of the collective experience. What kind of environments are these plays? Are these productions radio plays, performance art or sound installations? Can Pan Pan’s staging of the radio plays be read as something other than theatre – sound sculpture or an art installation, for example? How does the broadening of the piece impact on its spatiality? Shannon Jackson argues that “it has always been hard to decide where the autonomous theatrical art piece ended and its context began: in the text, in the acting of the text, in the acting and design of the text, in the theatre space, in the seating arrangement of the audience” (171). A large part of understanding the context of Pan Pan’s radical staging of *All That Fall* and *Embers* involves appending them not as medium-specific, but if a radio play moves to the stage, does its meaning not change?

Pan Pan’s productions place *All That Fall* and *Embers* back in the theatre space while retaining the character of a radio play. Beckett had insisted that *All That Fall* not be staged as it “will be destructive of whatever quality it may have and which depends on the whole thing’s coming out of the dark” (qtd. in Zilliacus 3). This perhaps does not do justice to the visual qualities that emerge from a non-visual medium. Martin Esslin notes that, “far from being a blind medium, radio […] is an intensely visual medium. The nature of man’s consciousness and sensory apparatus is predominantly visual, and inevitably compels him to think and imagine in visual images” (*Mediations* 131-2). The medium of radio facilitates the creation of vivid visual images that Esslin argues are satisfying in the sense that they can be individually realised. Rather than focusing on a stage set, the individual can use his or her imagination to envision the environment.

For Pan Pan’s artistic director Gavin Quinn the productions are different from the original radio play in that the Pan Pan production’s communal element is what contributes to its strength. Discussing *All That Fall* he says: “I see the audience experiencing the text in a corporeal way, because they are actually
part of the installation, part of the performance” (qtd. in Walsh, “Pan Pan”). He highlights the differences in recording for radio versus performance, saying that their particular footage is “recorded to play aloud, it’s not recorded for radio. It’s been recorded in an anechoic space, so there are no sound reflections. It’s just the voice. You start with the voice and build. So it’s a slightly different way of doing it. There’s no room ambience”. It is interesting to note that Quinn sees the production of All That Fall as “a kind of social sculpture, having everyone there, listening together...it’s sort of decentering the idea perhaps of a radio play, but also decentering the experience of coming into the auditorium front on and sitting watching a play”. Pan Pan’s staging is radical because it bridges that gap between an audience watching and listening to a play, The idea of a theatre play as a piece of social sculpture brings a self-reflexivity to the experience of going to watch the play. Self-reflexivity (or self-awareness) has become an increasing part of the debate around the fourth wall in other art practices and in particular performance art. Rather than losing yourself in character or the world of the play you remain aware of your surroundings. Quinn also notes that “the performances were recorded but they came from a live body so it’s playing with that interesting ambiguity between the live performance and the radio text”.

This differentiation between the live and the recorded, the event and its documentation, is how this radical new type of environment is generated.

For the original audience of the radio play the world of All That Fall is not seen but heard and realized through the experience of Maddy Rooney. The same could be said for the Pan Pan production. Although there is an audience present, and there are lights and props that enhance or hinder the experience, the performance is not a staging of Boghill. Not unlike the rise of monologue theatre in Ireland which has been linked to a folk history of story-telling, the Pan Pan production is an exercise in collective listening unlike the disjointed audience members of the original radio play. The divide between sight and sound for the audience members occur in both the original radio play and Pan Pan’s production. Judith Wilkinson notes that (given advances in sound technology) Pan Pan sound designer, Jimmy Eadie’s “recording of All That Fall

130
reproduces almost identically the experience of someone speaking directly into one’s inner ear” (133). She also highlights the increased physicality of the involvement where Eadie “manages to amplify the bodily experience of many of Beckett’s highly invasive and startling sound effects present in the original recording. When the up mail train arrives in the Pan Pan version, it feels like it is literally hitting you in the chest” (133). Eadie has highlighted one of the advantages of seeing the play in an auditorium: the superior audio technology. The Pan Pan production emphasises the biomechanical processes of the human body and the technology supports this. The ecosystem that consists of the auditorium with its bodies, both human and nonhuman, are brought together in a rarefied atmosphere. In bringing the audience together but keeping the character of radio play, attention is drawn to not only the corporeal processes but the trans-corporeal. Alaimo makes the point that “the human body is never a rigidly enclosed, protected entity, but vulnerable to the substances and flows of its environment” and I think this is reflected in the aural/visual breaking down of the audience, Alaimo (Bodily 28). I would argue that the Pan Pan’s All That Fall is a conceptual ecological environment in that it highlights the movement between substances in a regulated space.

Embers, written three years after All That Fall, also began as a radio play. As with All That Fall, there is hesitancy in confirming or denying the existence the surrounding landscape. Although we can hear the sea its presence is called into question as Henry says: “I say that sound you hear is the sea, we are sitting on a strand. [Pause.] I mention it because the sound is so strange, so unlike the sound of the sea, that if you didn’t see what it was you wouldn’t know what it was” (253). If you didn’t hear the sound of the sea, then it wouldn’t exist in the minds of the listening audience. There is no visual evidence to support Henry’s claim that the sound is the sea. Like Maddy, Henry also speaks in order to exist, to drown out the sound of the encroaching sea and the awareness of his own mortality. As the listener is only hearing Henry’s thoughts, we are party to a one-sided conversation.
This intense subjectivity is something that Martin Esslin argues is suited to radio drama as it “came at a particularly appropriate moment in the development of modern literature: both in the novel and in drama the reaction against naturalism led to an increasing…internalization of subject matter” (Mediations 178). The solitary nature of radio listening contributed to this increased subjectivity. Hearing the internal musings of Henry and Maddy on the radio allowed the audience to strongly visualize the world of the play. Pan Pan’s staging also gives the audience that space to imagine, but to do so collectively, more self-aware and in a communal setting. The difference is that listening has now become a group activity.

Pan Pan’s staging also incorporates a visual as well as an audio element. In All That Fall skulls are printed on the cushions of the rocking chairs. The rocking chairs imitate the slow rocking in Rockaby. Rocking is both a comfort and indicative of time passing but also an allusion to and mediation on death. The sounds of the sea that Embers evokes emanate from Andrew Clancy’s huge sculpture of a skull, the presence of which pulls the audience back into the present space of the performance. The solidity of the skull belies the hundreds

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**Fig. 4:** Set for Pan Pan’s Embers. Photographer: Ros Kavanagh, 2013.
of fragmented layers of wood used to make up the object, its weightiness grounding the audience in the space. This sculpture is in a theatre rather than a gallery and perhaps taking the place of the performers that would normally fill that space. Of course, Beckett insisted that *All That Fall* was a “radio text, for voices, not bodies” (qtd. in Zilliacus). The focus is on sound rather than physical presence. Pan Pan Sound Designer Jimmy Eadie notes that “Beckett…was broadcasting *[Embers]* over the medium of radio which would have been a much smaller speaker. So the sound pressure levels achieved in that would be much smaller than what I was able to achieve with all my speakers. And I was moving air at you, so you were getting this physical intensity from it” (qtd. in Wilkenson 134). This is the main distinction between *All That Fall* and *Embers* and Beckett’s stage work. The physical body is central to theatre.

There have been various staged versions of *All That Fall* but Pan Pan has focused not just on the act of shared listening but also incorporates a strongly visual element to suggest the environment in the productions. The performance space is flooded with a wall of yellow light. This immersive experience is reminiscent of artist Olafur Eliasson’s 2003 installation in the Turbine Hall at the Tate Modern. Bathing the audience with sunlight, or at least the experience of it, both productions use technology to simulate nature, or create a world for the audience to interact with. Creating an artificial environment, the work is the triumph of the mechanical or mediated representations of nature, neither of which is real. The result is that we become aware of the staging or process and our part in it. For Eliasson this gives the viewers the ability to “see ourselves in the third person, or actually to step out of ourselves and see the whole set-up with the artefact” (37). The disclosing of mimetic practices – a central part of the theatre production – and a connection with the performance at a visceral level (through the bodily experience of the audio technology), arguably, allows the audience to experience the performance more profoundly. Not unlike Brecht’s *verfremdungseffekt* – where the artifice of the performance is revealed – there is a confrontation or a challenge to the
audience’s passivity. Unlike Brecht’s theatre, however, the desire is for the audience to connect with their bodies rather than their minds.

The idea of a radio play “coming out of the dark” is central to Beckett’s vision for *All That Fall* (qtd. in Zilliacus 3). The soundscape complements the notion that what exists through sound might not necessarily be there in reality. Maddy’s regression and slow disappearance from the reality of her surroundings is communicated through sound. The script calls for sounds that are not what they seem, and non-realistic such as the approximated animal noises. Martin Esslin comments that,

Beckett’s script demanded a degree of stylized realism hitherto unheard of in radio drama, and new methods had to be found to extract the various sounds needed….They did so by treating them electronically: slowing down, speeding up, adding echo, fragmenting them by cutting them into segments, and putting them together in new ways. (“Samuel” 276)

This development of the technical aspect of radio broadcasting allowed the listener to experience not realism but the subjective world of the narrator/creator. In *All That Fall* the journey is as it is perceived by Maddy. *All That Fall* is the world she has created and we as listeners take the sounds she experiences as her reality. The world that she creates waxes and wanes with her own perception of her surroundings. For Daniel Albright the result is the making strange that is also evident in Brechtian theatre:

What is the listener to make of Mrs Rooney’s bizarre way of speaking, Her weird inversions of syntax? I suspect that Beckett intended the decoding difficulties as a verfremdungseffekt, a specifying, a making-concrete of the alieness of a voice coming out of a little machine in our living room: the estranging power of the medium itself. (110-1)

As Albright states, the power of radio drama to make strange is accentuated in *All That Fall* because of the estranging power of the medium itself. As mentioned in the first section, when the BBC first recorded the play for transmission their suggestion for actual recording of the rural sounds was turned down by Beckett who wanted “human approximations” – that is, humans making animal noises (Homan 120). The non-realistic sounds reinforce the
point that the narrative exists only through language and the instability of that language is central to Maddy’s suffering.

Pan Pan’s production of *All That Fall* is not a physical performance in the traditional sense because of the use of recorded voices for the actors. In *Embers*, the actors who are visible to the audience at the beginning soon disappear behind the cavernous skull from which their voices emanate. There is no live performer but the trace of one. *All That Fall* and *Embers* were not originally live theatrical performances. Both were recorded and the original event took place in the recording studio. The staging is successful is that there is also the theatrical element in that the pleasure is in the collective listening – the presence of the audience rather than the performer. We are still in the theatre. Herbert Blau notes that “of all the performing arts the theatre stinks most of mortality” and the ritualism and collectivism of a theatre performance is still there in Pan Pan’s staging (132). The ebbing and the regression in both *All That Fall* and *Embers* is all the more palpable in the absence of the performers as the audience listen alone to Henry’s parting words: “Nothing, all day nothing. [Pause.] All day all night nothing. [Pause.] Not a sound” (264).

### 3.5 Conclusion

Beckett’s interest in the mineral ran parallel to his personal configuration of the environment – fragmented, dismantled, and broken down. He wrote a letter to Mary Manning Howe on the 11 July 1937 declaring an interest in a “ruptured writing, so that the void may protrude, like a hernia” (*Letters 1* 521). This chapter argues that the emergence of the landscapes of the mind in *All That Fall* and *Not I* is part of a narrative of place. The interconnectedness of the body in the environment, being and language, the biological and the mechanical is evident in Beckett’s work. The first section examined the landscape in *All That Fall* and Maddy Rooney’s gradual withdrawal from it. The second looked at the urban landscape as a sustainability system and the final section looked at two radio plays in performance: *All That Fall* and *Embers*. There is a sense of
retarded development in *All the Fall* as each mode of transport to her destination breaks down. The place that the Rooneys have occupied is becoming, in Maddy’s words, “a lingering dissolution” (175). The community with which Beckett identifies as his own was dying. For Daniel Albright this is a play that collapses in on itself: “As words lose their meaning, and sounds decay into echoes and random cues, a general degradation of being takes place. Indeed the play’s mind, the play’s whole sensory apparatus, seems to be failing” (110). Albright is right to note that the play’s sensory apparatus is failing given that it is dependent on one sense, hearing. The insularity that the medium of radio allows is brought about by modernization.

The impact of technology on the fragmentation of the body is reflected in how these plays are performed. This chapter argued that these plays are the beginning of a move towards a decentring of the human body. That Beckett’s focusing on one sensory aspect of the human body, hearing, to deliver a performance is a part of a larger discourse on material disembodiment. Rosi Braidotti has made the point that biotechnologies have meant that a “qualitative conceptual dislocation has taken place in the contemporary classification of embodied subjects” (*Posthuman* 97). She argues that this mean that “the markers for the organization and distribution of differences are now located in micro instances of vital materiality” (97). *All That Fall, Not I*, and *Embers* are as relevant today as they were when they were first written because they prefigure this material fragmentation of the human body.
Chapter Four

Conceptualizing the North

4.1 Introduction

The West of Ireland is certainly not the only conceptual environment in the aesthetic range of the Irish playwright. The North, too, is a place where cultural identity has emerged, been formed, and contested. In the Irish Times, Friel described the North as the fifth province or a “province of the mind through which we hope to devise another way of looking at Ireland, or another possible Ireland” (Quilligan et al. 10). This chapter is a counterpoint to the West as the only cultural framework of place. Conceptual environments can be based in real landscapes but, also, in the ideologies of those seeking to aestheticize them. In the second chapter, I examined the West of Ireland as a place steeped in nostalgic imaginings of the natural world. In the third chapter, through Beckett’s work, I looked at place as toxic, something to be grasped at but never fully immersed in. Here, I will explore the intersection between theatre and the geographical space of the North.

Environmental trauma, or a scarred and silent land, has been the dominant trope in the Irish aesthetic. From post-famine lazy-beds ghosting the landscape to the mass-deforestation chronicled in early Irish laments such as “Caoine Cill Cháis”, there has been a correlation between environmental and human trauma.106 My suggestion is that these occurrences are aligned because,  

106 The opening lines of Caoine Cill Cháis mourn the loss of the surrounding forests: ‘Now what will we do for timber, with the last of the woods laid low’ (‘Cad a dhéanfaimid feasta gan adhmad? Tá deireadh na goillte ar lár’ trans. Tomas Kinsella 329). The issue of deforestation recurs throughout Irish literature, an example being Joyce’s “Cyclops” episode in Ulysses which is examined in full in Yi-Peng Lai’s chapter, “The Tree Wedding and the (Eco)Politics of Irish Forestry in ‘Cyclops’” in Eco-Joyce. Lai cites Eoin Neeson’s research into Irish deforestation, notably his book, A History of Irish Forestry (Dublin: Liliput Press,
as Jane Bennett notes in *Vibrant Matter*, “there was never a time when human agency was anything other than an interfolding network of humanity and non-humanity” (31). The many conceptual iterations of the Irish landscape involve human narratives alongside the material that make up that landscape. Soil, shore, or bog, these environments, not only consist of their own matter, but invoke the same material interplay in the theatrical and aesthetic expression of these landscapes. Brian Friel’s depictions of the North may be in dialogue with history in much the same way that the early Irish laments are, but I argue that the environmental trauma that emerges in his plays is an anxiety about contemporary society. Whereas the West is a nostalgic mediation on the past, the narratives of the North are predicated on the future. The anxiety latent in Friel’s work – particularly in the two plays that I have chosen to discuss – indicates an unrest that emerges from encroaching urban modernization.

Ulrich Beck’s definition of a newly modernized society emphasizes the notion of risk where the contemporary environment is infused with potentially harmful components. Beck defines risk as a “*systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by modernization itself*” (21; emphasis in original). He argues that a world society emerges when people conceive of themselves as global subjects. Friel’s awareness of the mythologizing of histories of place in the North is global in outlook and is a result of the anxieties Beck talks about in a world risk society. In both conceptual environments – the West and the North – Irish theatre has aestheticized an abstracted rather than an authentic landscape. I contend that the anxiety of modernity – dispossession of place, increasing toxicity and alienation – is central to Friel’s depiction of the North. The anxiety that is evident in his performance of a conceptual place (conceptual place being an ideological or

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1991), where Neeson argues that deforestation “paralleled the political history of the country” (5).
performed place, as outlined throughout this thesis) is shown in how the landscape is represented in his work.

Lawrence Buell has argued that where “environmental writing and criticism intervenes most powerfully within and against standard conceptions of spatial apportionment is by challenging assumptions about border and scale” (Future 76). He cites Friel’s Translations as an example of this spatial concern noting that for Friel, “the home culture has never not been fragmented” (81; emphasis in original). In order to establish the traumatized landscape as a product of modernity, I will focus on how home culture is performed using spatial motifs (such as colonial cartography in Translations). These spatial motifs are analyzed as manifestations of environmental trauma that are a reflection of contemporary anxieties rather than historical ones.

The Field Day Theatre Company was a cross border initiative financed by the Art Councils on both sides of the Irish border. The fifth province of the mind was to function metaphorically, in the same way that the theatrical landscapes in this dissertation work: as a conceptual environment. The company sought to create a place where notions of Irishness can be teased apart. Richard Pine has described the company as an experimental field in which the qualities and conditions of being Irish can be examined and discussed. One vital physical property which has metaphysical significance is the fact that the point at the centre of the crossroads, the meeting place of the four provinces, is the quintessence – the fifth place at which the essential secret or truth is buried. (Diviner 25)

The fifth province that Field Day sought to establish with their two most renowned productions, Translations and Making History, underscores the idea of landscape as a conceptual environment. Marilynn Richtarik notes that Field Day’s objective was “the notion of a fifth province above the fray of national politics and the conviction that art could shape as well as reflect society” (92). Field Day is a theatre company that has defined itself spatially from its inception. Translations and Making History epitomize that spatial concern in creating a conceptual environment of the North.
The first section, “Translations”, centres around two expressions of the opposing forces in the North: the colonial cartography of the English sappers and the native Irish-speaking hedge-schools. The setting of the play is Baile Beag/Ballybeg in County Donegal. Friel’s fictional village of Baile Beag (meaning small town) is the location often used in Friel’s plays, including Philadelphia, Here I Come! (1964), Dancing at Lughnasa (1990), and The Home Place (2005). The second section, “Exile and the North in Making History” explores the impact of historical trauma on the landscape of the North. The third section of the chapter, “Ouroboros/Making History”, will examine the Ouroboros/Making History site-specific tour looking at the ongoing disenfranchisement between people and place that is a central concern of Friel’s work. This chapter will establish these two Field Day plays as a commentary on contemporary rather than historical issues about land possession and think about what the North means for Irish ecocritical discourse.

Beck argues that there are three phases that have formed the basis for contemporary society: pre-modernity (or the traditional society), simple modernity (or the industrial society), and reflexive modernity, (where we are currently). Reflexive modernization is the state of uncertainty that we (as global rather than national citizens) live in since the Chernobyl disaster. Beck writes that the impact of this toxic shock “forces one to rediscover human beings as natural entities” as the self-imposed boundaries between human and nonhuman dissolve (Ecological 50). Because contemporary Western society is operating from within reflexive modernity it cannot understand the issues facing communities who have lived in pre-modern societies. The Ireland that Friel chooses to represent in his plays still resembles Synge’s descriptions of Irish rurality.107 Friel makes the point that “beneath the patina of Hiltonesque Hotels and intercontinental jet airports and mohair suits and private swimming-pools that is what we still are – a peasant people” (“Plays” 305). Firmly rooted in issues of dispossession and the landscape of rural Ireland, Translations and

107 That Friel’s grandparents were illiterate Irish speakers from Donegal would also have shaped his work.
Making History may be about historical communities but their audience is contemporary Ireland. There is an anxiety about modernization that is pervasive in Friel’s work and stems from cultural responses to modernity. Beck states that the in the “age of risk the threats we are confronted with cannot be attributed to God or nature but to ‘modernization’ and ‘progress’ itself” (qtd. in Yates 99). The second modern culture of fear is based on the threats of modernization. This chapter contends that there is evidence of an increasing environmental toxicity (as a result of modernization) in Translations and Making History.

The ongoing metaphor of the fifth province in the North, as an egalitarian sphere of artistic endeavour, forms the basis for these plays. Thus, the framework is in place for a conceptual ecological environment: one that encompasses both the ideologies of the North as an imagined place and the environmental anxiety of a risk society. The fictional inhabitants of Baile Beag/Ballybeg display a deep connection to their environment but still long to leave it: often escaping the mundane for a specific place (which they have romanticized), America. For example, Maire in Translations wants to emigrate: “I’m going to America as soon as the harvest’s all saved,” she says (400). In Philadelphia, Here I Come, Gar feels trapped, saying that “I’ve stuck around this hole far too long. I’m telling you, it’s a bloody quagmire, a backwater, a dead-end!” (79). He elaborates, emphasizing the natural features of Ballybeg: “I hate the place, and every stone, and every rock, and every piece of heather around it! Hate it! Hate it!” (79). He describes the landscape Ballybeg as “a bloody quagmire” in contrast with his impression of America as an abstract environment, what he calls “a vast restless place” (79). Owain Jones has pointed out in his account of place, landscape and memory that “[e]xiles and displacements generate absences in terms of past home(lands) which then live in complex relation to new dwelt landscapes” (12). Gar does remain ambivalent about leaving, caught between Ballybeg and Philadelphia. There is a fear of modernity as much as there is an attraction to it. The anxiety associated with
modernity, as outlined by Beck, mean that we can no longer attribute environmental disasters to gods or the natural world but to modernization.

4.2 *Translations*

Set in late August 1833, *Translations* is centred on the arrival of British soldiers Captain Lancey and Lieutenant Yolland to the Irish-speaking townland of Baile Beag. The soldiers form part of a detachment of the Royal Engineers sent to transliterate place-names and map the area for the Ordnance Survey scheme which had been established in 1824. The scheme (which was led in reality by Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Colby, Captain Lancey’s real-life counterpart) sought to create a detailed map of Ireland to a scale of six inches to one mile. Captain Lancey introduces the scheme to the local inhabitants of Baile Beag/Ballybeg as the “first ever comprehensive survey of this entire country” (406). The need for the scheme was justified by the statement that the “entire basis of land valuation can be reassessed for purposes of more equitable taxation” (406). This mapping also involved the anglicisation of native Irish place-names. James Fairhill makes the point that in *Translations*, “the survey is the equivalent of clear-felling the forests in its razing of Irish rural place-names, many of which referred to natural features (372).” Oona Frawley, too, notes that the survey “sent teams of both British soldiers and Irish intellectuals into previously neglected areas to record (but in practice often alter) place names as well as charting the landscape” (Irish 45). The equation of the survey with the clearing of the forests lamented in songs such as “Caoine Cill Cháis” illustrates, not only the tumultuous effect of the scheme but also, the link between colonial possession and the natural environment.

*Translations* is influenced by Friel’s upbringing in the North (his family moved to Derry when he was ten) and the impact of the cycle of violence that was becoming commonplace. Seamus Deane argues in the introduction to *Plays*
One that Friel was reacting to the breaking down of his own social environment as, “Police and army, guerrillas and assassins, bombers and torturers became so prominent in a sudden militarized society that the notion of its ever having been a decent unpolluted place seems utterly absurd” (11). There is a sense, in Deane’s comment, that the idea of Derry as a polluted place is something that is entrenched in the structure of the city. ¹⁰⁸ He might describe living in a militarized society as sudden but he also writes that it is absurd to think of Derry as ever being anything other than polluted. The plays that Field Day are performing are meaningful to Irish conceptions of space because, in the North, modernity has been established through violence.

The modernity brought about through violence that *Translations* examines is reminiscent of the point that Joe Cleary made (which I also mention in the first chapter) that “industrialization or technological modernity” did not happen in Ireland’s case but the “traumatic sense of breakneck modernization, of rapid cultural transformation and psychic transformation” did arrive by way of colonialization (7). Colonialization was not just a political and an economic system of oppression but also a psychic one. Placenames formed a large part of this political power play over geographical space. Kurt Bullock writes that, “the naming of place serves multiple functions. It is a way of identifying and of marking; it is a way of knowing; and it is a way of understanding” (98). For Friel, naming as a way of knowing is difficult to grasp as he admits that knowledge itself is uncertain. As he writes in a diary entry while in the process of writing *Translations*, “One aspect that keeps eluding me: the wholeness, the integrity, of that Gaelic past. Maybe because I don’t believe in it” (qtd. in Coogan 58). The importance of landscape in *Translations* and the severing of the connection between people and place are central to Friel’s exploration of the mind-set of the rural community. Ballybeg’s inhabitants are as attached to – or entrenched in – their environment as much as

¹⁰⁸ Willie Doherty’s photography serves as a prime example of this anxiety of place. He examines the nature of memory and remembrance and concentrates on how the landscape of Derry and its surroundings are marked by the “Troubles".
they resent it. In *Translations* the audience knows that the famine is less than twelve years after the events on stage. The impact on the landscape was enormous. Oona Frawley notes that: “Post-Famine Ireland resembled a war zone: land was in utter devastation; fields were unrecognizably blackened; much of the remainder of forest had been cut down for fuel; whole villages had been deserted due to death, starvation and eviction” (*Irish* 45). When Bridget voices her suspicions, Maire and Doalty are quick to counter:

BRIDGET. They say that the way it snakes in, don’t they? First the smell; and then one morning the stalks are all black and limp.

DOALTY. Are you stupid? It’s the rotting stalks makes the sweet smell for God’s sake. That’s what the smell is – rotting stalks.

MAIRE. Sweet smell! Sweet smell! Every year at this time somebody comes back with stories of the sweet smell. Sweet God, did the potatoes ever fail in Baile Beag? Well, did they ever – ever? Never! There was never blight here. Never. Never. But we’re always sniffing about for it, aren’t we? – looking for disaster. (395)

Richard Pine argues that “there are two inseparable factors in the Irish imagination: landscape and rhetoric” (“Brian” 191). Friel’s passage above is a poignant reminder of the denial of the impending disaster that was to destroy rural communities. The impending crisis is heralded by the physical sense of smell.

Environmental history is written in our bodies. This point is argued in the academic work of new materialism and what Stacy Alaimo terms “material memoirs” (*Bodily* 86). A memoir is a person’s narrative of the past and Alaimo describes the body as a material memoir. The material memoir is a narrative embedded in the material body and its processes. The emphasis is on physical, bodily experiences. Alaimo’s example of a material memoir is Audre Lorde’s *The Cancer Journals* which viscerally denotes, in Alaimo’s words, the self as “corporeal, woven into a larger fabric of history, culture and power” (*Bodily* 86). Alaimo argues that, in order to establish an active contemporary environmentalism, one must analyze the cultural framework that forms our understanding of environment. Her concept of trans-corporeality, of which the
material memoir is a part, seeks to redress the failure to recognize the body as immersed in the environment. There needs to be a renegotiation of the interplay between the human and nonhuman environment where “substantial interchanges renders the human permeable, dissolving stable outlines. Tracing these connections discourages us from taking refuge in the fantasies of transcendence and imperviousness that make environmentalism a merely elective and external enterprise” (“States” 477). Narratives that reflect the interchange between body and environment need to be read as material memoirs. Translations is a play in which the social space is not juxtaposed with the natural one but is entangled in a telling narrative of the environment. It could be argued that the physical loss of the connection to this landscape – and the setting adrift of a subsequent Irish diaspora – is central to a contemporary anxiety of place.

Mapping

In discussing what constitutes nativeness – and its connection to nature or being more natural – in Australia, David Trigger et al make the point that in societies with relatively recent settler histories, the debate about ecological belonging often carries symbolic significance that appears to overlap with assumptions about where certain categories of person (indigene – settler – migrant – refugee) sit on a moral hierarchy of cultural belonging. (1275; emphasis added)

This notion of who or what rightly belongs in a landscape (and contested ecological terms such as invasive species come to mind) hinges on the right to name that landscape. Recent work (such as cartographer Tim Robinson’s on the Aran Islands) builds on a history of re-claiming the landscape. Synge’s attempts to put the Aran Islanders at the top of this moral hierarchy of Irish cultural belonging reinforce the idea that this rural landscape (of the rural West) is emblematic of Irish identity. The Ordnance Survey in Translations is an imperialist or colonial cartography which during the nineteenth century became a method of governance through map-making. Renaming takes the act of
naming and possession out of the hands of the native population and is an important act in claiming a landscape. Eóin Flannery makes the point in *Ireland and Ecocriticism* that, “Placename archaeology is one of the vital strands in generating a sense of truly informed residency in a particular location” (107). The act of re-naming results in what Manus describes as “a bloody military operation…What’s ‘incorrect’ about the place-names we have here?” (408). The first scene of act two has Yolland and Owen anglicising each of the place-names that have already been mapped out by the sappers. The stage directions note their task is to “*take each of the Gaelic names – every hill, stream, rock, even every patch of ground which possessed its distinctive Irish name – and Anglicise it*” (409). Richard Pine notes that Friel is a “man resolutely connected with, and loyal to, locales: his father’s home of Derry, the city where he has spent a great portion of his life, and Glenties” (*Diviner* 3). For example, Glenties in Donegal takes up a large portion of Friel’s imagination. His mother was from the village and, when he was young, he visited and spent time there. Friel’s connection to Glenties is evident in his portrayal of Baile Beag/Ballybeg which is based on the area. Through this fictional landscape, Friel explores the roots of Irish identity and through ventures such as colonial plantation, mapping and anglicisation, he explores how that connection was severed.

At a practical level, the struggle in transliterating Irish place names is illustrated in act two scene one, in which Yolland and Owen are deciding on what to enter into the name book. Yolland’s comment “I’m lost” is appropriate as they struggle to find appropriate English versions for Irish names (411). In trying to anglicise Bun na nAbhann (mouth of the river) they find Banowen in the Church registry, Owenmore in the list of freeholders and Binhone in the grand jury’s lists. They finally settle on Burnfoot, a name that is arbitrary and unlike the others. Likewise Druim Dubh (black ridge) is called Dramduff, Drimdo and Dramduffy in the various registries and lists and they finally settle on Dromduff. When Yolland likens the anglicisation as “an eviction of sorts” Owen counters that the Irish place-names are “riddled with confusion” (420). He tells the story of the corrupted name of a well by a crossroads, Tobair Vree.
It used to be called Tobair Bhriain but had since lost all connection with the origins of the name. The inhabitants no longer remember the reason or the person the crossroads is named after and the well itself is long gone:

Do we scrap Tobair Vree altogether and call it – what? – The Cross? Crossroads? Or do we keep piety with a man long dead, long forgotten, his name eroded beyond all recognition, whose trivial little story nobody in the parish remembers? (420)

This example illustrates the ongoing and fluid relationship between the community and the landscape. In anglicizing the place-names the meaning is lost to the native Irish-speaking inhabitants; the unfortunate outcome of this process is dispossession.

Owen’s point that the attachment to place-names is something romanticized and illogical is reiterated in the second scene of act two with Yolland and Maire’s interaction being based solely on place names:

YOLLAND. Carraig na Ri. Loch na nEan.
MAIRE. Loch an Iubhair. Machaire Buidhe.
YOLLAND. Machaire Mor. Cnoc na Mona.
MAIRE. Cnoc na nGabhar. (429)

The words take on new meaning, and are used as a way of communicating between two people who speak different languages. The loss of such place names is a loss of a deep connection to the locale as Eóin Flannery has noted: “Placename lore, with its ramifying historical charges, together with the conflicting and uneven interactions of the Irish and English languages on the island, are part of the course of colonial history” (103). Place-names form an important historical record of dispossession.

Yolland romanticizes the landscape. As Owen tells him, “For God’s sake! The first hot summer in fifty years and you think it’s Eden. Don’t be such a bloody romantic. You wouldn’t survive a mild winter here” (429). Hugh tells Yolland: “I understand your sense of exclusion, of being cut off from a life here” (419). Yolland elevates local culture and language as closer to nature and the landscape. Friel demonstrates a nostalgic view of the life of the native Irish speakers in pre-famine hedge schools. When Yolland attempts to describe his
reaction to arriving in Ballybeg for the first time, Owen interjects, assuming the feeling was of being “back in ancient time” (416). Yolland describes being “moved into a consciousness that wasn’t striving or agitated, but at ease with its own conviction and assurance” (416). He sees the area as something ancient, running counter to the trials of modernity. Friel uses this association between the rural Irish landscape and nostalgia for the past to illustrate the hierarchy of cultural belonging whereby the native person is seen as more naturally attended to the landscape.

At its opening production in the Guildhall in Derry on 28 September 1980, Translations was exploring the root of the conflict over identity in Ireland. In a press interview given in 1980 Friel stated that “we’re continually thrust into a situation of confrontation. Politics are so obtrusive here” (“Finding” 16). The setting of the premiere of Translations and the context within which the play was created are crucial to the understanding of the play. Friel pointed out that for Northern Irish communities “living close to such a fluid situation, definitions of identity have to be developed and analysed much more frequently” (16).

The opening of Translations at the Guildhall also proved a symbolic performance (with a standing ovation from a mixed nationalist and unionist audience) in what was a traditional unionist space. As Patrick Lonergan notes, the opening production was “not necessarily an attempt to ‘occupy’ a space associated with Unionism, but perhaps could be seen as an assertion of the equality of the nationalist and unionist communities in Northern Ireland” (Theatre 34). The political agenda of Field Day was clearly outlined in the position taken in staging Translations in the traditionally Unionist space of the Guildhall and is again reiterated by company director Seamus Heaney: “We believed we could build something of value, a space in which we would try to redefine what being Irish meant in the context of what has happened in the North over the past 20 years” (qtd. in Richtarik 68). For Seamus Deane, another director of Field Day, the main concern of the company was the act of naming: “Field Day’s analysis of the [northern] situation derives from the conviction
that it is, above all, a colonial one…The naming or renaming of a place, the naming or renaming of a race, a region, a person, is, like all acts of primordial nomination, an act of possession” (Nationalism 18). Translations is essentially an exploration of that possession through naming. Through his examination of the Ordnance Survey scheme and its impact on the inhabitants of Baile Beag/Ballybeg, Friel reflects on the legacy of colonization. For Richard Pine, an aspect of Translations that has been ignored is the example it offers us of the relationship between place and memory. Manus taunts his father – “will you be able to find your way?” – meaning that, when the place-names have been changed from Irish to English, the landscape will take on different contours and life itself will change; to which Hugh responds that a new life must be learned, a new identity of man-in-the-landscape must be assumed. (Diviner 212)

The fact that a new way of knowing the landscape has to be learned demonstrates the exclusion that occurs as a result of re-naming. The loss that has ensued is between the folk memory of the local inhabitants and the environment. Disconnected from place, the inhabitants of Baile Beag/Ballybeg will have to learn English to understand and interpret their native landscape.

The colonial mapping of the townland has not emerged organically from the people living there but has been placed on and over an already established system of naming. This necessary tool of expansion is a way of owning the landscape, as Gerry Smyth describes, “It is only when these terrains were named … that landscapes began to take on specific personalities, atmospheres, connotations – in short, meanings” (Space 42). Just as Yolland realizes in the transliteration of these names that “something is being eroded”, the places that existed before the arrival of the sappers and the Ordnance Survey are lost (420). Emerging from this loss, there has been a mythical creation of place or an archive of memory that has subsequently taken the place of a native engagement with the landscape. Even amongst the modern Irish diaspora there is an idea of Ireland as rooted in this rural landscape. Katrin Urschel makes the point that,

Memory of Ireland among immigrants and their descendants is first and foremost an imaginative recollection of the place, as the place
represents the main link that is broken. Languages or accents, beliefs or stories can be taken elsewhere; places are fixed. (36)

When Hugh argues that “it is not the literal past, the ‘facts’ of history, that shape us, but images of the past embodied in language”, he is reiterating Pierre Nora’s *Lieux de Memoire*, in which “memory crystallizes and secretes itself” (445; “Between” 7). The separation of language from landscape has created an ideological or romanticized Ireland which has been embraced by diasporic cultural memory with its privileging of the pre-modern and rural environment.

Perhaps foreshadowing the outcome of this disassociation between language and landscape, Hugh encourages an acceptance of the changes being made, saying “we must learn where we live. We must learn to make them our own. We must make them our new home” (444). The resulting split between place and language led to the memory practices we have today. Tim Robinson states that “place names are the interlock of landscape and language” (*Setting* 155). If that interlock between language and place has been ruptured – as it has in *Translations* – then, this act of historical violence is remembered in the physical interplay between speaking and landscape. Cultural practice that addresses this rupture between place and language (such as Robinson’s and Friels’s) are crucial to the recognition that language is an integral part of belonging. As Latour notes in his vision for an egalitarian human/nonhuman collective, language “is one of the material arrangements through which we ‘charge’ the pluriverse in the collective” (*Politics* 85). Having the ability to articulate is important to understanding the environment. Latour’s central question in *Politics of Nature* is “who assembles, who speaks, who decides in political ecology” (86). The mapping of the landscape of the North is a point of disenfranchisement for its inhabitants and the discourse around who speaks and who decides (and the materiality of that process) is a political one. To create a political ecology that upholds all-inclusivity, then surely the first step is to recognize difference in who is doing the naming.
Hedge Schools

The play’s setting in a hedge school in Baile Beag/Ballybeg is significant. Rural Irish fee-paying hedge schools were at the centre of a tradition in direct conflict with the implementation of the national school system in 1831. The hedge school in *Translations* is described by Friel as a “disused barn or hay-shed or byre” (383). Hedge schools were a common educational practice in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Ireland (as there was no state control of schools) and what schools existed were attended by children of Protestant parents. The hedge schools were separate from any formal or governmental education. The report from the Commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry in 1826 revealed that in 1824 a total of 560,549 children attended places of education, with 70% of pupils (394,732) attending hedge schools (Clarke 4). The schools were fee-paying, often sporadically and per subject, and generally took place in less than ideal conditions. In 1814 William Shaw Mason described the dwellings:

> Schoolhouses are in general wretched huts, built of sods in the highway ditches, from which circumstances they are designated hedge schools. They have neither door, window, nor chimney; a large hole in the roof serving to admit light and let out smoke. A low narrow wall of mud, hard baked served as a seat. (qtd. in Fernández-Suárez 54)

Hedge schools had been legalized with Catholic Emancipation in 1829, four years before Friel’s play takes place. Although attended by Catholics, the schools (which were haphazardly run by untrained and unqualified teachers) were not encouraged by the Catholic Church which initially welcomed the instruction offered by the national school system. In an open letter, Doctor Doyle, Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, stated (to the priests in his diocese) that he

> welcomed the rule which requires that all the teachers henceforth to be employed be provided […] with a certificate of their competency, that will aid us in a work of great difficulty, to wit, that of suppressing hedge schools, and placing youths under the direction of competent teachers. (qtd. in Hyland and Milne 108)
Doyle’s comments about the training of teachers show that some of the schools were run in a makeshift manner. The improvised and makeshift nature of the hedge schools and total reliance on the competence of their teachers made them inconsistent.

In *Translations*, Bridget describes the national schools’ (as opposed to the hedge school) educational agenda as one where, “from the very first day you go, you’ll not hear one word of Irish spoken. You’ll be taught to speak English and every subject will be taught through English” (396). In the opening scene of *Translations*, perhaps indicating the ramshackle nature of the hedge school structure, the schoolmaster, Hugh, is absent. It emerges, during the first scene, that this is a common occurrence due to his alcoholism, with Doalty declaring, “Sure the bugger’s hardly fit to walk” (397). When Hugh does finally he is described as having a “large quantity of drink taken” (397). The class that makes up the hedge school is diverse, ranging from Sarah who “has been considered locally to be dumb”, to Jimmy who is reading Homer in Greek (383). As the scene progresses the upcoming introduction of the national school system is mentioned, with Manus relating a story told by Biddy Hanna who says, “Thank God one of them national schools is being built above in Poll na gCaorach” (389). Manus’s fiancée Maire also sees Anglicisation as progressive and urges Manus to find a job in the national school: “when it opens, this is finished: nobody’s going to pay to go to a hedge-school,” she warns him (389).

The hedge-school (like the Irish language spoken within it) is a space used by an endangered, if not dying, native culture. Richard Pine notes that the hedge school is “symbolic of a flight from normality, a culture sheltering out of doors from everything which would allow it to be ‘civilized’” (*Diviner* 189). The wildness of the hedge school as a space that is outside of civilized society is important as it is an endangered environmental site. For Pine this “out of doors” site is “akin to the allegorical flight of ‘mad Sweeney’ which was both topographical and conceptual in its exploration of opposites” (189). The allegorical flight of mad Sweeney, that Pine talks about, refers to the twelfth
century poem, *Buile Suibhne*, where King Sweeney wanders the Irish countryside (not unlike the vagrants in Synge and Beckett) having been cursed to live as a man-bird hybrid. Oona Frawley notes that while “the natural world of Ireland is lovely enough to seduce Sweeney into poems of extravagant praise, it is clear that his appreciation results from having been forced into nature: displacement brings the natural world into focus” (*Irish* 14). There is exuberance (at being in the wilderness) but an unease with the natural world built into the Sweeney’s story. As Frawley argues, “Sweeney recognizes that nature is for those who are somehow outside of the social realm” (15). Like the attendees of the hedge school there is an uneasy appreciation for being outside the cultural standard but the “actualities of a life in nature make it impossible to idealize that life” (28). The avian imagery is also connected with the natural instincts of the native Irish: the flight of the Earls, the flight of the wild geese in 1691, and the Irish soldiers serving in European armies as wild geese. The image of the human-animal hybrid is reminiscent of the native Aran islander as Synge’s descriptions of the wading women as “tropical sea-birds” reminds us (76). ¹⁰⁹ These creatures live in the natural world, as opposed to, the cultural one and, as Pine has stated, the hedge-school is symbolic of a culture escaping the prevalent influence of encroaching (and civilizing) modernity. The hedge-school is a site where wildness can find refuge from modernizing cultural influences.

The demise of the hedge-school illustrates what Friel sees as the collapse of a very specific type of indigenous Irish culture. The result is the crisis evident in the militarized environment in Northern Ireland. The Irish language is seen as something of a burden by some of the characters in *Translations*. The loss of education through the medium of Irish and the Irish language itself is something that Maire sees as progressive: “We should all be learning to speak English. That’s what my mother says. That’s what I say. That’s what Dan O’Connell said last month in Ennis. He said the sooner we

¹⁰⁹ Albert J. Soloman’s “The Bird Girls of Ireland”, discusses the impact of Synge’s image of the wading women on the work of James Joyce and George Moore.
learn to speak English the better” (399). Maire’s comments reflect the growing awareness of English as an advantage in an increasingly globalized society. Daniel O’Connell’s rallies (which were in English although O’Connell was a fluent Irish speaker) have been described by Donal McCartney as “hedge schools in which the masses were educated into the nationalist politics of repeal” (153). Nineteenth-century nationalist leaders such as O’Connell turned to English to deliver their message “on the shrewd understanding that his immediate audience was converted and that his need was to move English readers of his words in the next morning’s newspaper”, as Declan Kiberd argues (Inventing 136-7). At a national level the importance of the hedge schools as a representative structure for the cultural and political language of the native Irish is reflected in the attitude of the various characters in Translations towards the new educational system. Maire quotes Daniel O’Connell’s statement that the “old language is a barrier to modern progress” (399). She sees the hedge school as impeding individual progress. The change in Translations is the move from the hedge school to a system epitomizing the civilizing culture of modernity.

What is lost in this move from the outside space of the hedge school and what it symbolizes, the Irish, the rural or pre-modern, is evident in Yolland’s yearning for Baile Beag/Ballybeg: “I think your countryside is – is – is very beautiful. I’ve fallen in love with it already. I hope we’re not too – too crude an intrusion on your lives. And I know that I’m going to be very happy, very happy, here” (399). The attachment to the landscape of Ireland and its rural and

\[110\] An anecdote from the early-twentieth century illustrates this negativity towards the Irish language. When Republican leader, Patrick Pearse lectured the community in Rosmuc, Connemara, about the importance of the Irish language, he was asked the question, “Ach cén mhaith i nuaír a théann tú thar An Teach Dóite?” (what good is it when you go beyond An Teach Dóite?). An teach Dóite is the most easterly point of the Irish speaking community. As Peter Slomanson notes when telling the story, “The implication was that Irish is just a useless local vernacular that marks the speaker as a useless local person” (101).
stagnant systems where, Kiberd describes “things seemed to have petrified and time to have stood still” is also an attachment to spaces such as the hedge school (*Inventing* 621). As an outsider, Yolland sees the exotic in Baile Beag/Ballybeg. This awareness makes him conscious of his outsider status, “I feel so cut off from the people here.” (418). Yolland’s position as outsider means that although he wants to belong in this community, he is unable to inhabit it fully – even though he is in a relationship with Maire. Gerry Smyth argues that “[e]stablished Gaelic space was colonised by the new British space, creating a subtle series of overlappings and redoublings, which yet never lost sight of the power of the latter over the former” (*Space* 49). This colonial power play means that Yolland will never be able to bridge the divide that Smyth talks about. Yolland only serves to highlight the connection that the local inhabitants have with their environment in the form of place names or the hedge school.

Romanticizing nature is common and evident in Yolland’s descriptions of Ballybeg as it is in Hugh’s description of Ballybeg’s inhabitants: “I suppose you could call us a spiritual people” (418). It is unsurprising to note that just before this exchange, Yolland talks about his neighbour, the romantic poet William Wordsworth, whom he sees “out walking – in the distance” (417). Yolland never actually speaks to Wordsworth but there is an implication that the Romantic Movement is not far from Yolland’s mind. Greg Garrard makes the point that Wordsworth’s romanticism is more about the creator than the nature itself: “Wordsworth spends rather little time describing nature, and rather a lot of reflecting upon his own and other people’s response to it” (*Ecocriticism* 43). Yolland is a character whose interest in the surrounding environment is, like Wordsworth, only in the context of his relationship with it. The relationship between the local inhabitants and the landscape was more conflicted. Romantic Pastoral was not as popular in an Irish context, as Oona Frawley notes, “the Act of Union (1800), which tightened English governance of Ireland and moved parliamentary control to London, had implications for landscape that could not be covered by Wordsworth’s lyricism alone” (43). Nostalgic longing may be part of Yolland’s agenda but the underlying attitude towards nature in
Translators is influenced by the unfolding events in which the environment is increasingly becoming alienated from its inhabitants.

4.3 Exile and the North in Making History

The North as a conceptual ecological environment means that the attachment to the space, narrated in Translations, is forged in contemporary crisis situations. Having moved to Derry in 1939, Friel said that “there are two aspects to Derry: one was of a gentle and, in those days, sleepy town; the other was of a frustrating and frustrated town in which the majority of people were disinherited” (qtd. in Hickey and Smith 221). During the 1970s, the city became a flashpoint for sectarian violence and quickly known as the “cockpit of the Troubles”; the impression of the city as a hostile and tribal location was quickly embedded within the community (Lacy 254). The British military presence in Northern Ireland and the tensions that erupted within the civilian population in Friel’s childhood years led to his challenging the cultural basis for the political turmoil that he witnessed. In Making History, Friel uses the creation of history and our knowledge of it to construct a dialogue between our past and our present. This dualistic crux in Irish history is embodied in the principal character in Making History: Hugh O’Neill. The play uses real and fictionalised events from the life of Hugh O’Neill to weave a story examining the mythologizing nature of history-writing.

Translations was Friel’s first play for Field Day Theatre Company, premiering in 1980, and Making History was his last, appearing in 1988. Both plays challenge the audience to rethink the truth of any given history, particularly a history with such violent consequences for the present. In the programme notes for Making History, Declan Kiberd makes a connection between the two plays. He points out “that impossible but desirable fusion of Gaelic and English tradition, which characterised the central love scene in Translations, is attempted here in the marriage of O’Neill and Mabel Bagenal. Those who seek such reconciliation may be either ennobled or debilitated by it”
(4). Kiberd argues that those who are debilitated by this attempted merging of cultures are left with “only suspicion and distrust to fill the ensuing vacuum” (4). This section examines how the role of exile and dispossession from place in *Making History* forms a narrative of the North as a conceptual environment. It can be argued that *Translations* explores the consequences, the disinheritation of place, which Friel’s 1988 play, *Making History*, introduces.

Centred on the Tudor conquest of Ireland and the Flight of the Earls in 1607, the play follows Hugh O’Neill as he attempts to write an account of his life that will both influence future generations and remain truthful. The Flight of the Earls and the resulting Ulster Plantations signalled the end of Brehon Law in Ireland. Historical notions of place are closely connected with the construction of identity. In *Making History* Friel links particular sites with the history and memories associated with them. In the opening scene, Harry Hovedon (O’Neill’s private secretary), names various places – and clans – that would still resonate with modern audiences: O’Hagan, O’Kane, and O’Donnell, for example.¹¹¹ There is a christening at O’Neill’s foster family – fostering was a common practice amongst Gaelic families – in Tullyhogue. O’Neill is encouraged by Sir William Fitzwilliam to send his son to the newly established Trinity College. Harry Hovedon explains: “I’m told he’s trying to get all the big Gaelic families to send their children there” (248). He is invited by Sir Garret Moore to Mellifont Abbey “for a few days’ fishing on the Boyne” (249). O’Neill, through the course of the play, illustrates the ultimately failing attempts to fuse both the Gaelic and Anglo-Irish cultures. Mabel says:

That’s why you’re the most powerful man in Ireland: you’re the only Irish chieftain who understands the political method. O’Donnell doesn’t. Maguire doesn’t. McMahon doesn’t. That’s why the Queen is

¹¹¹ The figure of Gaelic chief, Hugh Roe O’Donnell features largely in *Making History*, but also makes an appearance in the “Cyclops” section of *Ulysses* where, as Yi-Peng Lai states: “In the tree wedding, Joyce makes the fictionalised O’Donnell, one of the last Gaelic patriarchs, give away his daughter to John Wyse Nolan, grand high chief ranger of the Irish National Foresters (therefore representing a contemporary chieftain of Irish nationalism), witnessed by the personified tree list out of the ancient Brehon Law” (107).
never quite sure how to deal with you – you’re the antithesis of what she expects a Gaelic chieftain to be. (297)

Making History loosely follows the structure Seán O’Faolain’s The Great O’Neill (1942), which was published when Friel was thirteen and quotations from the book were used in the programme notes. The play premiered at the Guildhall in Derry (just as Translations did in 1980) in September 1988. Playwright, Tom Kilroy (who had produced Double Cross with Field Day in 1986) had also written on the same topic: his play The O’Neill was produced by the Abbey Theatre in 1969. The play takes place over the course of two years with act one before the pivotal event of the Battle of Kinsale in 1601 and the second after.

Although Hugh O’Neill is an Irish Chieftain following Brehon laws and customs, he has also inherited the Earldom of Tyrone, a title his grandfather Conn O’Neill had been granted by the English. The result is a reign that bridges both Irish and English customs. This is illustrated in the opening scene when O’Neill’s private secretary, Harry Hoveden, explains that the native Irish Devlin family expect his protection under Brehon law: “The Devlins remind you – once more they say – that they have the right to expect protection from their chieftain and that if Hugh O’Neill cannot offer them safety and justice under the Behon law” (250). O’Neill has just married Mabel Bagenal – a deviation from historical accounts – whom he describes as, “one of the New English. Her grandfather came over here from Newcastle-under-Lyme in Staffordshire. He was given the Cistercian monastery and lands around Newry – that’s what bought them over” (Plays Two 263). Relations with the English soon break down and O’Neill instigates a sequence of events that will change the course of Irish history. The Nine Years War (1594-1603) and the Flight of the Earls (1607) that followed proved to be the end of a traditional Gaelic way of life and paved the way for the colonisation of Ireland.

In examining the history of O’Neill’s life, Friel exposes the inaccuracy of a single, all-encompassing narrative or truth. For Seán O’Faoláin, O’Neill was broken “not by England but by Ireland; by its deep atavism and inbreeding,
so characteristic of abortive and arrested cultures in all ages of the world’s history” (279). His description of Ireland as an abortive and arrested culture is evident in Friel’s work as characters are torn between connecting to that pre-modern idea of Ireland and wanting to part of a new and modern society. As Europe emerged from the Middle Ages, in Ireland, the majority of the country remained quite wild and outside the remit and control of the English crown. Some historians have suggested that following the death of his father, Matthew O’Neill, the eight-year-old Hugh was raised in England as a ward of Elizabeth I. More recent research suggests that he was raised in Dublin with the Hovenden family and was granted the Earldom of Tyrone in 1585 along with substantial lands in the area (Morgan, 1993). Seen as an ally of the Crown, O’Neill was initially granted the earldom in order to lead the planned plantations of Ireland.

In Making History, to illustrate the dualistic nature of O’Neill’s character, the stage directions call for him to always speak with “an upper-class English accent except on those occasions specifically scripted” (247). Towards the end of the play O’Neill’s accent changes as his “English accent gradually fades until at the end his accent is pure Tyrone” (338). We are aware of the creation of the myth as O’Neill, throughout the unfolding events, ponders his legacy: “Which choice would history approve... [I]f the future historian had a choice of my two alternatives, which would he prefer for his acceptable narrative?” (284). The key figure in the creation of this myth is Archbishop Peter Lombard who, during the course of the play, is writing a contemporary account of O’Neill’s life. Lombard believes that history is not the truth, but a construct, and seeks to mythologize the Earl and his part in the Irish story: “[T]he life of Hugh O’Neill can be told in many different ways. And those ways are determined by the needs and the demands and the expectations of different people and different eras” (267). O’Neill disagrees with Lombard’s approach to history and wants the facts recorded truthfully rather than being recreated as a heroic tale designed to feed into the nationalist ideal: “I need the truth Peter. That’s all that’s left. The schemer, the leader, the liar, the statesman,
the lecher, the patriot, the drunk, the soured, bitter émigré – put it all in” (P329-10). However this image, what O’Neill calls “the whole life”, has no place in Lombard’s story as he seeks to re-invigorate a people demoralized by colonisation (310). Lombard’s account will be a nationalist narrative designed to create a martyr: “Now is the time for a hero. Now is the time for a heroic literature” (334).

The sites that appear in Making History are an important part of the attempt to make the history of the North more concrete. An example is Leac na Rí (“Seat of the Kings”) at Tullyhogue in County Tyrone. The stone – mentioned in the opening scene as the site for the Christening party – was the inauguration site of the O’Neills who swore allegiance to the Brehon Laws – the last inauguration on this site was Hugh O’Neill’s in 1593. Friel refers to Lord Mountjoy’s destruction of the stone during the Nine Year’s War when O’Donnell reports, “He smashed the O’Neill crowning stone at Tullyhogue. There was no call for that, was there?” (301). Writing in the preface of his biography of O’Neill, Seán O’Faolain prefigured this discourse surrounding historiography: “[I]n those last years in Rome the myth was already beginning to emerge” (vi). This instability of meaning and of historical truths are evident in Friel’s play. During the staging and re-enacting of history, the historical narrative is undermined, as the play is just an act of performing history, not tied to historical truth.

Christopher Murray notes in his introduction to Plays Two that Making History’s “imaginative impatience with monoliths may be seen as, in Friel’s term, metabiologically creating the environment for the Good Friday agreement of 1998” (xiii). Murray sees this reworking of the narrative in Friel’s emphasis on the Mabel character, whom Lombard has side-lined from the history books. Friel has reinstated her as, Murray argues, because, “Mabel believes in and has the courage to put into practice the idea of inter-marriage/cross-fertilisation” (xiii). In essence, history is being re-staged, re-played for a contemporary audience, giving them the change to re-negotiate their past. As Murray puts it, Friel is “producing a new myth, poetically conceived, for Anglo-Irish relations”
(xiii). The dismantling of the myths that form the apparatus of much of the nationalist agenda in Northern Ireland – and Friel’s hometown of Derry where the Bogside murals can perhaps attest to ongoing mythologization – can perhaps be linked to the work that Field Day were doing in destabilizing traditional Irish narratives of the North.

4.4 Ouroboros/Making History

Conceptual environments are spaces where the idea of place is central to the discourse. Making History is a play about the impact of historical myth-making on the North. In the summer of 2007, Ouroboros Theatre Company embarked on a national site-specific tour of Friel’s Making History, using historical buildings and sites throughout the country as performance spaces. Initially conceived as a means of connecting Friel’s play to local historical domains, the company toured to sites with an historic or symbolic connection to O’Neill’s ill-fated rebellion and his subsequent exile. The experience of audience members, the Office of Public Works (OPW) site managers, production crew and actors suggested that an innovative and potentially radical form of theatre was taking place. Irish Times columnist Sara Keating notes that with site-specific theatre, Ouroboros has to adapt its methods to work with the site “as the space dictates the aesthetic and the way in which the actors can enter and leave. This means that there’s a certain freshness about each production, because the actors are inhabiting a different space each time” (14). This changing of the site with each performance creates a conceptual environment on a concrete site, one that allows the audience to see the foundational events that have changed the territorial landscape of the North.

Site-specific theatre creates new ways to engage with our historical sites and provides a new aspect to the way in which a community negotiates its history. This type of engagement with historic sites is evident in contemporary theatre, most notably in Anú Productions’ work such as their most recent triptych marking the Easter Rising in Dublin. In “That was us”: Contemporary
**Irish Theatre Performance**, Brian Singleton recounts his experience of attending ANU Productions’ site-specific “Monto” cycle (*World’s End Lane, Laundry, The Boys of Foley Street* and *Vardo*). Immersed in the performance—engaged rather than passive—the audience formed, in Singleton’s words, “communities of viewers” (21). Engaging directly with the audience, Lowe reiterates Singleton’s notion of community engagement writing that “communion” between viewer and performer is one to “consider deeply” (57). The moral implications of belonging to this community and taking part in how it conducts itself are evident in the testimonial nature of these productions. Bearing witness is also a part of the discourse around site-specificity.

The historical sites used in these various theatrical productions are of emotional significance to the local community, and audience expectations and behaviour differed from when the play was staged in traditional venues. As Ouroboros Artistic Director Denis Conway points out that “[w]hat the sites offered us was a historical sense, a connection to the real time of the play that a theatre building cannot offer. When you walk into these places you are surrounded by history, by atmosphere” (qtd. in Keating 14). The company chose places that had an historic or symbolic connection to O’Neill’s rebellion and subsequent exile. These included military sites, where the consequences of O’Neill’s rebellion are still evident in the landscape. Examples of the military sites include Barryscourt Castle and Charlesfort where the Battle of Kinsale proved the O’Neill’s undoing. There are also domestic sites, namely the castles where O’Neill, his family and allies resided and, finally, there are religious sites: The Rock of Cashel, seat of the Kings of Munster; The Hill of Tara in County Meath, high Seat of the Kings of Ireland; and Melifont Abbey, the site where O’Neill submits to the Queen.

One of the most important sites in the Ouroboros/Making History tour was Castle Hill in Dungannon. Castle Hill consists of an open air site with views stretching out over Co. Tyrone, “where Lough Neagh still dominates the view to the east and Slieve Gullion to the south, just as they must have done in 1550 when the fateful earl was born there” (McNally 21). O’Neill was born in
Castle Hill in Dungannon and it was the stronghold of the O’Neill’s. The area has a number of structures built there, the earliest built by Domnall O’Neill in early 14th century. *Making History* was staged on Castle Hill, Saturday 8th September 2007 to coincide with a festival of culture celebrating the 400th anniversary of the Flight of the Earls. Artistic Director, Denis Conway, felt that Dungannon was the most important of the sites on the tour in that it remains a disputed site: “The castle on the hill was razed to the ground and has been a British army post for the past 35 years, until it was decommissioned recently” (qtd. in Gorman). Dungannon has been at the centre of the “Troubles” and became notorious as one corner of the “murder triangle” after holding the first civil rights march in Northern Ireland on the 24th August 1968.

The site has functioned as a British army base since the 1950s and opened to the public for the first time for the 2007 commemoration of the Flight of the Earls. Many of the local community had not been on the site and, as Denis Conway points out, “the venue was organised by a cross-party committee to commemorate a man who 400 years ago tried to meld two opposing sides: the old Gaelic order and the new Protestant influx of the Reformation” (Conway 7). Journalist Frank McNally commented that, “Castle Hill had a history of private ownership and fortifications before that. By some accounts, it has been off limits to the public since the Flight of the Earls, exactly 400 years ago” (21).

In the first act of *Making History*, scene one and two are played out in, “a large living room in O’Neill’s home in Dungannon”. As the building had been destroyed by O’Neill in 1602, there were no remains, and so the play was staged in the marquee on the grounds. In Dungannon, the birthplace of O’Neill the direct repercussions of decisions made during the Flight of the Earls is still felt today, as Conway notes, “If, 400 years ago, the Gaelic Chieftains had not been, as Friel says, ‘trapped in the old paradigms of thought’ … they might have absorbed the new colonial English and more of their Celtic traditions would survive in Ireland today” (Ouroboros Archive). Far from following traditional history narratives, Friel’s work expresses the difficulties and
subjectivities in history-writing. *Translations*, too, highlights the impact of historical narratives on contemporary politics in the North. Lionel Pilkington’s argues that *Translations* advocates “an acceptance of the reality of British state power in Northern Ireland, the recognition of nationalist cultural identity in Northern Ireland and a substantial lowering of nationalist political expectations” (*Theatre* 68). In *Making History* the characters are faced with the unreliability of historical narratives. All that is left is the trauma of history and what is experienced by those who witness its consequences such as the community gathered at Castle Hill in Dungannon on the 8th September 2007.

In site-specific theatre the performative space becomes a conceptual space to be negotiated by the audience. With a contested site such as Dungannon where the split in the community can be traced to a specific site, the process of engagement can prove cathartic. Castle Hill is one of the most important sites on the tour because it emerges as a conceptual environment (it is a site that allows the occupant to engage directly with its history). The legacy of that time has cast a long shadow over contemporary politics. The site retains the history of the building used there, in particular the Army Barracks which served

![Fig 5: Castle Hill, Dungannon. Outdoor scene looking over the Sperrin Mountains.](image)

164
as a focal point for subsequent violence in the area. The landscape serves as a symbol of the aggression between loyalist and nationalist factions with layers of history ghosted onto the site through generations of occupants.

Rather than create a performance responding directly to these sites, a feature of much site-specific theatre, Ouroboros performed an established history play. *Making History* has its own radical context in that it voiced the political ambitions of Field Day and its vision for a fifth province of the mind. As a conceptual environment, the fifth province is a more idealistic conceptual space than the North. The aim of the Ouroboros Theatre Company was to reframe history, through performance, and in doing so, re-establish the relationship between history and locale. The site-specific tour operates as an expression of locality: it performs its social history. The Irish landscape has been seen as a place seeped in nostalgia. Frawley argues that this type of nostalgia infuses the present and “charges it with the knowable, predictable past so that the present no longer seems as unsettled, since a continuous identity is posited” (156). The creation of a nostalgic past that reinforces the identity construction of the present day is exactly what is explored in *Making History*. The play and the tour function differently in how they imagine that Irish environment. The tour operates as a performative link between the historical space on one side and its cultural meaning for the locality in which the site is based on the other. The role of these sites, in the context of the performance, is to complicate and challenge historical narratives. In site-specific performance the site relies on a complex coexistence of numerous narratives that pre-exist the work.

The Ouroboros/Making History tour covered Ireland, before performing in Italy, France, Switzerland and Belgium. In continental Europe, the sites marked the journey O’Neill took in his exile, finishing in Rome where the final act of *Making History* is set and where O’Neill is buried today. Conway recalls that he and Geoff Gould, the director, hit upon the idea the idea of staging the

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112 Oona Frawley has argued in *Irish Pastoral* that “Irish literature seems frequently to use the natural world as a site for heightened nostalgia” (156).
play in two locations on the same site: “We wanted the first half of the play (set in O’Neill’s castle and the Sperrin Mountains) outside and, as the dusk sets and O’Neill’s fortunes and freedoms wane, the audience would move inside for the scenes set in Rome” (7). The different locations and the movement between lent themselves to representing the passage of time. These split-stages were recreated in each venue and where the outdoor space was not appropriate a marquee was erected to separate the space. Denis Conway notes:

The move from outside to inside, from light to dark, from hope to despair, from Ireland to abroad offers a metaphor for the demise of the Gaelic aristocracy and is a powerful symbol for the heart of the play, in those locations where the building itself is crumbling. (7)

The site-specificity, following the trace of O’Neill, allows for and reinforces *Making History*: the story of a country embodied in the dualistic nature of one man, the unfolding rebellion marking the landscape and culminating in exile. Ireland is vastly altered by the unfolding events of the play. The different locations, and the movement of the audience from one space to another as the light fades, expose the viewer to these sites and reconnect the local community with its local, natural landscape. Ouroboros/*Making History* tour is about bearing witness, examining the history and stories, the truth and the lies that have fed the myth-making machine that has consumed recent Irish history. Michael Shanks argues that “[p]erformance and the performative are always archaeological: that is, there is always, with performance, the question of origin or precedent” (*Three* 150). The repetition of performative texts and the variance with which they are enacted highlights the tension between truth and fiction. In uncovering these archaeological traces, site-specific performance can enhance the experience of occupants of a particular landscape. The Ouroboros/*Making History* showed the connections local communities have to their historical sites. These places reflect not only the history of the play as it unfolds but also embodies the real history and political tensions right through the last four centuries to the 400th anniversary of the flight of the earls which this tour commemorates.
4.5 Conclusion

How does the North fit into the idea of a conceptual ecological environment? Security forces, land borders and territorial disputes are a part of the daily lives of the communities that live there. David Lloyd has notes that in the North, “every boundary and interface is charged with the potentiality for violence” (Irish 139). Occupants are faced with hazards that cannot be anticipated or quantified. I argue that conceptual cultural landscapes (such as the fifth province of the North) are created in order to construct narratives that help to negotiate these environmental concerns. The imminent and incalculable violence that underscores the North results in narratives that see the landscape as fractious. The aim of this chapter was to explore Friel’s work as a place that reinforces on one hand, and then deconstructs the traditional narratives of environmental loss. Friel’s work and that of the Field Day theatre company was to create a new space in the North, one that integrated both loyalist and unionist communities. Friel proposes that landscape – particularly in Ireland – is a site of emotional trauma rather than the rural idyll that presupposes romanticism. Lionel Pilkington has argued that Translations is a “play that is resolutely opposed to any radical political change” (Theatre 68). Maintaining stability means favouring a more urbane existence that is built on compromise and mutual acceptance. Ulrich Beck argues that a world society emerges when people conceive of themselves as global subjects. I argue that Friel’s awareness of the mythologizing of histories of place in Ireland is global in outlook and is a result of the anxieties Beck discusses in a world risk society. Beck argues that within the global society of high modernity there are “two consequences of crucial importance: community life will no longer be determined solely or even primarily by location; and collective memory is losing its unity and integrity” (“Cosmopolitan” 31). Both issues, the community’s detachment from the landscape and the destabilization of collective memory, are of central importance in Friel’s work. Friel critiques the insularity that seeks out that
nostalgia for the past and opens up a world where events such as the comings and goings from Ballybeg are seen within a global context rather than local.

The first section of the chapter looked at the crucial role of language in the local community’s detachment from their environment. The resulting crisis of place can be found in the following generations of residents of Ballybeg. The challenge faced by the residents of Ballybeg speaks as much to the contemporary Irish living in the reflexive modernity of Ulrich Beck than historical accuracy. Friel’s landscape is an active site of trauma. In a diary entry dated 5 November 1979, Friel made the comment that “all art is a diary of evolution; markings that seemed true of and for their time; adjustments in stance and disposition; openings to what seemed the persistence of the moment. Map-makings” (qtd. in Coogan 61). Friel is creating a theatrical space in which different performance of place can be enacted on the stage. The setting of Translations in the townland of Baile Beag/Ballybeg at the cusp of the changeover from Irish-speaking to English-speaking puts it at a point in Irish memory where an indigenous identity was lost. In a diary entry on Translations Friel notes:

In Ballybeg, at the point when the play begins, the cultural climate is a dying climate – no longer quickened by its past, about to be plunged almost overnight into an alien future. The victims in this situation are the transitional generation. The old can retreat into and find immunity in the past. The young acquire some facility with the new cultural implements. The in-between ages become lost, wandering around in a strange land, Strays. (qtd. in Coogan 59)

The difficulty the inhabitants of Ballybeg have is navigating this uncertain future. Baile Beag/Ballybeg is a place in transition and its inhabitants are forced to change with it. Because the language is marginalised, the majority of contemporary Irish audiences would no longer be able to understand or interact with the native inhabitants of Baile Beag/ Ballybeg. The community no longer understand the names of the places that surround them. In an interview, Seamus Heaney observed that Translations was a “play went intravenously into the
consciousness of the audiences and the country” (qtd. in de Breadun 13). In translations, language as a faculty is resigned to history.

The strays are also visible in Making History. O’Donnell tells O’Neill: “Everywhere you go there are people scavenging in the fields, hooking up bits of roots, eating fistfuls of watercress” (304). When Lombard is in Rome discussing his reasons for mythologizing the Flight of the Earls, he evokes a downtrodden population: “Ireland is reduced as it has never been before – we are talking about a colonized people on the brink of extinction” (334). The landscape is not generic; it has been infused with the names of the various sites in the Irish language. Friel has based generations in the town land of Baile Beag/Ballybeg who face the legacy of the events in Translations. Richard Pine argues that in Translations, the community is “threatened by the choice between the rush to English or the retreat to silence” (Diviner 202). Military occupation has created a dispossessed community. A sense of transition in the early 1800s before the beginning of the famine in 1845 changed the physical and cultural landscape of the country. The key defeat of Wolfe Tone in the Rebellion of 1798, which, in Translations, Jimmy and Hugh walked as far as Glenties to participate in, resulted in the Act of Union in 1800 and a subsequent loss of identity through place (445). Central to Translations is how the dynamics in the community change when faced with external pressures. This external pressure creates a desire for narratives of the past which reinforce collective identity.

Nora has pointed out that there is a “world-wide upsurge in memory” resulting in a fetishism of the past: “A kind of tidal wave of memorial concerns that has broken over the world, everywhere establishing close ties between respect for the past … and the sense of belonging, collective consciousness and individual self-awareness, memory and identity (“Reasons” 437). Where Synge’s idealised landscapes were based on fact (the Aran Islands), and Beckett’s landscapes were abstract, Friel’s Ballybeg sits between the real and the imagined. Rather than a faithful rendering of historical events, Translations is an allegory for contemporary Northern Ireland. It may be set in a pre-modern
community but its lesson is for reflexive modernity. The enclosed community’s awareness of its demise reflects our own contemporary loss of environment. Buell notes that “contemporary toxic discourse effectively starts with Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962), whose opening chapter, “Fable for Tomorrow”, introduces one of the key discursive motifs: a ‘town in America’ that awakens to a birdless, budless spring” (“Toxic” 645). Friel’s exploration of a community on the brink of what (we now know) to be a catastrophic famine fits into contemporary apocalyptic narratives that have emerged with the coming of the Anthropocene – mass extinction, climate change, food shortages. *Translations* does the same in creating a parable for contemporary Irish society that places it in the microcosm of an enclosed community on the cusp of famine, loss of topographical identity and language. The trope of the famine also emerges in *Making History* as O’Donnell reports to O’Neill, “The countryside’s in chaos…slaughter, famine, disease. There must be eight thousand people crowded into Donegal town looking for food” (305). The image of a ravaged landscape, infertile, unable to provide sustenance has proved a potent one in Irish iconography. Both plays prefigure the visceral and primal nature of the unfertile and empty landscape.

Buell argues that Friel’s work (along with that of West Indian poet-playwright Derek Walcott) expands “the scale at which modernization rearranges place” (*Future* 81). This expansion of scale allows global anxieties to be transcribed onto smaller geographical areas. Discussing *Translations*, Buell notes that the “scale is a whole country, though symbolized by a single parish” (79). These are national anxieties played out on a vastly reduced scale. This is where the North, like the West, stands in for broader issues of modernity: ever-increasing mechanization, mass migration, damage to landscape, livestock and crops. Buell points out that “the untranslatableness of native toponymy, whose meaning is as deeply encrypted as the stories that go with the indigenous place names … is a barometer of the mutual noncommunication leading to the tragic denouement” (80). This lexical gap and the separation of people and place is a central theme in Friel’s work. He
demonstrates how cultural identity is essentially a performance of place. The ritualized paganism associated with Irish rurality is juxtaposed with the civilizing influence of encroaching modernism. Field Day’s plays, *Making History* and *Translations*, reveal the absurdity evident between reality and representation. The relationship between people and language in the Irish case has become pathological and evident in both plays is a fear of modernity that distinguishes the North as an environment where conceptual ideas about Irish history are enacted onstage.
Chapter Five

Digital Environments

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapters of this dissertation have focused on theatrical and radio performances. Here, however, I intend to broaden the scope of the thesis to include the documentation that remains after a performance. The reason is that the inclusivity of all material is central to a new materialist reading of performance. Material ecocriticism advocates an inclusivity that means what remains is as important as the defining event itself. This is a mode of thinking materially that, as Serenella Iovino puts it, involves paying attention to “electric grids, polluting substances, chemicals, energy, assemblages, scientific apparatuses, cyborgs, waste, the things themselves” (“Material” 52). This chapter seeks to examine how digital documentation fits into our understanding of storied matter. As our surroundings become more unstable – fracturing and rupturing under increasing environmental pressures – I explore the emergence of digitized environments.

Although the digital world has tangible impacts (through the production of e-waste and its uneven distribution to developing countries, for example), the scope of this dissertation is the emergence of conceptual ecological environments. Given the remit of the thesis, I want to address the intangible environment of the digital archive. What is the societal impact when representations of landscapes migrate into the digital sphere? This chapter will

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113 About 41.8 metric tonnes of e-waste was generated globally in 2014. The United Nations Environment Programme Report, “Waste Crime – Waste Risks”, states that “thousands of tonnes of e-waste declared as second hand goods are regularly exported from developed countries to developing countries” (15).

114 It is worth remembering that the notions of gatekeeper or controller of memory is built into the word archive, as Derrida reminds us in Archive Fever, the word archive comes from the Greek word arkeion or house of archons (archons being superior magistrates) (2).
focus on digital rather than geographically defined depictions of place. Examining these digital spaces, I will extend the term conceptual ecological environments to include digital landscapes.

To facilitate this move in the thesis from a traditional cultural understanding of our environment through theatrical representation to the digitalized and documented performance, I want to define the parameters of the definition of archive. The term, digital archive, will be used much more broadly in this thesis than a traditional material archive and will include the use of documentation from social media (such as twitter, facebook and Instagram) alongside the digital archive curated by arts practitioners. This expansion of the term archive is as a result of the advancement of digital technology. In *The Modern Historiography Reader*, the archive is defined as being both a “depository for cataloguing, preserving, and consulting primary materials, normally accessible only to qualified scholars” (508). This definition points to the undemocratic nature of access to the traditional archive. With digitization, access to the archive has been opened up to a wider audience.

Digitization assists democratization in making the primary materials of the archive accessible. *Monoskop*, for example, a digital archive of printed modernist and avant-garde magazines from the late 19th century to the late 1930s allows access to material that is unavailable to the majority. Ubuweb (founded in 1996 by poet Kenneth Goldsmith) is worked on by volunteers with server space and bandwidth donated by universities. The digital repository hosts over 7500 artists and several thousand works of art. As founder Kenneth Goldsmith states that the

web provides the perfect place to restage these works. With video, sound, and text remaining more faithful to the original experience than, say, painting or sculpture, Ubu proposes a different sort of revisionist art history, one based on the peripheries of artistic production. *(ubu.com)*

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115 Monoskop digital repository is a wiki for the “collaborative studies of art, media, and the humanities” (https://monoskop.org). The open access site allows anyone to edit content.
There is a drive evident in the language used by Monoskop and Ubuweb towards more open access to archival material. With much of this material outside of copyright, these digital archives operate on the fringes of traditional artist documentation.

The expansion of the framework of the archive, through digital archiving, is important for this thesis as it extends the strictures of the performance beyond the live element. I will discuss this relationship between the live element of theatre production, deemed by many to be its most essential part, later in this chapter (under the heading “The Ongoing Performativity of Digital Documentation”). What I will note at this point is that a digital repository such as Ubuweb changes – and extends – the nature of the theatre audience. For example, Ubuweb holds the audio for four different versions of Samuel Beckett’s Embers: the 1959 BBC Third Programme version, the WBAI 1963 version, the 1966 French version, Cendres, with Roger Blin and the 1998 Swedish version Askglöd. Each version lies side-by-side, part of the online digital archive. The plays are set apart from the context of their original broadcast or live performance. The traditional definition of a theatre audience as a group of people gathered at a particular place and time to watch a live performance is challenged by digital technology. What about the theatre audience watching a live performance transmitted in cinema theatres? Are radio plays, and the audiences listening to them, any less theatrical for not taking place in a traditional theatre?

The disembodying nature of digitization stands at odds with the liveness deemed necessary for a theatrical performance and yet, for Iovino and Oppermann, “a material ecocriticism examines matter both in texts and as a text, trying to shed light on the way bodily natures and discursive forces express their interaction whether in representations or in their concrete reality” (2; emphasis in original). This chapter is crucial to my argument for the creation of conceptual ecological environments because it extends the framework of the performance beyond the theatre and into a material domain.
As I stated in my chapter on Beckett, the interconnectedness of the body and the space around it is necessary for constructing an ecological environment. This chapter adds digital documentation to the remit of the research because the documentation is as important to a materialist ecocritical reading of the text as the performance. In a new materialist framework, the agency of matter needs to be read, and have equal billing, alongside traditional analysis of theatre productions.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first, “Druid Archive as Conceptual Ecological Environment”, explores the implications of digitization for a theatre archive. Can the culturally specific symbolic systems of Druid be revitalized through digitization? Druid Theatre Company typifies a particular brand of Irish nostalgia: one connected to the rural west of Ireland. Serpil Oppermann has noted that, “Material ecocriticism is mainly concerned with amending artificially naturalized systems of meaning that precipitated anthropocentric epistemologies” (35). I have argued that, in line with Oppermann’s definition of material ecocriticism, the DruidSynge performance is part of a system of knowing that is nostalgic and artificially created. So how can we make a more authentic narrative of place? I want to explore how the current digitization of their archive can challenge the traditional parameters of place performance.

The company theatre archive, which is housed at the James Hardiman Library at the National University of Ireland, Galway includes playbills, posters, photographs, invitations, flyers, scripts, tour handbooks and other related documents. This material is intertwined with human social and cultural practices. Attending the theatre to reading the reviews, the process of engaging with the writers, actors, and a myriad other agents in the web of narrative agency is addressed in this section. The issues pertaining to this section is how the theatrical performance of landscape functions in a digitised or mediated culture and what theatre (and by extension the live arts in general) become as they move from the live to the digital. Because personal and cultural identity are deeply connected to place, I will argue that landscape –
which (as I stated earlier in the dissertation) is place frame by human culture – can be performed digitally.

The second section, “The Ongoing Performativity of Digital Documentation”, examines the impact of digitization and wider digital culture on theatre. How can new narratives constructed through digitization effectively expand a theatre audience? Peggy Phelan argues that “performance’s being, becomes itself through disappearance” (146). I intend to challenge that statement, arguing that through digitization, performance never disappears but is constantly re-generating itself, the end result being not a theatre archive, but a web of new narratives. As noted earlier, Sidney Dobrin argues that “what we imagine to be real space must be reimagined” (203). These new narratives will go some way to becoming the inclusive discourse that materialist ecocriticism calls for and that inclusivity will broaden the definition of what a real space is.

The final section, Material Networks: Contesting Ephemeralty”, will examine the material nature of digital documentation. This section will further the notion of entangled agencies of matter. These landscape narratives, whether on stage or in the archive, “advocate the vitality of matter”, to use Jane Bennett’s term (ix). As this thesis argues for the emergence of conceptual ecological environments in Synge, Friel and Beckett’s work, I will extend my materialist reading to the digital sphere. I contend that this extension will increase the parameters of performance into a more materialist reading of these plays.

Terminology used in the digitization of material needs to be clarified for this chapter. Archives have traditionally been made up of print and manuscript material (such as newspaper archives), but the advent of digital technology has enabled, not only the digitization of print material, but also, the inclusion of digital material in the archive itself. The UNESCO “Charter on the Preservation of the Digital Heritage” lists digital materials as including, “texts, databases, still and moving images, audio, graphics, software and web pages, among a wide and growing range of formats. They are frequently ephemeral, and require focused production, maintenance and management to be retained” (75). There are certain stages in the accumulation of material in a digital archive, or the
digitising of print material in the creation of a digital archive. The first is the initial creation of the data (the term data being used to define recorded information), for example through documenting/recording a specific performance. This recording can be done with or without an audience which raises the question: how can a theatre audience stay a theatre audience in the face of digitization? Notwithstanding a radio play which has a dispersed audience, I argue that the theatre audience can also be extended through access to digital material. The second stage is the method the central system uses to amalgamate the data creating narratives that enable the material to be read. More than 2000 European digital archives have contributed to the online portal, Europeana for example, in order to trace narratives and new clustering of historical information. Although individual archival organizations are responsible for their own digitization procedures, they must then conform to the European Data Model (EDM), a cross-domain, semantic web-based framework if they wish to conform to larger organizations such as Europeana.

Before examining the digital environment in either the theatre or the digital archive, I want to first reaffirm the characteristics that are arguably what makes theatre what it is. Traditionally (and in accordance with Peter Brook’s definition), the physical body is necessary for a theatrical performance to happen. Performative disciplines (such as theatre, dance and performance art) have become more fluid in their interpretation of presence, and the boundaries between artistic disciplines have relaxed. For example, The National Theatre Live Project broadcasts plays from the London stage to cinemas globally, challenging the premise that the audience need to present for a theatrical performance to occur. The 2012 Turner prize nominee Marvin Gaye Chetwynd’s performances have been described as “a postscript to 20th century theatre – the carnivalesque mood, low-budget materials and collapsed actor/audience hierarchy go back to Brecht via 1970s happenings” (Wullschlager). These two methods describe different ways of performing liveness.
Theorist and performance artist RosaLee Goldberg describes the live presence of the artist as “central to ‘the real’, and a yardstick for installation and video art” (9). In performance art – because of a focus on the real and a reluctance to perform the “live” repeatedly in the same way that theatre does – the discourse around documentation is central. How an event has been recorded has become as important as the event itself. In his article, “The Performativity of Performance Documentation”, Philip Auslander discusses Chris Burdan’s seminal 1971 performance piece *Shoot*, arguing that the fact that there was no audience present at the event made no difference to “our perception of the performance” (7). He claims that “it is not the initial presence of an audience that makes an event a work of performance art: it is its framing as performance through the performativ act of documenting it as such” (7).

So, how does a theatre audience stay a theatre audience in the face of digitization? The answer could be in the documentation. The recording of a performance as a piece of theatre implies the existence of a theatre audience and, as such, the viewer becomes that audience. A report commissioned by the Federation of Scottish Theatre explored how the innovative nature of Ntlive (live broadcasting of National Theatre performances to 280 cinema globally) expanded the theatrical audience beyond its traditional boundaries while retaining the liveness of the theatre at its core:

Cinema audiences reported even higher levels of emotional engagement with the production than audiences at the theatre. They also claim that they are now more likely to visit the theatre in the future, suggesting that there may be spill-overs on the wider sector, and audience development potential for simulcasts. (Rudman 1)

In 2012 the British Arts Council in partnership with the BBC published a questionnaire survey of 40 publicly funded organizations to see how digital technologies help link companies to their audience. The total digital content of the responding companies came to 60,000 hours and 31,000 items, the majority being artist interviews (83%) followed by recordings of the performance (75%). The content was made available to the public through the companies’ websites for the most part, with 60% also using *YouTube*, and 55% using other means.
such as cinema broadcasts, *Facebook, Vimeo* etc. (Rudman). Interestingly, Rudman expanded on this content with a guide on how to choose the right platform for each company’s particular content. Exploring the planning stages of the digital content to the publishing options such as global video platforms (*YouTube, Vine, Vimeo*), online cultural channels such as digitaltheatre.com or on a private platform using video sharing software such as *ooyla* or *brightcove*. Rudman argues that “increasing numbers of arts audiences are consuming performing arts through live or recorded digital broadcasts, and this is a great opportunity for performing arts organizations to increase the reach, scale, access to and legacy of their core artistic work” (2). This opportunity to extend the legacy of a theatrical company should be embraced not only by the companies themselves to promote various theatrical performances but also as a means to explore new and innovative ways of being in the environment. The tools available to enhance a live performance and to further the life of that performance gives the opportunity, in the shape of an online exhibition for example, to audience members to contribute their own memories of a given environment.

The transmutation from live bodies to digital material is not only a move from the live to the archival but also a challenge to the role of theatre documentation. The function of documentation changes from being a gatekeeper of histories to a dynamic of evolving and continuing interplay between actor and audience. Does the act of viewing or using a digital archive constitute a theatre performance? Can the ongoing performance of archival material be deemed a type of mediatized liveness? The theatre archive has always been an active and constantly evolving structure, attempting to capture the multi-faceted dynamic of a time-based medium. The documentation has always been secondary to the performance, viewed as secondary to the event, an attempt to capture the ephemeral. With digitization comes the opportunity to place the performance and its documentation on an equal footing, both active agents in a material narrative of place.
5.2 Druid Archive as Conceptual Environment

As discussed in Chapter two, the West has become a conceptual ecological environment. It has become the *de facto* environment in Irish narratives of place. The islands form a conceptual ecological environment in that they are driven by an ideology (or belief system) that links a diasporic community to a specific geographic area. In this section I would like to examine in detail the archival documentation of the *DruidSynge* cycle, in particular, the Wildfire Films documentary of the tour which was filmed live and released – three years after the initial event – in 2007. The box set contains live recordings of all the Synge plays in the cycle, a behind-the-scenes documentary of the tour, a television documentary commemorating the one-hundredth anniversary of the first performance of *The Playboy of the Western World*, and an interview between Synge expert, Professor Ann Saddlemyer and Druid director, Garry Hynes at the Synge Summer School in July 2007. The live recordings of each performance begin and end with the audio of the attending audience being seated (ushers are heard in the background at the beginning) and applause at the end.

The evidence of the importance of place is clear from the documentary, *Mighty Talk: A Journey with DruidSynge*. Garry Hynes describes being “haunted” and actor Eamon Morrissey calls the project a “vast epic thing” (2007). From the beginning the narrative in the film tied the tour to the landscape of the Aran Islands. As the documentary begins in May 2005, the Company arrives at Inis Meáin for a field trip. Garry Hynes immediately links the islands to Synge’s plays: “Out of those five visits that he made, this island in particular, out of it came, essentially, his entire canon” (2007). Looking for the same wild and savage remoteness that Synge saw on his visits to the islands at the turn of the twentieth century, Hynes sees the trip as “part of the rehearsal process” (2007). In the closing moments of the documentary, after footage of *DruidSynge* in Galway, Dublin, and Edinburgh, the cycle is performed at the local national school on the Aran Islands. The documentary describes the event
as, “Druid bring the ‘Synge Cycle’ back to Inis Meáín” (2007). Described by Garry Hynes as “the only place in the world we could be right now,” the documentary finishes where it begins, on the Aran Islands (2007. DVD). The documentary feeds into the narrative of place that uses a play text to realize an imaginary past. Robert Welch has said of Riders to the Sea, that the “object reality of stones, sea and the island itself is powerfully present by virtue of the fact that it is continually called to mind in the text’s naming of these locations, indeed presences” (Changing 93). Welch reinforces the divide between the cultural space of the interior (which is described by Welch as nurturing) and the exterior where the harshness of life is embedded in the landscape. I would argue that the documentary illustrates a landscape that has become conceptual. The company’s desire to return to the source serves to highlight the unnatural state of the environment. Just as the landscape is created, so the characters that operate within that place are theatrical.

The second documentary in the box set, Playboys and Rebels, brings us back to the original production of The Playboy of the Western World. This documentary focuses on the creation of Synge’s aesthetic, his trips to the Aran Islands, and the protests that erupted around Playboy on its opening night on 26 January 1906. The documentary shows the association between Synge and the national theatre and also highlights the outcome when a small community from the west of Ireland acts differently from what the urban Dublin audience expects of them. As Colm Tóibín states in the documentary:

It isn’t just the language about shifts, it’s the idea that a small community of people who are ostensibly Catholic would not – the minute they heard about someone killing anyone – immediately declare themselves against that, that it was a repugnant act.

Although Playboy is set in Mayo, the origins of this story are on the Aran Islands.116 Here, we have a playwright satirizing the nostalgia surrounding the

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116 Synge recounts a story he heard about a man called O’Malley on Inis Meáin where a
“Connaughtman who killed his father with the blow of a spade when he was in a passion, and then fled to the island and threw himself on the mercy of some of the natives with whom he was said to be related” (67). Tim Robinson has noted that “according to Aran oral
rural islander. As Oona Frawley has noted in *Irish Pastoral*, the “furore arose because of Synge’s candor in relating tales of rural Ireland: while nationalism had already linked itself to rural Ireland, it had done so in a way that only idealized that rurality” (100). Dublin audiences were not ready to see the violence that infringed on a romanticized rural environment, especially as its rural community was emblematic of the country as a whole.

This mediation on Irish peasant life by an Anglo Irish Protestant writer has formed, according to the documentary, the mainstay of Irish theatre writing today. The documentary traces a linear pattern – of writing in the face of religious and political intolerance – to contemporary playwrights, Stuart Carolan and Gary Mitchell. Garry Hynes puts Synge at the centre of a historical process of writing and narrating Irish life: “He’s there in the DNA of Irish writing in the twentieth and twenty-first-century” (24.10). I would argue that the documentary, *Playboys and Rebels*, is included in this box set because it serves to highlight one of the greatest events, not just in Synge’s work, but in the establishment of an alternative Irish narrative that went against the severe Catholicism at the turn of the twentieth century.

The true Synge country is, according to the final contribution to the box set, county Wicklow. Anthony Roche (former director of the Synge Summer School) introduces the discussion between Professor Ann Saddlemeyer and Garry Hynes, by focusing on Synge’s landscape of origin: the Synge family was a prominent landowner in the area in the nineteenth century.  

Three of Synge’s six plays are based in the Wicklow area. The merging of Synge’s life with his plays (largely because of Synge’s ethnographic work on the Aran Islands) blended the real with the fiction. This documentation now forms the framework through which we read the cultural landscape of the West.

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117 Synge’s family rented in the area and he spent much of his time there (Beckett, of course, also spent much of his childhood in Greystones, County Wicklow).
Druid Theatre Company explores the role of authenticity through the performance of constructed identities. This constructed identity exists as an imagined environment, invented to tell us something about ourselves. But the materiality of the documentation can give substance to the performance. Discussing Karan Barad’s term, diffractive reading\textsuperscript{118}, Serpil Oppermann states that,

\begin{quote}
instead of transforming “nature” into an endless series of interpretations, the “diffractive” method allows us to actively participate in a creative process in which material levels and levels of meanings emerge together, contributing to the world’s becoming a web teeming with collective stories. (10)
\end{quote}

The world created by Druid does not exist only as a theatrical copy, but through its documentation, there exists a relationship between the real material world and that of the performance. A materialist reading allows us to include the narratives that surround the performance: the props and paraphernalia, but also, the experiential memories of the place that the performance re-enacts.

Performing memory as a cultural practice (clearly evidenced in Druid’s work) explores theatre not as the medium for uniqueness or authenticity, but illustrates how the different narratives constructed through digitization can effectively re-engage the audience with the performance of place. Through digitization, performance never disappears but is constantly re-generating itself, the end result being, as Oppermann states, “a web teeming with collective stories” (10). New media has opened up possibilities for the exploration of new modes of interaction between archived performance and the theatre audience. The digital archive is an important way to gather these different narratives of place together. Thomas Osborne observed that, “whether as notion, impression, concept or anti-concept, the image of the archive is a useful focal point for

\textsuperscript{118}Both Karan Barad and Donna Haraway talk about diffraction as a method for thinking about the text as a part of the outside world and not distinct from it. Barad defines diffraction as “a material-discursive phenomenon that challenges the presumed inherent separability of subject and object, nature and culture, fact and value, human and nonhuman, organic and inorganic” (\textit{Meeting} 381).
bringing together issues of representation, interpretation and reason with questions of identity, evidence and authenticity” (51). They are points of access for the audience to storied matter. Through the examination of an integrated online archive, the notion of cultural identities, examined through performance, can open new lines of enquiry into the material remnants of landscape.

The preservation of digital archives is central to the conservation of cultural heritage. The search for meaning through cultural heritage is the basis of the 2003 UNESCO publication, Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which listed expressions of cultural heritage as “practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated there with – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage” (art. 2). The landscape of the Aran Islands that forms such a vital part of modern Irish society has become synonymous with all that is Irish is central to the expressions of heritage protected in the Convention. The clustering of ideas surrounding cultural identity – archival and performative – in the digital sphere supported by technological advances and the interaction of the user can create a space that advances the cause for an increasingly egalitarian view of landscape. The connection to the narrative of the Aran Islands, rather than the place itself, is evident in Druid’s methodology. Archival documentation has complicated what was a clear linear narrative of place. Thinking about Aran as a web of different stories, from enamored visitors to environmental degradation, allows us flesh out the Islands as a conceptual ecological environment.

5.3 The Ongoing Performativity of Digital Documentation

Overcoming the reliance on the physical body in theatre can expand the parameters of theatre for the audience. The use of technology as part of (and in the construction of) performance has long since evolved from theatrical representations of technology in theatre. An example is Samuel Beckett’s
Krapp’s Last Tape (1958) where technology (in this case a reel-to-reel tape machine) is used to extend the performance beyond live actors. Directors such as Robert Lepage, Jan Fabre and Romeo Castellucci, and theatre groups such as La Fura dels Baus, all rely on technologies in the realisation of their work. Katie Mitchell’s Waves (2006) and Complicite’s The Elephant Vanishes (2003) have successfully used digital technology to bring the works of Virginia Woolf and Haruki Murakami to the stage. Theatre companies are now expected to showcase across digital platforms. The live video streaming of theatrical events has become the hyper-mediated version of the live performance. The tweets emerging from inside the auditorium (as audience members engage in debates before the performance is finished) illustrate the rise of the meta-level conversation in and around the theatrical space. Given the pervasiveness of this digital influence, some would argue that Peter Brook’s definition of the theatrical experience (as a man walking across an empty stage) is becoming increasingly challenged by new definitions of performance.

Performance, or as Richard Schechner deemed it “twice-behaved behaviour,” functioning as a conduit for remembering and re-performing our identities and our histories is not new (36). What has changed is how modern technologies have adapted performance in the representative reconstruction of our reality. The move from real to digital space is integral to the notion that performance as theatre has always been imagined or virtual. Digitization fundamentally changes theatre from ephemeral performance to residual data and that process can act as a catalyst for different discourses around the agency of material.

In our mediated culture what Žižek terms a “cobweb of semblances” has replaced the real, and memory has been transformed into continuously diluting images of the past (12). But the emergence of media archaeology is testament to the material nature of the archive and through this materiality we can connect to the past in a more concrete way. Marlene Manoff notes that “computational devices produce a dramatically altered archive – one that is not organized by humans and whose processes occur below the level of human perception”
There is a myth that the digital archive (as a narrative of the past) is objective because it is computational. More interesting would be to envision the digital archive as a system creating its own narratives. As Timothy Morton has argued, a “virus is a macromolecular crystal that instructs cells to produce copies of itself. If a virus is alive, a devil’s advocate might claim, so is a computer virus. Life-forms themselves undermine distinctions between Natural and non-Natural” (“Queer” 276-7). The digital archive may be thought of as an uncontaminated, utopian, organizational system but we should adopt a more materialist perspective on its underlying makeup.

The influence of digital technologies on performance has created opportunities for the advancement of theatrical productions both in range and in depth. In the last few decades there has been a revaluation of the arts, as the scope of digital technologies permeates the fields of film, cinema, and theatre. The impact of that influence has created new questions about the nature of the arts and its place in society. Some theorists have argued that digital media has become fully absorbed into our culture, beckoning the post-digital age. Henry Jenkins claims that new media have not replaced traditional media but that “the emerging convergence paradigm assumes that old and new media will interact in ever more complex ways” (6). Whereas previously theatre required a live encounter between performer and audience, that relationship has developed into what Michael Pepperell and Michael Punt call “total continuity between consciousness, body and machine” (63). Even the most traditional theatre company encourages a heightened digital interaction with its audience. From previews, interviews with cast and crew uploaded to websites, and media-sharing sites, the online element not only provides audio-visual documentation of the performance but creates alternate possibilities for interaction. For Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin “new digital media are not external agents that come to disrupt an unsuspecting culture. They emerge from within cultural contexts, and they refashion other media, which are embedded in the same or other contexts” (19). Digital media have not replaced the theatrical experience but
expanded and furthered its duration beyond the walls of the auditorium, creating a new and ongoing life for the performance.

Walter Benjamin notably talked about our attachment to the uniqueness of a work of art. This attachment, Benjamin argues, has led to fetishism of the original object or, in the case of the live arts, the event. For this reason the value of the theatrical experience, which is closely tied to its ephemerality, stays with the event rather than with its documentation. In a theatre archive, therefore, the core element or the liveness of the subject is lost. Karel Vanhaesebrouck points out the challenges that digital archives of performance face:

There is no tangible “archetype”…What version should be preserved? The first? The ‘best’? A recording of a performance which is not one of the regular ones, but which has been restaged especially for the sake of the archive? A reconstruction a posteriori? (imageandnarrative.be).119

The digital theatre archive has developed to include many different facets of the performance which although allowing for a richer archival experience has raised the issues of mediation. Articles, blogs, photographs, and video all now contribute to the discourse surrounding the performance. The curation of the archive falls out of the control of theatre companies and the self-imposed narrative traditionally in the domain of a small group of individuals now transfers to the hands of many. Audience photographs, amateur reviews, blogs, posts, and tweets all contribute to the conversation surrounding the performance. In the case of Helen Cole’s We See Fireworks performed at the Barbican in 2011, the performance itself consisted of recordings of audience recollections of previous theatrical performances.

New ways of understanding the documentation of different narratives are needed to gather as much information as is valuable for remembering a theatrical performance. For example, Europeana’s model of collecting material from different archives throughout Europe allows for a much broader range of narratives to be gathered. There is a sense of a history being uncovered and alternative narratives being shared. Archaeologist, Michael Shanks has stated

119 The same issues have been raised when theatrical texts have been edited for print.
that in digital culture “the tools to uncover so much are in our hands; ours and those of people who haven’t had access to this kind of cultural tool before” (“Here” 233). There is a distinction to be made between the gathering of material and the curation required to thread this material together into a linear narrative. Europeana, in an effort to curb the top-down curation of historical narratives, also allows for individual contributions to exhibitions such as the call for personal archival material relating to the First World War (europeana1914-1918.eu). Diary entries, letters and photographs all build towards a more complex image of an historical event. Another innovative use of digital tools to broaden and enrich an archive is “Wilderness Babel”, a virtual exhibition on the Environment and Society portal – a project founded by the Rachel Carson Centre in Munich (environmentandsociety.org). The aim of the project, edited and coordinated by Dr Marcus Hall, is to examine the mapping of language, with contributors invited to describe their own native and linguistic descriptions for “wilderness”. These exhibitions show how digital material can be used to facilitate new ways of exploring historical data.

Remapping traditional models of the archive for the digital era has led to an increased awareness of the way that we archive our personal and collective histories online. On the world’s more popular video sharing website, YouTube, 100 hours of video are uploaded every minute. The question of how digital archives are constructed and maintained has become crucially important to their usability. Open access to our shared cultural heritage is one of the challenges of digitization. They also feed into the creation of a narrative-driven unfolding of present events, the memorializing of the present. Andrew Hoskins writes that:

there is a new contagion of the past driven by a memorial culture unstoppably equipped with the availability, portability and pervasiveness of digital devices, enabling the instant aggregation and archiving of everything. The “digital”, it can be said, insinuates itself in the past. (1)
The connection of apocalyptic and dystopian narratives to technology is testament to the anxiety surrounding this phenomenon of instant self-narration and memorialization. Lauren Berlant states that this creates a new genre (a constant focus on the world as living in the present), an activity of “being reflexive about a contemporary historicity as one lives it” (5). The effect, I would argue, destabilizes the authenticity of historical documentation. There is an impression that all-inclusive narratives are fickle and easily undermined.

This break in the faith in historical narratives emerges from contemporary digital tools of representation. Dipesh Chakrabarty maintains that this collapse in representation emerges from the global crisis of climate change. He points out that the “discipline of history exists on the assumption that our past, present, and future are connected by a certain continuity of human experience” (“Climate” 197). Given the impending catastrophe of climate change, we can no longer rely on old, linear ways of narrating and documenting historical events. He determines that we need a new way of imagining the human and allowing that to dictate our method of representing our world. As humans have now become a geological force and, Chakrabarty contends, our way of being in the world needs to change. He states that: “our thinking about ourselves now stretches our capacity for interpretative understanding. We need nonontological ways of thinking the human” (“Postcolonial”13). I would argue that this new model for narrating the human story, and its environment, needs to form a central part of rethinking documentation and its resulting narratives.

Michel de Certeau claims that “in history everything begins with the gesture of setting aside, of putting together, of a certain classified object into documents” (History 72). The action of setting aside puts value on the object, value that had historically led to the fetishism of the physicality of the object itself, although it can be argued that the digital object is currently gaining this currency. Digital culture does need to reassess its relationship to the object.

120 For example, Jon Turney’s Frankenstein’s Footsteps: Science, Genetics and Popular Culture (1998) is an exploration of the fear generated by the rise in biotechnology and its impact on cultural narratives.
because increasing value is now being placed on digital artworks in new media art, for example. In contemporary art practice digital tools have transformed the way we produce art and the emergence of a digital aesthetic has changed the way we think about – not only the natural world – but how we document that world, and the physical matter, the objects, that result. Many digital and environmental humanities scholars are moving into the materiality of digital technologies arguing that there is nothing virtual about e-waste. Jennifer Gabrys points out in *Digital Rubbish: A Natural History of Electronics*, that in “programming matter, software becomes tied to matter; it constitutes a distinct articulation of material processes…There is no software because there is nothing soft – or absent – about it” (62). The aura of the original, the uniqueness of the archival object has led to a focus on the object; its value lies in its setting aside. As a theatre archive the core element or the performativity of the subject is lost. With digitization, the theatre archive has developed to include many different facets of the performance which although allowing for a richer archival experience has raised issues of preservation of the material.

All archives are performative in their mode of operation. As Jones, Abbott and Ross state, all “archiving is performance: records are surrogates that provide a window onto past moments that can never be recreated, and users interact with these records in a performance to reinterpret this past” (166). So how can digital technology further enhance this ongoing performance? The transmutation from the real to the electronic is not only a move from the live to the archival but also a challenge to the role of the theatre archive in performance studies. As Jones *et al* continue to say the challenge of archiving performance resonates particularly with digital archivists as “digital records are inherently performative, only coming into existence when the correct code executes the data to render a meaningful output” (170). The theatre archive has always been an active and constantly evolving structure, attempting to capture the multi-faceted dynamic of a time-based medium. The archive has always been secondary to the performance however, being viewed as what remains after the main event, a collection of scraps attempting to capture the ephemeral.
With digitization comes the opportunity to place the performance and the archive on an equal footing, both active agents in the discourse inspired by the theatre company.

Different priorities have emerged, however, between digital archives that are born digital, a term used in UNESCO’s 2003 “Charter on the Preservation of the Digital Heritage”, and the traditional archives that await digitization or which have been digitized. Whereas print material in traditional archives have been in existence for years – medieval manuscripts, for example, have been retained with relative ease – digital software has proved to be more delicate. The issue is noted in the UNESCO charter:

The world’s digital heritage is at risk of being lost to posterity. Contributing factors include the rapid obsolescence of the hardware and software which brings it to life, uncertainties about resources, responsibility and methods for maintenance and preservation, and the lack of supportive legislation. (75)

Computerized data has become fragile – even more so than print archives – and the digital technology is evolving too rapidly to keep pace with much of the digital archival objects. However, Lavoie and Dempsey point out that fears around the preservation of digital materials is somewhat ill-founded as the important data will remain protected:

While it is true that digital materials are inherently more fragile than analog materials, the degree of risk varies widely across classes of resources: there is appreciable risk, for example, that a Web site available today may be gone tomorrow, but there is little indication that the corpus of commercially published electronic journal content is under the same threat. (dlib.org)

They argue that these issues are important as this bring up issues of what they term “digital stewardship” (dlib.org). This question of who manages the archival narrative feeds into the same overall discussion in this thesis: how is landscape – namely the performance of place – narrated? The gulf between material and digital objects that pertain to the same subject can be lessened through a dialogue between the physical and digital narratives of the environment. The increased performativity of digital documentation is an
important addition to any discussion of narratives of place.

5.4 Material Networks: Contesting Ephemeraly

In Material Ecocriticism, Cheryl Glotfelty’s examination of Peter Goin’s photography looks at the digitization of his images of nuclear test sites. She states that the “process of digitizing the images is itself an exercise in intra-action as there is no exact correlation between the color of the original print and the digital palette” (235). Using Karan Barad’s term, intra-action, where co-emerging matter results in a world in “its ongoing becoming”, Glotfelty sees this digitization as a change or development in the narrative of the material (Meeting 3). According to her, the digitized object is “not a copy but rather an interpretation of the original, which itself was an interpretation of Goin’s immersive, trans-corporeal, intra-action with the site” (235-6). This lack of a definitive text indicates the non-hierarchical nature of the digital archive. Digitization, again, demonstrates its increasingly egalitarian mode of collecting narratives. Narratives become democratized in the digital archive and, similarly, the landscape in the theatrical works of Synge, Beckett and Friel are interpreted, not just by the visual reading of the stage designer or director, but by many photographs, reviews and descriptions of the environment. I argue that the digital manifestation of these theatrical landscapes, through the myriad narratives that accompany the performance, broadens these landscapes into an ecological or all-inclusive conceptual environment. To return to the definition of ecological discussed in the introduction, this reading seeks to analyze these performance texts – not just as a specific production or play text – but in terms of all the material generated in its production. Extending my materialist reading to the digital sphere, I wish to lengthen the parameters of performance into a more intimate material negotiation of these plays.

The documents that remain after live events have passed need to be seen as having ongoing or continuous agency in their own right. After the event, the video or audio that remains are the residual elements that makes up the ongoing
The performance of place. Through the process of digitization, the various elements that constitute the performance change. The exciting future for the theatre archive lies in the diverse and varied ways for the user to interact with the material using digital technologies, be they gaming technologies such as the online virtual reality systems such as MUD (Multi-user dungeon), 3D modelling or the use of chatterbots (which, as Philip Auslander argues, are the same agents of liveness as real performers). The opportunities that exist for future theatre audiences to engage with performances through digital intra-action create a space where the narrative of the environment is ongoing.

Far from being immaterial, the digital archive consists of the same agential matter as the traditional archive. The digital life of theatrical documentation – be it digitized archival objects or videos of interview and rehearsals – is dependent on their worth to the user. Theatre that is valued today is not necessarily the theatre that will hold its value in the future initiating the question of who should decide what to archive? The online curation of archives and the sculpting of websites and performance histories are important in maintaining the vision and purpose of the theatre company. Digitization allows for a life beyond the performance of a piece of theatre. The archiving of cultural memory of a landscape creates a reservoir of information to inspire discussions on the narratives that inform a large part of our societal structures. Although a script is reenacted endlessly and can subsequently be placed in an archive as historical record, the performance itself on any given date is unique. Peggy Phelan argues that “performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance” (146). Philip Auslander counters Phelan’s argument proposing that as performers are re-enacting a script, they themselves are a constituent part of a reproduction. He argues that “live performance cannot be said to have ontological or historical priority over mediation, since liveness was made visible only by the possibility of technical reproduction” (54). All performance is mediated to some degree; at the core of the theatre is its play-acting. The traditional focus on the performing
and re-performing of a constructed idea of landscape supports the assertion that the illusory state of the theatre can also be transferred to the digital world. The fluidity of theatrical performance of cultural identity lends itself well to the ongoing performative nature and increased mutability of the digital environment. The dynamic structure of the internet will allow for the culturally specific symbolic systems of the theatrical performance to be revitalized through digitization.

Digital technologies have challenged as well as invigorated the role of the traditional archive. The archive, formerly charged with the depositing and safeguarding of historical objects, has been described by Jacques Derrida as “an irrepresible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement” (91). Helen Freshwater has noted that the fetishism for the unique has allowed us to become transfixed by the material object. She states that “[t]he archive is a literal embodiment of the metaphors that surround memory, as memory is (in)formed by culturally distinct methods of storage, inscription, and access” (742). She highlights the subjectivity of the archive and calls for a “cautious, conditional reconstruction” (751). Digital technology gives us the opportunity to open up a new discourse around documentation which could reconfigure the nature of documentation as discussed by Freshwater. An opportunity to create a new all-inclusive method of documentation that embraces the materiality of the archive and the multi-experiential narratives that it engenders.

Digital tools have ushered in new ways of examining the past. An example is Carrlands, a digital deep mapping project which seeks to document, archive, and construct a narrative, of a specific landscape. The project was conceived and written by Mike Pearson, Professor of Performance Studies at the University of Aberystwyth. The project seeks to draw attention to and illuminate “the historically and culturally diverse way in which a place is made, used and reused, and the complexities involved in interpreting landscape” (carrlands.org.uk). Using audio recordings, interviews, photographs and on-site fieldwork, the project aims to inspire a public response to three specific
landscapes in North Lincolnshire. The public are then encouraged to contribute their observations and interpretations. The ultimate aim of the Carrlands project is to “to record and represent the grain and patina of a place through juxtapositions of the historical and the contemporary, the political and the poetic, the factual and the fictional” (carrlands.org.uk). The Heritage Sandbox project, launched in December 2011, is the creation of REACT: one of four knowledge-exchange hubs for the creative economy in England. REACT seeks to support and encourage collaboration between arts and humanities researchers and creative economy companies in the exploration of new experiences of heritage. The projects are chosen in order to try “to work out whether places have memories, and if so, how can we help people relate to these memories” (Cole, wired.co.uk). Under this funding remit is the “City Strata project” aiming to create a geo-located, multi-layer and multimedia overlay of Bristol using mobile platforms. This platform will enable location based experience which will include user-generated and uploaded content. One of the project leaders, Peter Insole, was previously involved in the creation of “Know your Place”, a website that explores Bristol through the use of historic maps which also allows the public to share images online (maps.bristol.gov.uk).

An example of the ongoing memorialization of performance is Helen Cole’s We See Fireworks performed at the Barbican. The performance was a collection of recordings of audience members remembering previous theatrical performances. The memory of the event provided the opportunity for a further performance by a particular group of audience members. Using digital tools, the ongoing performance of place can be open to an ongoing performativity. The use of digital technologies to explore different modes of performance was created by producer, Jake Orr, of A Younger Theatre. The website provides critical perspectives on theatre for younger generations, and has offered up a new perspective of the relationship between critic and theatre company. Orr had unrestricted access to the rehearsal process of Be Good Revolutionaries by Dirty Market. He documented his own observations on the process on a digital blog: digitaldirtymarket.tumblr.com. Examining the theatrical process from the
very beginning offered Orr (and his online audience) the opportunity to enter into a dialogue with each other and the performers. The notion of theatre under a microscope is part of the permeation of digital technologies into all aspects of culture. The aim of the project was not just to explore the rehearsal process but also to create an online audience, to create a piece of digital theatre that stands side by side with the performed piece. The main question at the core of the project is how can documenting a performative work-in-progress using digital tools become a theatre or art form in itself? And does the characterizing of this type of action as performance necessitate a redefinition or renaming of what has traditionally been known as performance (what happens on a stage in front of an audience)? This new emergent performance illustrates just how much technology has become enmeshed in our contemporary reading of the artistic practice.

The environments created in the theatre space have extended out beyond the space of the live performance. There is a more inclusive relationship which broadens the scope of the theatre audience. As I noted in the introduction to this thesis the term ecological reflects the breaking down of boundaries, as Hubert Zapf has noted, “the sense of a shared and complex world is the fundamental impulse of ecological thought” (55). This increased democratization and interplay between performers and audience, surely, aspires to a more ecological dynamic for theatre. Digital media generates information that is in essence, ongoing and performative in ways that traditional theatre archives were not. The physical presence of performer or audience is no longer necessary for these virtual environments to be engaged. Can theatre now be born digital and exist wholly in the digital sphere (and does this require a redefinition of performance)? The notion of performance itself has become central to the multiple ongoing technological developments that are changing the audience from passive to active agents. These active agents contribute more and more forcefully to the notion of performance through various digital mediums. The limits of theatre are changing. Digital technologies have allowed for a new layer of interaction to influence the field of theatre studies and this dynamic
new field has created a need for a new definition of what theatrical performance means. The opportunities that exist for future audiences to engage with theatrical performances through digital interaction suggests a need the re-examination of the social, artistic and political forces that led to the creation of performed landscapes.

The capacity of the digital archive – not just to document a particular representation of place – but to perform it as it migrates through different media has created an interesting dilemma for materialist and ecocritical thinking. The field of material ecocriticism, and the environmental humanities as a whole, has traditionally focused on the real rather than imagined or digital environments. There has been a fear that digital culture’s primary focus is on the tools of modernity rather than maintaining any stewardship of the natural world. Ted Hughes notably wrote in Winter Pollen that we need to salvage “all nature from the pressures and the oversights of our runaway populations, and from the monstrous anti-Nature that we have created, the now nearly-autonomous Technosphere” (128). The distinction between the unmodified natural world and the digital, technological sphere has been challenged in the most recent edition of Green Letters where Sidney Dobrin argues that digital environments have become “the dominant environment in which information circulates, in which we circulate…what we imagine to be real space must be reimagined” (203). Should these digital environments be the focus of a new type nature (one separate from the real) and is that a helpful notion for reconfiguring the boundaries that have traditionally divided nature and culture? Traditional theatrical notions of liveness – such as the mediatized form of a live performance – have been challenged by theorists such as Philip Auslander and the same argument can be extended to the environment. The privileging of the real over the digitized is, in effect, a refutation of the mediated context within which all represented landscapes are read.

121 Although Winter Pollen was published in 1994, I think the anxiety around technology is still evident now, over 20 years later.
5.5 Conclusion

Timothy Morton has written that ecological culture is “supposed to be soft and organic, old-fashioned and kitschy, while technoculture is hard, cool, and electronic. But there are surprising connections between the imminent ecological catastrophe and the emergence of virtual reality” (*Ecology* 26). If we focus on the form rather than the content, both “virtual reality and the ecological panic are about immersive experiences in which our usual reference point, or illusion of one, has been lost” (26). The traditional aesthetic distance from the environment that enlightenment ideas around nature offered us is lost in new digital cultures and ecological narratives. Materialism attempts to break down the traditional opposition of nature and culture through focusing on the underlying forces between material agents. Because digital tools have reinvigorated traditional methods of recording performance, a new discourse has emerged exploring how we can use these new digitized environments to learn more about our relationship with the natural world. Focusing digital theatrical platforms on the core dynamic of the group’s performance (as opposed to the factual documentation which can be sporadic in many of the archives which pre-date modern technologies) allows more traditional archives to have currency in the digital sphere. The growth in the ability of theatre companies to develop new modes of engagement through evolving digital technologies will allow for a better understanding of our identity and its connection to the environment around us. Phelan has argued that “a performance’s independence from mass reproduction, technologically, economically and linguistically, is its greatest strength” (149). But reproductive ability could also make performance more egalitarian and more expansive. The growing power of the internet allows for large audiences to witness live performances while being in separate locations. In the move from the ephemeral theatrical event to the digitized mediated performance, and through the ever-evolving developments in computing and its performative and analytical implications, virtual theatre has become more than the represented
space of the event. With the proliferation of archives since the Second World War it has been argued (in the work of the Annales School and Pierre Nora) that constructed history has replaced true remembrance. The re-enacting of the historical narrative in the theatre is one of reproduction. Complicating this narrative by including a widespread and diverse range of associations, memories and storied matter will enable a more inclusive history of place.

Digital technological developments have changed the way that the audience thinks about a theatrical performance. Now that theatre performances can be enacted entirely on Twitter, how are traditional environmental narratives integrated into a digitally progressive society? In an increasingly digital world, many traditional theatre companies have print material that (until they are digitized) remains in boxes. Through the digital archiving of these objects, the nature of these performances will not only be transferred to a new medium, but could potentially be re-interpreted by artists, performers, and digital users. The ever-evolving developments in computing and their performative and analytical implications have brought about a quantum leap in theatrical practice. Lara Nielsen claims that theatre and performance “can interrupt the narrative order of things, break fissures in the ‘prison house’ of language, even irrupt civilizational discourses with the gestural, physical, and insurrectional semiotics of life itself” (157). The power of the live performance to reach an audience is one of the most powerful parts of theatre. Through emerging digital technology, there is now a way of extending live performance by using digital tools.

This chapter contends that the digital turn feeds into the discourse around conceptual environments. Digital narratives of landscape can foster a wider debate on how natural environments – when separated from the unhelpful nature/culture binary – contribute to the construction of our cultural identity. Herbert Blau wrote that “there is nothing more illusory in performance than the illusion of the unmediated” (143). The mediated nature of performance lends itself well to the digital world. Neither structure creates real or authentic narratives of place. But digital documentation enables an entirely different kind
of (hitherto undefined) performative potential. Innovative and inspiring use of
digital technologies will now allow different narratives to contribute, and
ultimately to change, that evolving performance of place.

**Overall Conclusions**

6.1 Introduction

Drawing on ecocritical and new materialist theory, this thesis sets out to
integrate examples of Irish theatrical, radiophonic, and digital landscapes into a
discourse of the environmental humanities. I grouped these landscapes together
under the premise that exploring them as conceptual ecological environments
will offer a more inclusive (and biocentric) way of reading narratives of place.
These examples show that Irish theatre has moved beyond the boundaries of
landscape representation and into a discourse of environmental crises incited by
modernization. Putting the theatrical environment at the centre of the
dissertation, this study had two contentions: firstly, Irish theatrical landscapes
represent conceptual ecological environments and, secondly, that these
conceptual landscapes offer a way of bridging the nature/culture binary that has
separated body from environment.

The main thrust of this thesis is to overcome the division between
cultural and natural frameworks and to emphasize embeddedness in our
material environment. In the introduction to this thesis, I noted that I have used
the term conceptual environment because – in line with conceptual art – the
idea generated by the landscape and encapsulated in the aestheticized version is
the main focus. However, the notion of a conceptual environment, that is
culturally constructed and performed, should not take away from its very real
materiality. As Iovino and Oppermann have argued, all matter is storied matter
which emerges “in combination with forces, agencies, and other matter” (1).
Reading the landscapes in this thesis as storied matter is a way to examine Irish
theatre narratives from the perspective of the environmental humanities. The reasons for doing this reading of Irish theatrical landscapes, and applying the notion of conceptual ecological environments to other narratives of place, is that the politics of how we aestheticize place has implications in the real world. As Kate Soper has pointed out, it is not “language that has a hole in its ozone layer; and the ‘real’ thing continues to be polluted and degraded even as we refine our deconstructive insights at the level of the signifier” (152). Deconstructing environmental narratives should stand alongside scientific development and activism as an important way to tackle impending anthropogenic crises such as climate change or mass extinction. The analysis of how we create narratives of the environment is crucial to changing cultural attitudes towards nature. Care of the natural environment can be practiced by examining how we represent nature in performative texts as Bruno Latour argues, the “ozone hole is too social and too narrated to be truly natural” and natural phenomena such as the ozone layer can benefit from cultural as well as scientific analysis (*Modern 6*). The aesthetic reasons behind environmental narratives need to be disentangled. Alongside discussions of nature as a cultural (and theatrical) construct in this thesis, there is an awareness of our embeddedness in the environment and how material ecocritical discourse addresses the interdependence between body and environment.

The first analysis in this study, “Conceptualizing the West”, looked at Synge’s performance of place as a living archive. The Aran Islands is multi-layered, built up through generations of remembering. This site of remembrance, allows the landscape of the west of Ireland to be mapped as a concrete, cultural archive. Recent publications building upon archival theory explore how the archive functions as “the storing and ordering place of the collective memory of that nation or people(s)” (Brown and Davis-Brown 17). The Aran Islands, an environmental archive, gives the Irish diaspora a sense of moral solidarity, a set of memories that has moved from the real (if it ever existed), into the performative and now into the archival.
The agential power of the sea is made evident within the confines of the islanders’ cottage. Synge stayed on the island five times between 1898 and 1902. The account of his time there takes note of the islanders’ acceptance of the dangers of making daily excursions into the Atlantic Ocean. Synge “could not help feeling” that the islanders “were under a judgement of death” and their lives are framed by the violence of the manner of their drownings, as Synge recalls, “I knew that every one of them would be drowned in the sea in a few years and battered naked on the rocks” (162). Synge’s ethnographic account of the relationship between the islanders and the sea forms the basis of his representation of nature in Riders to the Sea. Looking at Synge’s work as environmental texts (Buell’s definition), the nonhuman environment in Riders to the Sea is “not merely a framing device” but “a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history” (Environmental 7). This is a crucial part of how we can think ecologically about Riders to the Sea: as a conceptual rendering of human history as a part of natural history. Garrard has made the point that one of the “central missions of ecocriticism is to reveal...that nature makes history; that it is, as a concept, historical” (“Endgame” 396). The main way we can challenge the “myth” of nature’s “externality” is to read texts as inclusive to both the human and nonhuman (396).

Synge’s aestheticization of the Atlantic Ocean and its impact on the islanders had profound implications for how nature is represented in Irish theatre. James Knowlson has pointed out that the revivals of Synge’s plays at the Abbey “were of greater significance to Beckett than the work of any other Irish dramatist” (56). Both playwrights adopt a tragicomic vision of the world. “Beckett’s Fragmented Environments” examines material agency in his radiophonic and synedochical plays. Beckett’s work is suffused with his experiences of the Irish landscape. Like Synge, the nonhuman world is often

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122 It is well documented in Beckett’s letters during the thirties that he walked in the Dublin Mountains. On the 14 August 1937, he wrote to Thomas MacGreevy that he found in the Irish landscape, “a nature almost as inhumanly inorganic as a stage set” (Letters 1 540). A
a fraught and ominous entity that dominates the lives of the characters. Neither Maddy nor the fragmented protagonist in *Not I* are fully-embodied. 123 Mouth tries to confirm her existence in much the same way that Maddy does. Both women are disembodied and both exist through sound (although Mouth has an organ to transmit that sound) and their existence is precarious, neither being certain that she exists at all. Mouth and the Douls are vagrants, attempting to make sense of their marginalization and, in many ways, choosing to remain isolated. That marginalization from the social world is, in many ways, a decision to return to a more natural way of life.

Beckett’s work is universal in that many of his environments are not specifically tied to a locale. David Lloyd has made the point that Beckett “transcends the horizon of Irishness, and its limiting localness” (“Frames” 37). Whereas I agree that much of Beckett’s work does transcend the limiting localness of Irishness, I would argue that the imagined landscapes of *Not I* and *All That Fall* are claustrophobic and that is a feature of an Irish relationship to the environment. For example, in *Not I* Beckett made deliberate, and quite uneasy, connections between Mouth and her memories of place. The disembodied voice recalls her home, “where was it? . . Croker’s Acres . . one evening on the way home . . home! . . a little mound in Croker’s Acres” (380). Beckett described the inspiration for Mouth coming from the old crones that lived in Ireland. These “old crones” were women that had been ostracized from the social sphere and were found “stumbling down the lanes, in the ditches, beside the hedgerows. Ireland is full of them” (qtd. in Knowlson 590). These are women that are outdoors, living directly in the lanes, ditches, and hedgerows of the natural world. Mouth’s monologue is laced with anxieties that emerge from an alienation of living in a modern environment but, as I argue in few years earlier, in a letter dated 18 October 1932, he had a distinctly organic reaction to the mountains, writing to MacGreevy that he was “reduced almost to incontinence in the calm secret hostility” (*Letters I* 136).

123 Like Maurya, Maddy senses that she is not a fully-embodied person: “oh to be in atoms, in atoms! [Frenziedly.] ATOMS!” (177).
the chapter, there is a synthesis between the body and its surroundings.

Mouth represents a woman living on the boundary if not directly inhabiting the urban cityscape. I argue that her body is attuned to the networks of modernity in accordance to Buell’s definition of the environment as “a network or networks within which, on the one hand, humans are biotically imbricated (like it or not) and, on the other hand, nature figures are modified (like it or not) by techne” (“Toxic” 657). Mouth is the alienated, fragmented body that is part-human and (in Buell’s words) part-techne. This part-mechanization of man (the unnatural manner of speaking, the fragmented body) is inherent in the crisis of modernity where there is a fear that the natural order has in some way broken down. Buell argues that the threat of toxicity which emerged in a post-industrial society is only part of the increased anxiety of modern living. But rather than urban space being a central metaphor in heralding an endpoint of humanity (and there is no doubt that the anxieties evident in these narratives are valid) the city and its networks can be embraced as a site of a sustainable modernity.

The fragmentation evident in Not I is a breakup of the body in the environment. But this dissolution of the body into the environment does not have to be apocalyptic; the emergence of the endless networks found in the modern cityscape can also produce vital and sustainable spaces for living. The representation of the city as an apocalyptic nightmare is essentially a fable and one that is waning, as Garrard points out, “environmental apocalypticism has had to face the embarrassment of failed prophecy even as it has been unable to relinquish the trope altogether” (Ecocriticism 100). Rather than the cityscape envisioned by the modernist architects such as Le Corbusier, what has transpired in Koolhaas’ vision of the Junkspace, is a partisan version of modern urban life; a “fuzzy empire of blur” that “fuses high and low, public and private, straight and bent, bloated and starved to offer a seamless patchwork of the permanently disjointed” (176). But this seamless patchwork is also a feature of ecological interdependence. Ecological interdependence is not something that is solely a feature of rural landscape. The desire to preserve what is deemed the
natural environment and to exclude the urban is detrimental to a future in which the city is evidently a large part.

The urban cityscape is the one that is recapitulated in Not I; the effect of modernization on the environment and consequently – because of our enmeshment with that environment – on the mind. Apocalyptic narratives have in many ways misinformed what it means to be human and living in a modern cityscape. The city is certainly fragmented, commodified, technological, and material, and, as Samuel Beckett’s Not I suggests, undeniably urban. This depiction of the urban city, however, is not necessarily as detrimental as the fantasy of the future previously has been. Not I is suggestive of an aesthetics of the city that, while depicting the precariousness of urban living, also proposes an urban body that is capable of complete immersion. Mouth is a body that overcomes the strict binaries of individual and environment and represents the interplay between the two. This exchange between, which, in many ways, depicts urban modernity, should surely mark a more progressive representation of the city than that of apocalyptic versions an urban future.

In the fourth chapter, I argue that Friel bridged the discourse between theatre aesthetics and the geographical and conceptual space of the North. The social and cultural aspect of landscape is evident in the creation of the fifth province. Field Day’s desire to create a geographical province of the mind that would enrich the cultural lives of the community creates a premise in Irish theatre of a conceptual environment. To understand Irish drama Brian Friel writes that one must first understand the two dominant features of the Irish mindset: “one is a passion for the land; the other a paranoiac individualism” (“Plays” 305). This attachment to the land that Friel talks about has led to the North becoming a site of trauma where ongoing conflict and partition has created divisions. Friel’s plays document that legacy of human conflict on the environment in the North.

Friel’s traumatized landscapes are a product of modernization, but a modernization in which the physical alienation from the landscape is due to colonialization. One of the questions that arose in this study is how Irish
theatrical landscapes are aestheticized: how is the rural landscape represented or imagined by theatre practitioners? As Helen Lojek points out, the characters looking out the window in Translations have become entirely disconnected from their landscape. The same device (and its implications for the disconnection between body and environment) is also evident in Synge’s Riders to the Sea, Playboy, and Beckett’s Endgame. This could potentially contravene one of Buell’s rules for an environmental text, that the “nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device” (Environmental 7). However, the framing of the natural world via the window is not simply a tool to serve the social world (as nature is often used to reflect on cultural issues) but highlights the characters alienation from the environment and the dangerous position that places the human body in.

The final chapter, “Digital Environments”, is a part of this study’s call for all-inclusivity. I argue that including digital environments extends the notion of natural spaces into the digital world. The documentation of live performance has created a new spatial environment within which to engage with the natural world. The spatial environment that digital documentation offers (by way of an online exhibition or a modified and edited presentation of place) presents us with a new site of contestation between body and place. Modern technologies have challenged the relationship between performance and documentation, allowing for a deeper and more varied means of digital performative expression. An example of this is the emergence of digital theatre where technology becomes an integral part of the theatrical performance alongside live performers.

In much the same way that digital environment have initiated debates about embodiment, conceptual ecological environments gives us the opportunity to think about how nature is aestheticized. Examining plays as environmental narratives allows us to think more ethically and examine how the notion of care can be influenced by the way we read and aestheticize nature, as Karen Barad states, to take “account of the entangled materializations of which we are part, including new configurations, new subjectivities, new possibilities”
Digital performances, separated from the live, have amalgamated with archival material (both real and born digital) to create new environmental narratives that contributes towards an ethics of care for the nonhuman world.

I have argued that the four plays – *Riders to the Sea, The Well of the Saints, All That Fall* and *Not I* – can be read from a new materialist standpoint capturing the human and nonhuman aspects of the plays. Synge’s ethnographic accounts, the sea, the radio, the theatre spaces, the tours, and the archives are all material entities (or storied matter) which forms a part of these conceptual environments. Performed environments are influenced by the social context within which they are created, such as Synge’s desire for the authentic landscape in his initial trips to the Aran Islands (which is overturned by the ongoing deaths in *Riders to the Sea*) to the body dematerializing into the urban space in *Not I*. The material narratives that surround the performance are not made up of inert matter but can be enlivened in an all-inclusive reading of the environment. Connectedness between environmental narratives can be enabled through an emphasis on materiality. The notion of storied matter allows for an engagement with the environment that creates greater accountability on the part of the audience or reader. Buell notes that the way, “environmental writing and criticism intervenes most powerfully within and against standard conceptions of spatial apportionment is by challenging assumptions about border and scale” (*Future* 76). Challenging traditional notions of spatial apportionment is central to material ecocritical discourse. This thesis is about paying attention to the material factors that are nonhuman in the creation of environmental narratives.

### 6.2 Reflecting on Transformations: Careers, Disciplines and Methods

The development of my research from an emphasis on digital landscapes in the first year to environmentally-driven performances of place has led to some unexpected outcomes. Focusing on representations of nature and the natural world on the theatrical stage, the research has the aim of integrating theatre landscapes into the environmental humanities. The reason is an ethical one, an
attempt to tie theoretical research to the realities of environmental collapse. Theatre history (as with all cultural depictions of nature) is responsible for creating the framework for the relationship between the human and nonhuman world. I feel that the theatrical aesthetization of the environment for the purposes of performance has important connotations, not just for theatre history but wider societal changes. My work examines conceptual representations of nature. But, as Haraway states, “I am a compost-ist, not a posthuman-ist” and I equally hope that this research has embraced as wide a range of performative environments as it could, in order to breakdown boundaries between storied matter that has elsewhere been detrimental to nature.

Material ecocriticism and broadening discourses in ecocriticism to include digital environments is an essential part of this research. Material ecocriticism is a move from traditional thinking of the natural world (mainly influenced by European Romanticism) towards more contemporary understandings of nature and how it is depicted, urban ecology for example. This move beyond the singular idea of nature in first-wave ecocriticism to forging new interdisciplinary relationships in understanding different natures is a dynamic and innovative part of new materialist discourse. The digital environmental humanities or digital ecocriticism is working to bring many skills and different perspectives from various disciplines together to focus on the new understandings of the environment we live in. From my standpoint, this cross-fertilization provides exciting challenges. With the development of digital media and digital technologies, digital ecocriticism will continue to expand and inform my research.

The different definitions of nature: as a cultural product, as an independent entity (a catchall phrase to denote the nonhuman world), and a material “web teeming with collective stories”, as Iovino and Oppermann state, needs to be reinforced. This nuanced understanding of the dynamics of nature is central to challenging the separation of human and nonhuman (and, hopefully, 124 Simon Schama has pointed out that, “even the landscapes that we suppose to be most free of our culture may turn out, on closer inspection, to be its product” (9).
bringing agential matter into the narrative mix). This thesis sought to prove firstly, that Irish theatrical landscapes represent conceptual ecological environments and, secondly, that these conceptual landscapes offer a way of bridging the nature/culture binary that has separated body from environment. I addressed each of the plays in this thesis examining them as environmental texts in order to focus on the conceptual idea of landscape. I thematically linked different performances of these plays, theatrical, radiophonic, and digital, to embrace the ethos of inclusivity that was a main objective in thinking ecologically.

6.3 Recommendations for Future Research

When focusing on the body as matter only, various questions arise. At what level does the human end and the non-human begin? Why do we think of our bodies as bounded and what does that viewpoint mean for the gendered body, the body at war, and the starving or decaying body? Harold Fromm argues that the environment “runs right through us in endless waves, and if we were to watch ourselves via some ideal microscopic time-lapse video, we would see water, air, food, microbes, toxins entering our body as we shed, excrete, and exhale our processed materials back out” (95). This experience of collective listening evident in Pan Pan’s production of All That Fall also focuses on the material process of hearing, the biomechanics of the body. Fromm’s idea of the environment moving through us in waves, the microbes and toxins that he talks about but also the sound and radio waves that we experience as humans. We process those waves through our physical bodies just as Maddy Rooney does. The idea of the permeable body that emerges from Alaimo’s trans-corporeality is evident in Maddy’s attempts to find form. What that theatrical performance highlighted was the materiality of the bodily process of listening. Technological advances at the intersection between science and art has enabled many contemporary art producers, such as Pan Pan, to respond directly to these different scales of the material environment.
Envisioning Irish theatrical landscapes as conceptual ecological environments is important because it offers a materialist analysis of aesthetic renditions of place. It also puts an emphasis on the thematic use of the natural environment in Irish theatre. Dipesh Chakrabarty has stressed (in his seminal article, “The Climate of History: Four Theses”) that a focus on the cultural at the expense of the natural has led to anthropogenic climate change. He writes the cultural separation of human history from natural history frees matter from any agency it possesses. I argue that the history of theatrical texts, productions, and documentation can be included in this new remit for natural history. Because humans have now become a “geological force”, we must begin to understand the origins of our aesthetics of nature (206). Now is the time, Chakrabarty points out, to envisage a new way of reading historical narratives and I would include Irish theatrical history in that call. Contemporary environmental crises have produced a need to narrate, in Chakrabarty’s words, “futures that we cannot visualize” (211). I hope that, building on this research, there can be further explorations into Irish theatre work that acknowledges the entanglement of the social and cultural agents in the material and natural spheres.

One of the issues that this research has sought to address is future questions for digital environments. The function of the digital archive entails (not just gatekeeper of histories) but also a dynamic, evolving and continuing performance, which raises many questions. Can theatrical performance really be archived, and if so what is the relationship between the live performance and the digitized performance? Can the performative function of the archive be deemed live theatre? As I have shown in the fifth chapter of this thesis, digital media have become part of the fabric of the theatre. But how can we imagine, in a substantial way, what afterlife these interventions (performances) will have in the digital world. How is that material different from the usual documentation in an analogue theatrical archive—and what distinct problems and opportunities do the two distinct types of historical record offer to the theatre historian of today and of the future? These questions illustrate the lines
that digital archival research can take in the future. My own focus – on the emergence of conceptual ecological environments as a tool for envisioning landscape – has meant that these questions have been touched on in this thesis but not fully examined. They can form research questions that can be addressed by future lines of enquiry.

This thesis argues for readings of historical theatrical performances as environmental material texts. For Stacy Alaimo, the ethical dimension of historical narratives emerges when we trace “the material interchanges across human bodies, animal bodies, and the wider material world” (“States” 476). Hers is a call-to-arms where the dogmatic rhetoric of the human/nonhuman binary needs to be changed. She argues for “a posthuman ethics in which the flows, interchanges, and interrelations between human corporeality and the more-than-human world resist the ideological force of disconnection” (Bodily 142). Alaimo sees a future that “refuses to see the delineated shape of the human as distinct from the background of nature, and instead focuses on interfaces, interchanges, and transformative material/discursive practices” (142). I want this research to form part of the response to that call to create a practice of inquiry and discourse that focuses on the interchange between nature and culture, rather than remain concentrating exclusively on cultural practices. I have argued throughout this thesis that materialist readings of cultural landscapes allow for a deeper understanding of the nonhuman world. I hope that these environmental readings of the plays of Synge, Friel and Beckett (and the broadening of the scope of performative environments to include digital and radiophonic material) will contribute to a study of theatre as a site of natural history. A site of ethical concern where the performance – not just of social roles – but of nature as a whole, can be challenged. How nature is theatricalized and documented should not be conceived as something external to ourselves, but should be seen as the very material that constitutes our lives.
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