

**Counter Sites: On Site-Specific Performance**  
**and the Re-Historicizing of Space**

by

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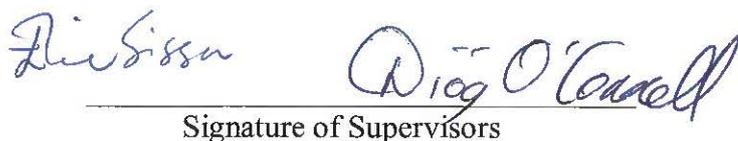
## Declaration

I hereby certify that the material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Master of Arts (Research), is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others except to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text. No portion of the work contained in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification to this or any other institution.

  
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I hereby certify that all the unreferenced work described in this thesis and submitted for the award of Master of Arts (Research), is entirely the work of Lisa Fitzgerald. No portion of the work contained in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification to this or any other institution.

  
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## Abstract

The aim of this research is to examine how government funding, through the creation of a cultural policy framework, can facilitate and support site-specific performance and highlight its value, particularly at sites of historical importance. Using the *Ouroboros/Making History* tour as a case study this project examines the nature of site-specific performance and questions the effectiveness of existing cultural legislation in supporting this innovative practice. It also explores the growing relationship between culture and commerce resulting in the creation of cultural policy that embraces the tenets of business and applies them to the arts. Further it examines the economic and cultural benefits for local communities where audience/visitor attitudes towards historical locations are challenged and reinterpreted through the medium of theatre

Recent socio-economic forces have pressured government agencies such as the Arts Council to create cultural policies incorporating both culture and commerce. Theatre production is vying with many new “cultural industries” (advertising, broadcasting, tourism etc.) for funding. Entrepreneurial initiatives are coming to the fore as the arts is being seen more as an end-product rather than a process, and one which should benefit not only the local community but the larger economy also. With the recent removal of government funding from many established theatre companies, there is a need to assess the impact of this turnaround in support for the future and the quality of theatre production. It is intended that this research will contribute to the cultural debate on the provision of site-specific locations and will benefit the developing national and regional performance guidelines for historic and architectural sites in Ireland

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## Introduction

The refined concept of theatre requires a particular kind of interdisciplinary research. For it contains three different, yet interrelated, meanings of the term *theatre*: theatre as an art form, as a genre of cultural performance, and as a medium. Each of these meanings entails and engenders different kinds of interdisciplinary and comparative approaches which *in summa*, affirm and illustrate the idea of theatre studies as an “interdisciplinary” field *par excellence*. (Fischer Lichte, 1997: 13)

Changes within theatre studies, as a measure of the current growth in interdisciplinary research, reflect the deepening relationship between the theatrical experience and an increasingly performative culture. The emergence of a society where our socially constructed identity is increasingly understood to be performative, mirrors the recent shift in critique from conventional modes of theatre production to the emergence of “the performative turn”: “the exercise of verbal, bodily and multi-modal performances of artistic or social practices” (Dirksmeier & Helbrecht, 2008: 1). The muddying of the concept of theatre has produced, according to Fischer Lichte, three interpretations of theatre: as a traditional art form, a “genre of cultural experience” and a medium for exploring the performative turn (1997: 13). These categories of enquiry, none of which are mutually exclusive, provide the backbone upon which the debate between “theatre” and “performance” rests. This paradigmatic shift within both academic discourse and practice, from conventional theatre housed in a traditional architectural space to the theatrical experience as a medium through which more allusive aspects of performance, such as the quotidian performance within society, can be explored, has provided a framework whereby the performative turn has come to echo human behaviour as an “enacted” experience.

This thesis investigates current critical discourses concerning theatre and performance, and in particular site-specific performance, through an analysis of the politics of the theatrical space and examines how the growing relationship between

culture and commerce has affected these discourses. This, in turn, facilitates the creation of a framework through an analysis of current policy debate, which endeavours to empower theatre practitioners in their practice. By fostering a deeper and more extensive discourse within the field of the performing arts and through the aligning of theoretical debate with cultural practice this research seeks to inform site-specific cultural events both in Ireland and further afield.

In 2007, Dublin based theatre company Ouroboros Theatre Company (Ouroboros) undertook a national tour of Brian Friel's *Making History* using historical buildings and sites as performance spaces. Initially conceived as a means of connecting Friel's play about the Irish leader, Hugh O'Neill, to local historical contexts, the company toured to sites with an historic or symbolic connection to the 1607 Flight of the Earls. The experience of audience members, site managers, production crew and actors suggested that an innovative and potentially radical form of theatre was taking place. The collaboration proved to have economic and cultural benefits for the local communities involved, and the site-specificity created a deeper and more meaningful dynamic between the audience and the performance, as opposed to traditional spatial relations in theatres and auditoria which may effectively work against audience engagement.

By using the Ouroboros/*Making History* tour as a case study for research, questions regarding the shift from conventional theatrical space may be explored. Given the ubiquitous use of the term "site-specific" to refer to any cultural or theatrical practice happening outside a traditional space, the descriptor "site-specific" is examined and challenged as part of the theoretical context of the case study. The tour defied all expectations by embracing the fluidity within site-specificity where the very lack of definition allows for multiple interpretations of what characterises the terms. *Making History* itself is a play written for a traditional theatre space and for Ouroboros the challenge of creating a new performance history for the play, which addresses its specific historical and geographical locations, lay at the heart of current discourses surrounding site-specific theatre. The production both embraced and contravened theatrical conventions and illustrated the full extent of what we understand the term "performance" to mean. Touring to twenty-five national and international locations,

only two performances were in conventional theatres. All of the sites had some connection to the rebellion of Hugh O'Neill and the subsequent Flight of the Earls. Audience reaction to performances illustrates the success of the innovative methods used by Ouroboros within these historicised spaces.

Situating the play within a site-specific location and understanding that audiences would have different relationships to the play's production, depending on the space in which the performance occurred, allows us to see the benefit of producing site-specific work on a wider scale. Government funding through the creation of a cultural policy framework can facilitate and support these productions and highlight the value of site-specific performance particularly at our historical sites. Using the *Ouroboros/Making History* tour as a case study this project questions the effectiveness of existing cultural legislation concerning theatre audiences, and seeks to formulate new modes of engagement for future policy makers. It also explores the growing relationship between culture and commerce resulting in the creation of cultural policy that embraces the tenets of business and applies them to the arts. Further it examines the cultural benefits for local communities where audience/visitor attitudes towards historical locations are challenged and reinterpreted through the medium of theatre.

The heart of theatrical performance lies in its ephemerality and yet no other sector within the arts has to negotiate its practice in such concrete terms; artistically, in the way theatre functions as a group endeavour; financially, in the various institutions funding any given project; and administratively, in how these institutions and theatre companies co-operate in producing the work. Historically, since the foundation of the State, the way in which governmental organisations have engaged with theatre practitioners underlines the ineffective relationship within which both these "partners" have operated where,

The prevalent attitude was that the arts were a luxury that the emerging State could not afford, an attitude reinforced by a post-colonial conservatism that saw the "fine arts" or "high arts" as inimical to native Irish culture. In fact, the only official government policy on the arts in these years was the strict censorship laws, which effectively silenced many Irish artists for decades and drove others away. (Keating, 2008:14)

The emergent relationship between government and theatre practitioners as illustrated by the OPW and the *Ouroboros/Making History* tour succeeded in showing a much more fruitful and productive way of creating theatre. In order to explore the very real concrete funding issues that face theatre groups I have to construct a method for addressing both the practical aspects of staging theatre with the theoretical aspects involved in coming to understand a definition of site-specificity. The complex nature of theatrical performance mixed with the slippery and under-defined notion of site-specificity creates a need for the research itself to move between the practical; funding, staging; and the theoretical, defining, contextualising.

The instability of meaning which has emerged within postmodern discourses surrounding identity has led to a more complex and interweaving analysis of the notion of performance. Scholar, Peggy Phelan, writes that, “the deepest challenges of writing about performance is that the object of one’s mediations, the performance itself, disappears. In this sense, performance theory and criticism are instances of writing history” (1997: 3). Capturing the contested notion of the term “performance” and, in particular, “site-specific performance”, is central to a concrete analysis of an ephemeral subject. The difficulties with “writing history”, as Phelan describes, will be examined both in Chapter One, “Mapping the Territory”, through the lens of scholars and theorists who have explored these questions and in Chapter Two, the case study, through the documenting and tracing of the concrete practicalities experienced on the *Ouroboros/ Making History* tour. Influences such as Grotowski’s “poor theatre” explored through the lens of his Laboratory Theatre Company (1965-1984) and Richard Schechner’s work with the Performance Group (TPG) from its inception in 1967 to his resignation in 1980 are explored in this dissertation with an emphasis on how theatre innovators contributed to the rise of avant-garde or experimental theatre in which site-specific performance has played a crucial role. Giving a clear definition of the essential terms used within the thesis is a core element of the research, in particular, when exploring the challenging concept of “performance” and outlining the current volatility within the debate surrounding theatricality. This dissertation investigates the notion of the performative turn and, by applying that analysis to the concept of “site-specific performance”, the aim of

the research is to reflect the fluidity and flexibility in the field of site-specific theatre, to draw attention to how notions of the construction of space, the stage and the physicality of the actors are important within an historical context.

The interdisciplinary nature of site-specific performance is also a cornerstone of the research. Looking at the current discourses surrounding this burgeoning disciplinary interaction, and scholars immersed in this field, the discipline is being shaped by associated factors that are defining what performance means. Performance studies is a young discipline that draws on many fields of expertise, with scholars such as anthropologist Victor Turner, whose collaborative work with Richard Schechner led to his writing the foreword to Schechner's *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (1985); ethnographer, Dwight Conquergood championing performance studies as the link between theory and practice in *Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research* (2002); feminist, Judith Butler whose work on gender performativity can be explored in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990); and archaeologist, Michael Shanks who explored the connection between performance and archaeology in *Theatre/Archaeology* co-written with Mike Pearson and published in 2001, all contributing to the discourse surrounding the performative. Theatre studies, anthropology, philosophy, sociology, linguistics continue to inform debates within performance studies as the discipline becomes more concerned with talking about performance as opposed to teaching performance. In other words, performance studies as a discipline, "by adopting an expansive, universalizing definition of performance and by grounding methods borrowed from the social sciences in poststructuralist epistemologies." (David Savran 2001:91) is becoming more distanced from the practicalities of performing on stage. My research attempts to bridge theories of performance studies and the practicalities of theatrical production. Central questions posed by this research include, "what is the relationship between the performance and the site?", "Within an historical site, how is the site changed by the performance?" and "how can cultural policy facilitate the development of site-specific performance?"

The emergence of performance studies as a discipline has had a profound effect on theatre studies and what the notion of theatricality means when compared with

performance as a mode of expression. “It goes without saying that the field of theatre studies is rapidly being re-shaped by the principle of performance, abetted by the rise of multiculturalism, interdisciplinarity and gender studies” (States, 1996: 2). The various factors that come into play during the act of performance engender a dialogue surrounding the nature of the act itself and question the varying definitions of a performative event. This thesis contends that investigating the current hypotheses surrounding performance, and in particular site-specific performance, and analyzing the spatial politics of the theatre and the relationship between performer and audience, will lead to a deeper and more extensive discourse within the field of the performing arts in Ireland. Worth quoting in full is the concept of theatre espoused by Professor Erica Fischer Lichte of the Free University in Berlin, in particular the importance she puts on theatre and the field of interdisciplinary studies,

The refined concept of theatre requires a particular kind of interdisciplinary research. For it contains three different, yet interrelated, meanings of the term *theatre*: theatre as an art form, as a genre of cultural performance, and as a medium. Each of these meanings entails and engenders different kinds of interdisciplinary and comparative approaches which *in summa*, affirm and illustrate the idea of theatre studies as an ‘interdisciplinary’ field par excellence. (1997: 13)

Methodologically, a mixed paradigm brings both the benefits of quantitative and qualitative research to the table and enables a complex study of both the Ouroboros/*Making History* tour and the cultural enterprise that surrounds and supports the making of such theatre. This methodology is also beneficial in that it allows me, qualitatively, to concentrate on how things play out in practice, and also examine the quantitative issues that arise within the cultural policy aspect of the research.

### **The Case Study as a Mixed Methods Research Paradigm**

Re-envisioning the site within the context of the performative has proved more elusive as the concept of “site” now operates on a very subjective level, moving away from the “site” as a concrete entity and more towards “site” as socially

constructed and, “meaning-fully constituted in relation to human agency and activity” (Caftanzoglou, 2001: 21). This instability of meaning creates a need for a framework that reflects the fluidity within which modern society operates. Using the strengths of quantitative and qualitative research methods, and combining them within a mixed methods research paradigm, balances both the positive and negative aspects of both as evidenced in the highly influential book *MultiMethod Research* where, “the fundamental strategy is to attack a research problem with an arsenal of methods that have nonoverlapping weaknesses in addition to their complementary strengths” (Brewer and Hunter, 1989: 17). Exploring cultural policy in Ireland and abroad in relation to site-specific performance grounds the research and by examining the effectiveness of existing cultural policy contextualises the study on a practical level. Further, it examines the economic and cultural benefits for local communities where audience/visitor attitudes towards historic locations may be challenged and reinterpreted through the medium of theatre. It is envisaged that the research will provide a basis on which to inform cultural policy makers and address a gap in understanding how historic sites are used, understood and interpreted within cultural policy in Ireland.

By focusing on the qualitative aspects of ethnographic study, the choice of the case study method within the research “allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (Yin, 2003: 2). Yin defines the method as, “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (23). The case study method offers a holistic approach in which the study of a single phenomenon, the *Ouroboros/Making History* tour in this case, sheds light on the broader value of site-specific performance in historical sites. The method enables me to look closely at the research questions on a practical level and examine the realities faced by theatre companies in the realisation of a site-specific production on historical sites.

Another advantage in using the case study is that the method crosses all disciplines and counteracts some of the language boundaries that are endemic in interdisciplinary work. It avoids the “notion of discipline-as-identity”, a term used by

the BRIDGES consortium, a think tank in interdisciplinary research, in order to categorise the defensive context in which research language is created (Beam, Diamond, Beam 2003: 125). The group cite language of difference as a fundamental barrier to interdisciplinary research, although caution that, “discipline-specific language should not be watered down for mass consumption, but that conversely, cross-disciplinary collaborators needed to learn techniques for clarifying meanings” (2003: 126). As this research and the resulting case study falls into this field, I hope to retain clarity in the language used within the study itself.

The use of this method is also beneficial (particularly within interdisciplinary research) in that it allows the research to focus on how things play out in reality as opposed to theoretically. Using strategies such as interviews, observation and documentary materials, the case study enables a concrete and reasoned study of the practicalities of site-specific theatre. R. Keith Sawyer has noticed “how disparate disciplines are converging on a common set of concerns and a common set of approaches in response to the same issue. The common theme is a shift from a focus on product, to a focus on process” (1998: 15). This shift from process to product, from text to performance, has become a central tenet of contemporary research and one which is echoed in the case study. I would like an exploration of the processes within the *Ouroboros/Making History* tour to reflect this common set of concerns that can span disparate disciplines.

Reflecting the broader research born out of this case study, I am following the three principles laid out in Yin’s *Case Study Research* (2003). The first principle is to use multiple sources of evidence, in the case of the *Ouroboros/Making History* tour, video and photography documentation, interviews and archival records as, “the use of multiple sources of evidence in case studies allows an investigator to address a broader range of historical, attitudinal, and behavioral issues” (98). The second principle is to create a case study database, the purpose being to separate the evidentiary base from the report of the investigator as, “too often, the case study data is synonymous with the narrative presented in the case study report, and a critical reader has no recourse if he or she wants to inspect the raw data that led to the case study’s conclusions” (101). The evidentiary base in this research consists of a survey

of the historical sites managed by the OPW and also the video footage taken of the 2007 tour, highlights of which are submitted with the dissertation. The final principle is to maintain a chain of evidence in order to, “increase the reliability of the information in the case study” (105).

There are two strands running through this dissertation, the theoretical and the practical. This research reflects both; on the one hand, the theoretical, explored in the review of critical literature and cultural policy with respect to site-specific performance; and on the other, the case-study, an examination of the practical aspects of site-specific theatre production. Both strands reflect the focus of the research, the artistic relationship between history, performance and the site. Writing for the *Guardian*, Charlotte Higgins notes that site-specific theatre should “transform the drama through the qualities of space, and transform the space through the qualities of the drama” (*Guardian*, 11 Aug, 2005). The possibility of an alternative mode of site-specific theatre existing outside of conventional theatre spaces and the placing of historical plays within an historical venue may challenge and revitalise spectators to question their own preconceived notions of history. There is a need, however, to complement this theory with a practical examination of the current state of site-specific theatre and the use of historical sites. How is site-specific theatre funded, organised, structured? In terms of historical locations, can historical spaces be renegotiated through theatre? How can historical sites be modified for theatre and what procedures and policies should be put in place in such an event? How do economic considerations influence and limit the scale of such theatrical productions?

The funding application for this project was a collaboration between Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art Design and Technology (IADT), who were involved as part of the Phase 1PRTL Cycle IV, and the inter-institutional Graduate School of Creative Arts and Media (GradCAM). The funding application for this MA arose from an initial desire to evaluate artistically and address the experience of the tour once it had taken place, enabling a discourse surrounding the documentation of performance. The case study has depended on what is remembered in oral histories etc., rather than what an independent researcher might have determined by being on-site. It addresses the question of evidence and the researcher as primary investigator and

determinant and what strengths and weaknesses come from this position. In the absence of a bird's eye view or omnipresent perspective what is left is what has been photographed, filmed and remembered. It is through this evidentiary base that the experience is evaluated regardless of how flawed or skewed that might be.

Quantifying the extent of cultural policies within the current remit of governmental organisations in Ireland, such as the Arts Council, and within the EU, helps to examine the scope and framework currently in place. The rise of EU cultural policy and funding stems from “the realisation that legal and economic integration alone will not create a united Europe, thus the emphasis is on Europe as a cultural unit stemming from the history of the European nations and their long-standing cross-fertilization” (Sassatelli, 2002: 435). The biggest challenge facing theatre production today is the rise of the cultural enterprise model and the cultural policies that are being put in place to facilitate the growth of cultural industries. Recent socio-economic forces have pressured government agencies such as the Arts Council to create cultural policies incorporating both culture and commerce. Theatre production is vying with many new cultural industries (advertising, broadcasting, tourism etc.) for funding. Entrepreneurial initiatives are coming to the fore as the arts is being seen more as an end-product rather than a process and one which should benefit not only the local community but the larger economy also.

It is intended that this research will contribute to the cultural debate on the provision of site-specific locations and will benefit the developing national and regional performance guidelines for historic and architectural sites in Ireland. The body of information collected during this research will be invaluable to the field of cultural policy as a recent report suggests “the Arts Council believes that it is now timely to re-examine the current approach to funding the production and presentation of the theatre” (2009: 3). The funding of theatre production has formerly been in the hands of theatre companies who, historically, have nurtured younger and emerging theatre practitioners from stage technicians and directors to playwrights and actors from within their own companies or structures. With the Arts Council eager to engage with new models of production, such as the creation of “production hubs”, a term the Council uses to refer to “an administrative function which facilitates producing and

presenting the work of more than one artist (or ‘producing entity’)” (Arts Council, 2010: 5), questions have arisen surrounding the roll-out of the model and its impact on sustaining existing mentoring practices within companies. With the recent removal of government funding from many established theatre companies, there is a need to assess the impact of this turnaround in support for the future and the quality of theatre production.

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” (2008: 157). This break in the “prison house” of language, the power of the performative to reach an audience and to create a dynamic that exists outside of the normality of our lives is the reason that theatre continues to function today. Emerging from this dynamic is the work of site-specific theatre with its ability to provide new modes of engagement between unconventional spaces and the audience, thus leading to a deeper and more meaningful understanding of the concept of performance itself.

## Chapter I: Defining Performance, Situating Site

The notion of the performative act has filtered through to all domains of human behaviour becoming entrenched in the modern psyche. Role-playing and its implications for social interaction has become influential both in the public and private sphere, indeed, philosopher and author, Slavoj Žižek, suggests all of our social norms have become staged, “with our neighbours behaving in ‘real life’ like stage actors and extras” and with our capitalist society devolving into a “spectral show” (2002: 14). Without the ‘realities’ of the grand narrative or the appeal to ultimate truth that is synonymous with the modernist era, societal behaviour has become increasingly introspective and self-parodying and at its heart lies what has become termed “the performative turn”. Philip Auslander notes the diversity with which the term performance is appropriated within disciplines: “As an interpretative paradigm, the idea of performance has been used to describe everything from static art forms to everyday behaviour, to political demonstrations and terrorism, to large-scale social conflicts” (2004: 99).

In 2003, Auslander published an all-encompassing four-volume exploration of the concept of performance in an attempt to map this ever-expanding field. The first volume, *Performance: Foundations and Definitions*, outlines in detail the history and emergence of “performance studies” as a domain of scholarly enquiry and critique. Auslander explores the nature of performance from Janelle Reinelt’s (2002) examination of the rise of the term in North America versus the term ‘theatricality’ more widely used in Europe, through to the interlocking of performance with other disciplines such as the ritualistic aspect that connects performance with anthropology (Richard Bauman, 1975). Reinelt’s differentiation derives from an American tradition of avant-garde performance and, “the rejection of textual sovereignty” (2002: 202) – sovereignty not so readily lost in the European theatre. Here Reinelt sees, “a long history of conflict within theatre studies between privileging dramatic text or the processes and events produced in concrete performances” (2002: 203). It may be argued that the differing modes of thought in North America characterised theatre as performance, a genre that could be expanded to many areas of discipline

and study, whereas in Europe performance remained a part of a contested theatrical history. Performance Studies as an area of disciplinary enquiry, emerging within American academia, resulted in an understanding of performance as one which could be expanded beyond the conventions and language of traditional theatre forms. For Auslander, performance:

subsumes aesthetic performances, ritual and religious observance, secular ceremonies, carnival, games, play, sports, and many other cultural forms as its object of inquiry and unites the tradition of theatre studies with techniques and approaches from anthropology, sociology, critical theory, cultural studies, art history, and other disciplines. (2004: 100)

The performative turn has been widely explored within the theatre and I define theatre exclusively as a space in which a live narratively driven drama is enacted. More recently the concept has been embraced within dance, performance art and fine art, movement between these disciplines has become more fluid and, consequently, defining the theatrical experience has become difficult. For Bert O. States:

[I]n the wake of widely disparate activities (social, behavioural and artistic alike) being “subsumed” under the “genus” of *performance* the term *theatre* gradually underwent a loss of validity. It was seen as being at least temporarily worn out; it carried with it too many traditional and overfamiliar institutional trappings. Theatre meant: a text performed “up there” by actors, with emphasis on the *thing* performed (“the play’s the thing”), paid admission, a “general” audience, in short, a timeless roar-of-the-grease-paint aura that obscured the real nature of performance – *the act of performing itself*. Just as “the world worlds” in Heidegger’s phenomenology, so performance *performs*.

(1996: 8)

States’ assertion that performance has invalidated the word theatre echoes the notion that theatre and theatrical performance have become subsumed within the concept of performance. Performance is always in the performing, it never exists outside of the ‘now’ whereas theatre is a collective enterprise engaged in creating a performance. The enterprise of theatre is now considered a subset of performance, which has permeated every level of society. Baz Kershaw, notes that, “[a] major point of the reason for this can be identified ... in widespread changes in the processes of the social, which are producing what I call a *performative society*” (1999: 13). Kershaw sees these societies as areas where, “democracy and capitalism meet” and

consequently, “the performative becomes a major element in the continuous negotiations of power and authority” (13). The social construction of our reality means that control and power lies with those engaged, and participating, in what Kershaw calls “performative democracies”. In this environment, culture changes from, in Baudrillard’s words, “a productive to a reproductive social order in which simulations and models constitute the world so that the distinction between real and appearance become erased” (in Featherstone, 2007: 3).

An important factor in these emergent theories surrounding performance is the gulf between the performative or theatrical theorists, and the performance/theatrical groups themselves or put more bluntly, the division between theory and practice. In *Professing Performance*, author Shannon Jackson examines the problematic discourse of theorising practice: “[F]or some theorists and scholars, this literal mode is philosophically uninteresting, for other performance practitioners and artists, the invocation of the literal is a celebration of the concrete” (2004: 109). The tendency in academic scholarship has been to write about the literal text or the play rather than the performance, if only for the reason that theorists don’t know how to write about the performance, although they can write about the staging, or the lights, or the costume, the language for writing about performance had to be shaped, named and articulated, for the most part, by practitioners. This means that practitioners had also to be interested in writing, or communicating ideas about performance in other ways than performing them. For practitioners the conceptual isn’t at the heart of performance, theorizing after the fact negates the performative act. For theorists, the most valuable aspects of theatrical performance lie in its repercussions within philosophical discourse. Arguing that “deconstruction’s treatment of oral/performance supported rather than subverted modernist art criticism’s suspicious treatment of the theatrical” (115), Jackson looks at the “intellectual legacies” left by modernist and post-modernist evaluations of the performative.

Using examples of the work of four philosophers, Jackson considers the affect of theorization on theatrical performance and the repercussions for both theorists and practitioners today. Examining Clement Greenberg, Michael Fried, Jacques Derrida and Paul le Man, she looks firstly at the dynamic between Derrida’s theory of

deconstruction and Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty*. Secondly, she juxtaposes the work of deconstructionist, Paul de Man and philosopher, John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, seeing the "intervention of words" upon our awareness of the world and whether, "their obscurity and disorder does not seldom cast a mist before our eyes and impose upon our understandings" (119). This is the beginning of the difficulties surrounding the various disciplines, performance vs. theatre, and how these resentments have developed along the fault lines of what Jackson terms the "axes of sameness and difference" (31).

With Greenberg and Fried, Jackson notes that, "the emphasis on the material of the art object was an inartistic way of creating impact. Their literalist label derived from their sense that such artists were cheating by tapping the 'coherence that belongs automatically' to three dimensionality rather than achieving a coherence that emerges aesthetically in pictoriality" (122). Fried characterised this preoccupation with objecthood as "theatrical". Aligning theatricality with literalist art (Fried's term for Minimalist art), Fried notes that: "Theatre is the common denominator that binds together a large and seemingly disparate variety of activities" (123). Theatre was effectively disparaged as a lowly act, focused on the cult of physicality. But for Jackson, this division is unnecessary and neither discipline is set in opposition to the other but can be complementary functioning within, "a shared, if internally discontinuous, institutional history" (11). The focus needs to move towards an exploration of the space operating between the two disciplines thus allowing for a more fruitful dialogue.

Most destructive of the recent debates is the question of whether theatre studies have become defunct given the overwhelming growth in performance studies. David Savran writes that: "Performance Studies is being fashioned [as] the rebellious offspring of theatre studies - according to this oedipal narrative, a debilitated father... is being challenged by his obstreperous child, impatient with his parochialism, and the fact he just isn't cool anymore" (in Bottoms, 2003: 174). Theatre studies is considered backward and old-fashioned and in stark contrast to the currency and authenticity expounded by performance studies. Again, the barricades being drawn are unnecessary and negative. In the foreword of a special issue of the journal,

*Substance*, in 2002 which explored the notion of theatricality, Josette Féral notes that: “My primary objective in this collection is to clarify the notion, and to see whether theatricality is still a pertinent concept compared to performativity, which has overshadowed it in the last 15 years” (3). Féral is “convinced that the opposition between performativity and theatricality is purely rhetorical, and that both are necessarily enmeshed within the performance ... Performativity is at the heart of what makes any performance unique each time it is performed; theatricality is what makes it recognizable and meaningful within a certain set of references and codes”(3).

In Janelle Reinelt’s *The Politics of Discourse: Performativity meets Theatricality*, she explores how contested the terms of performativity and theatricality become “when discourses are in flux”. Beginning by distinguishing the terms, performance, performative and performativity, Reinelt states that, “[a]lthough seeming to be separate scenes of struggle...these sites are often interwoven” (205). As of theatricality, Reinelt notes: “Many theatre scholars use ‘theatricality’ uncritically to mark aspects of texts or performances that gesture to their own conditions of production or to metatheatrical effects” (206). She acknowledges the different usage of the term within American and European analysis noting that, “Anglo-American theorists have embraced performance and performativity as central organising concepts, European theorists have stressed theatricality” (207). This has led to the confusion within the disciplines as the prevalence of cultural studies in American learning has led to a much more inclusive notion of performance, rituals and festivals for example, rather than a more traditional theatrical approach in Europe. This dynamic, partnered with the antagonism between performance studies and theatre studies, has brought with it a clear need to anchor related terminology. The parallel development of differing definitions of terms within disciplines has allowed for confusion wherein theories develop along party lines.

However, it can be argued that the pervasive criticism of performance studies, of its vagueness or broadness, is also its greatest asset: its interdisciplinarity. Performance studies operate not just within a vast range of disciplines such as anthropology, archaeology, and feminist studies for example, but also have a very real application

for our social and political world. Within theatre studies, the frame of reference lies solidly within the narrative of the dramatic act and so site-specific theatre is very different from site-specific performance. The Ouroboros/*Making History* tour works as a case study because it is successful not only as a theatrical piece, but also as performative piece. The tour, in its entirety, operates as an expression of its locality: it performs its social history. How performance studies and theatre studies relate to the tour is different, theatre studies addresses it as a theatrical piece looking at its production history, audience reaction, dramaturgy and, most importantly, the play itself as a literary text, while performance studies explores its relevance as an enactment of a cultural phenomenon. 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.

### **Defining Site-specific Performance**

Emerging from within discourses surrounding the differences between performance and theatre or theory and practice, the language used tends to develop ambiguous fields of meaning as they are defined by differing disciplines, as illustrated by the phrase, “site-specific performance”. The term “site-specific” is described by Andy Field, as:

a piece of short-hand that crudely shackles together artists whose work couldn't be more different ... by labelling them thus, they become merely another new-fangled and eminently bracketable novelty act, cast in opposition (or as a diverting supplement) to “straight” theatre. (*The Guardian*, “Theatre blog”, 6<sup>th</sup> Feb 2008)

For the purposes of this dissertation I would like to explore the term “site-specific” in more detail, unpacking a little of the baggage that accompanies its usage and framing the context in which I will be exploring the practice. As the phrase has become a catch-all term for many differing types of theatre practice, I believe that untangling some of the various usages within different disciplines will enable a more succinct and clearer framework in which to investigate the discourse. This exploration will prove beneficial to site-specific performance as a practice, because

the term itself has become a vague and indistinct phrase which has been circulating in the contemporary arts world since the 1980s without any real exploration of what it means, where it comes from, and how the umbrella term functions within contemporary discussions on theatre and/or performance.

Any event which happens outside a conventional theatre space and features an innovative and progressive use of space tends to be given the all-encompassing term “site-specific” even by critics and writers on theatre and performance practice. Other, more precise terms are sometimes used, for example, site-relevant, site-generic, or site-sympathetic, but the tendency is to subsume subtleties of difference under the one term: site-specific. Therefore, as a starting point, a clearer definition is required in order to avoid the lazy and unclear usage described above.

Within the visual arts for example, there is an emerging need to re-establish the parameters used in relation to site-specific practice, as author, Miwon Kwon notes, “if site-specific art seems no longer viable - because its critical edges have dulled, its pressures been absorbed – this is partly due to the conceptual limitations of existing models of site-specificity itself” (2004: 2). Kwon is referring to site-specific visual art in particular, where the practices surrounding site-specific art are not necessarily performance based but may involve object based or conceptual installations, albeit in specific locations. This immediately leads to a confusion of terms, since performance art, by its very nature, is always site-specific be it in a gallery or a field. By using the term “site-specific art” as opposed to “site-specific performance art”, Kwon is referring to a static object. A static object is judged on its merits regardless of its location. Performance art, and with it performance artists, are judged on the energy created by the performance and its impact on the audience or participants. One of the problems that the term “site-specific” engenders is its often uncritical overuse in visual arts contexts, where the site-specificity may relate to a location of a static artwork rather than the event-based performance.

Nick Kaye, a scholar of post-war experimental performance, states that, “a ‘site-specific work’ might articulate and define itself through properties or meanings produced in specific relationships between an ‘object’ or ‘event’ and a position it

occupies” (2000: 1). The key component to site-specific work, whether object or event, is the relationship between the work and its surroundings. The relationship between an object and its surroundings and a performance and its surroundings is completely different, and the ties that exist between performance art and theatrical performance lie in their shared relationship with their surroundings; a relationship site-specific art does not have. For Alison Oddey, “[w]hat is common to all companies involved in devising theatre from a specific site, is the desire to make or create a product from a particular environment, using their particular skills or work practices as appropriate” (1996: 125). With the slippage in terminology amongst disciplines, and a malleable definition of site-specificity, the primary objective within theatre studies is finding a concrete evaluation of site-specific. If Shakespeare in the Park is site-generic, then a common set of terms needs to be established so the plays performed under the mantle of site-specificity do so with a particular set of meanings and practices already understood, and in place.

Marvin Carlson sees site-specific theatre as productions where “already written texts are placed in locations outside conventional theatres that are expected to provide appropriate ghostings in the minds of the audience, or, in more extreme cases new works that are directly inspired by the extra theatrical associations of these locations” (2003: 134). These are sites in which particular meanings are already in place, ghostings occur in specific places not random places, and these sites, coupled with the performance, may be termed truly site-specific. In both these cases, theatre moves from the more orthodox script or narrative driven performance to a focus on site and place. This complex arrangement reflecting both the fictions of the theatre and the realities of the site evoke these ghostings for the audience and it is this relationship that is at the core of site-specific theatre.

The slippage that has arisen with regard to the careless use of the term “site-specificity” has occurred in part, from its utilisation in avant-garde work and the necessity of avant-garde practice to distinguish itself from the conventional theatrical milieu that it sought to escape. For me, the notion of ghostings is the most successful attempt at demarcating the boundaries of site-specificity, providing a term that can be used to describe the performative effect when enacted on a significant site. The

term “ghosting” when used within the practice of site-specific performance allows for theorists and practitioners to distinguish between various definitions of site-specificity; static art objects, for example, cannot incur the ghostings that rely on the performative act as well as the site. For that reason the term “ghosting” will be used within the thesis to illustrate the relationship between site and performance, the relationship that lies at the heart of site-specificity.

Site-specific theatre has its roots in the work of avant-garde theatre director Jerzy Grotowski (1933-1999), who reshaped traditional notions of theatrical space and founded The Laboratory Theatre, a group that rejected superficial elements of theatrical performance such as extravagant sets and props. The core of theatre art, for Grotowski, was the “actor-spectator relationship”. The developing focus on this relationship further enhanced a move away from traditional modes of practice within conventional theatre spaces. The desire to remove the fourth wall between the performers and the audience led to a revision of theatrical space, as orthodox stage productions had previously reinforced the demarcation between actors and audience. The developing need for an alternative space for the audience/spectator led to the rise of theatre groups specializing in unconventional spaces and hence the growth of site-specific performance. In his seminal work, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, written in 1968, Grotowski writes:

By gradually eliminating whatever proved superfluous, we found that theatre can exist without make-up, without autonomic costume and scenography, without a separate performance area (stage), without lighting and sound effects, etc. It cannot exist without the actor-spectator relationship of perceptual, direct, ‘live’ communication. (1968: 19)

The term itself, “site-specific theatre” emerged in the early 1980s and directly evolved from Environmental Theatre, a practice coined by Richard Schechner in the late 1960s to describe his theatrical experiments and innovations inherited from Grotowski. This practice gave its name to the title of one of the most crucial books written on the subject, *Environmental Theatre* published in 1973. This text provided a platform upon which site-specific theatre was to develop, encompassing Schechner’s own theatrical experiences and incorporating the training etiquette with which the actors could engage with the space around them. Located in the US,

Schechner founded the Performance Group (later to become The Wooster Group) in 1967 and perhaps their most well received piece was the play, *Dionysus in '69*, a modern interpretation of the Greek play, Euripides' *Bacchae* (see fig. 1). The play ran for a total of 163 performances from June 1968 to July 1969 in a disused garage in Greenwich Village. There were no seats in the auditorium and the audience was invited to sit on the floor or on scaffoldings erected throughout the space.

Euripides' *Bacchae* upon which *Dionysus in '69* is based was first staged in 405 BC and centres on the story of King Pantheus of Thebes and his mother Agavē who are punished by the god Dionysus for refusing to worship him. For Schechner the Dionysian age was evident in the cultural conflicts of the day. An interpretation of the *Bacchae* was chosen as:

Dionysus' presence can be beautiful or ugly or both. It seems quite clear that he is present in today's America—showing himself in the hippies, in the “carnival spirit” of black insurrectionists, on campuses; and even, in disguise, on the patios and in the living-rooms of suburbia.

(Schechner, 1969 in Hall et al, 2004: 52)



Fig. 1: *Dionysus in '69*, The Performance Group, Stefan Brecht TDR, 1969

For William (Bill) Shepard, a member of the Performance Group, who played the original Pentheus, *The Bacchae* suited the Group as:

The basic conflict in the play ... seemed remarkably similar to the Group dynamic which fluctuated between precision and order on the one hand and impulsive abandon on the other. In both the play and the structure of the Group the dramatic tension between social order and anarchy, discipline and impulse, created a highly charged atmosphere of social instability poised between change into a new society and self-destruction. (1991, in Hall et al, 2004: 59)

The audience were invited to participate in the play in what is seen as a ritualised event, beginning with the “birthing” of the audience and finishing with a Dionysian frenzy described by *Time* magazine as, “shamelessly alive from the waist down and shamefully dead from the neck up” (28<sup>th</sup> June 1968). It proved to be The Performance Group’s most successful production, epitomising the work of group within a new genre of their own creation, environmental theatre. Schechner felt that, “Dionysus was overwhelming to the degree that audiences believed that it was not a play and found that belief confirmed by the Group. This belief in the play’s actuality was collaborated by its participatory elements” (1973: 43).

The play exemplifies the notions prevalent in both environmental theatre and the site-specific theatre that was to follow: audience participation and integration, multiple foci and an exploration of theatrical space in its totality. In reviewing Schechner’s book, *Dionysus in 69*, Kenneth M. Cameron explains that: “To create *environmental* theatre is to liberate space and democratise the relationship between actor and audience” (1970: 432). Schechner and the Performance Group shaped the theatre to conform to each play. To enhance the immediacy of experience the multiple-focus theatre replaced the traditional single focus, allowing more than one scene to be staged at the same time. This melding of the space and evolving interaction between both the performers and the audience led to a flood of research into the fluidity of the role of site within performance theory.

## Theatre Archaeology and the Significance of Site

In relation to site-specific performance, one of the more dynamic relationships that has emerged of late, which goes far to illustrate the interdisciplinary nature of site-specific theatre, is that between performance and archaeology, a discourse that has informed the analysis of the case study examined in this dissertation, the *Ouroboros/Making History* tour, where, in each venue, historical locations echoed and informed the staging of the play. What archaeology offers is a more considered look at site itself whereas performance's concerns may in the first instance be about specificity: how will this site relate to, or enhance this performance. Archaeology's business is with the site itself and the meanings it contains within itself – more of an earthed, geographical, bounded, actual space, rather than the cultural, intellectual and emotional spaces which performance seeks to address. What archaeology brings is the importance of understanding the site as physical location – not as stage for potential meaning. Therefore the dynamics of the relationship of Theatre and Archaeology forces both sets of thinkers/practitioners (archaeologists and theatre/performance makers) to think within the other's discipline, and by doing so create a new discursive relationship.

The *Ouroboros/Making History* tour was successful in that the theatrical company understood the site as site: it was not just advantageous, or good stages for the play, the sites themselves were deeply meaningful archaeologically, as built environments, as fields of study historically and in this the company and the OPW shared an understanding that was able to be expressed performatively. A groundbreaking book, *Theatre/Archaeology*, written by theatre practitioner, Mike Pearson and archaeologist, Michael Shanks, heralds a new conceptual merging of ideas; “an unlikely convergence of the theories and practices of archaeology and performance” (2002: 1).

This merging of ideas explores the dynamic that arises when dealing with the documentation left over from performance events, photographic, video, voice and text and maintaining each authors' exclusive stance from within their own discipline noting, in particular, how site-specific performances:

rely, for their conception and their interpretation, upon the complex coexistence, superimposition and interpenetration of a number of narratives and architectures, historical and contemporary, of two basic orders: that which is of the site, its fixtures and fittings, and that which is brought to the site, the performance and its scenography: of that which pre-exists the work and that which is of the work: of the past and of the present. (2002: 23)

Pearson's and Shanks' explorations of the potentials offered to performance by the discipline of archaeology, in particular the superimposition of two narratives, site and performance, support Marvin Carlson's innovative use of the term ghosting to describe the same dynamic. The relationship that has evolved between archaeology and theatrical performance is ultimately, "the intertwining of two themes: that of historical re-enactment within heritage contexts ... and the use of performance theory to discern and describe historical practices and behaviours" (2002: 1). This dynamic provides an important framework within which the very nature of the performative act can be explored, in particular how the ghosting that occurs can be traced and documented. Gay McAuley, argues that:

the authors provide brilliant insights into the practice of site-specific performance, and their book makes a major contribution to the discipline of performance studies through its elaboration of concepts such as the deep map, the sensorium, second-order performance as a mode of performance documentation, and more generally, in the seriousness with which it addresses the task of documenting performance.

(2003: 278)

*Archaeology of Performance* acknowledges the possibilities for practice in utilising both disciplines noting that, "an important lesson we learn from recent developments in performance theory as we examine performance in archaeological contexts is to focus more on how theatrical events communicate, how they generate meaning, and how different meanings are negotiated among participants, rather than simply assume the pre-existence of fixed meaning" (Coben and Inomata, 2006: 20). Recent work which analyses performance from an archaeological perspective by reconstructing anthropological rituals and linking them to contemporary performance suggests that:

Because of the nature of the archaeological record, it is important to analyze the material aspects of ritual performance ... such as the space where the performances take place, features that may hint at the function of and access

to performances, and objects used in performances, to be able to draw any meaningful inferences (Daniela Triadan, 2006: 162).

Michael Shanks makes explicit the similarity of methodological approaches within performance, anthropology and archaeology when he suggests that the function of the archaeologist is also to cultivate a sense of past lives and civilisations: “In the archaeological theatre the discovered past is the play and archaeologists the actors who work on the text producing a performance, releasing some meanings of the past for an audience” (Daniela Triadan, 1992: 65).

The theatre and the field of anthropology have always found fertile ground in their interactions. These endeavours, however, were largely the focus of western theatre seeking out new and, perhaps, exotic ways in which to challenge the domination of western modes of production. Various approaches have occurred from traditional cultural anthropology to the more experimental focus of The International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA) founded by the Grotowski scholar and author, Eugenio Barba. Author, Rustom Bharucha, sees:

the fascination for “other” cultures by western interculturalists –and ‘fascination’ is the key word – emerging from a fundamental dissatisfaction with their own cultural resources. Indeed one could argue that interculturalism was born out of certain ennui, a reaction to aridity and the subsequent search for new sources of energy, vitality and sensuality through the importation of “rejuvenating raw materials”. (Pavis 1996: 207)

#### **Site, Space and “Heterotopia”**

The complex notion of the site as a ritualistic or sacred space informed a concept of human geography developed by philosopher, Michel Foucault where sites that he termed “heterotopias” functioned as places of “otherness” within society.

Elaborating on this concept within his treatise, *Des Espaces Autres, (Of Other Spaces)* first presented as a lecture to a group of architects in 1967 and published posthumously, Foucault describes how these sites are, “real places – places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society – which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (1986: 24). These heterotopias provide a real site, a space

where the identity of the local community is both represented and inverted. Historical spaces such as the sites used on the *Ouroboros/Making History* tour provide this dynamic which combined with the theatrical performance allows for an innovative re-engagement with our history.

Foucault's first principle outlines how diverse various heterotopias can be, ranging from prisons to, what Foucault considers the oldest heterotopia, the garden. They do, however, fit into two main categories, crises heterotopias and heterotopias of deviation. Crises heterotopias are a feature of primitive societies, spaces reserved for adolescents and pregnant women for example, a space set aside for the other; an example that survives is the boarding school. The space/site functions as a break or a time out for the participant in a sacred or sacramental space. The second, heterotopia of deviation, is a space that deviates from the societal norm. Juxtaposed, these sites can be a site of isolation as in prisons or a sacred space such as a church. These spaces operate as an enclosed entity incomparable with its surroundings, "spaces for the means of alternative ordering" (Hetherington, 1997: 46). Local historical sites, such as those used on the *Ouroboros/Making History* tour, sacred sites such as Mellifont Abbey in County Louth, sites of conflict such as Charlesfort in County Cork are all spaces that are locked into the history that shaped them and as such operate as a place of otherness.

The third principle looks at how a heterotopia is, "capable of juxtaposing in a single real space several spaces" and the fourth principle looks at how the heterotopia, "begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time." The final two principles "presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable," and "function in relation to all the space that remains" (Miskowiec J., Trans., 1986: 26). Historical sites which function as heterotopias within the community are a reflective space in which crucial periods of history can be re-examined. The performing or re-enactment of the Hugh O'Neill's trials from the Battle of Kinsale to the Flight of the Earls is situated, not in a neutral space, but in a dynamic space where both the site-specificity and the performance co-exist.

The theatre as a heterotopia or a space of otherness is apt as histories are layered one upon the other in a locus where real and imagined worlds co-exist. As the anthropological site is seen as ritual and sacred, and the archaeological site is seen as grounded and historically meaningful, the performative site is both concept and embodiment. For Foucault: “The theatre brings onto the rectangle of the stage, one after the other, a whole series of places that are foreign to one another” (25). In *Foucault, Borges, Heterotopia: Producing Knowledge in Other Spaces*, Robert Topinka states that “the theatre, where diverse worlds, norms, and customs converge on the stage, represents a heterotopia of many spaces in one” (2010: 57). While many sites may be deemed heterotopic, performative spaces function particularly well as transitional spaces of deviation or otherness, spaces where the spectator can engage with the issues at hand, in the case of *Making History*, the issues of conflict and colonisation. When this performative space is overlaid on the realities of the historical site where this conflict occurred, the site informs and shapes the theatrical experience and becomes the dominant force in the actor-spectator dynamic.

## **Chapter II: Site in Practice: Towards a Working Definition of Site-Specificity**

Different understandings of how site and performance are discussed in other disciplines, such as archaeology and anthropology, can offer an expanded understanding of what site-specificity means within the context of performance studies. Using these different disciplinary insights and theoretical considerations, the question remains: What language do we use when talking about site-specificity within the context of this dissertation? Theoretically, Foucault's concept of the site as a heterotopic space proved the most valuable, allowing the site an equal platform to the performative act upon which the dynamic of site-specific performance can be explored. Carlson's thinking on the ghostings that occur when performance is overlaid on these historical sites creates a term that defines exactly what is created when the performative site comes into existence. Along with defining the terminology, exploring the scope of site-specific performance as a practice is another aspect of this research. How other theatre practitioners define their practice within the realities of production and touring establishes how current and prevalent site-specific theatre is within recent discourses.

In May 2002, in an article for the *New Theatre Quarterly*, Fiona Wilkie conducted a survey of site-specific performance practices in Britain. Beginning with a questionnaire (the details of which are in Appendix A) Wilkie surveyed forty-four practitioners within site-specific theatre groups such as Grid Iron Theatre Company based in Scotland and Wrights & Sites based in Exeter. Ranging from questions of identity, to definitions of site-specific theatre, to funding, Wilkie began to pin down elusive questions surrounding the functioning of site-specific theatre groups in Great Britain in an attempt to map site-specific performance in Britain. The majority of groups involved were particularly concerned with site-specificity yet none were exclusively so, and non-theatre based artists and performance artists were included. Interesting results include the fact that the average date the groups were founded was 1996 indicating either a short lifetime span for site-specific theatre groups or, more probably, that the term "site-specific" only gained currency in recent years.

Although Wilkie discusses and categorises the more used type of site i.e. playground or church, the key trend amongst the groups is the constant refreshing of the type of space used. No group stuck to the same type of site although all the spaces were “real” sites and not created environments. Of funding, ten of the respondents felt the site-specificity of their work affected the way it was funded: “In my experience it’s easier to convince a company to give you cash for a venue-based work” (Justin McKeown, 146). Most were funded through Arts Councils or Regional Arts Boards and interestingly two thirds have to seek funding separately for each project.

“For 19 of the 44 artists I surveyed, the decision to move out of the theatre building is an explicitly political one, “engender[ing] ideas of place and community” (Lone Twin) and “renegotiating what a space has come to mean” (Storm Theatre) in places that are variously controlled, accessed, and inhabited” (144). Wilkie felt that the interest in site-specific work increased in companies based outside of the bigger cities such as London where a conventional theatrical tradition reigned. There was an almost aggressive way in which these companies sought to move to less “political” venues, “the dominant discourse of London, its theatre buildings, and its theatre traditions” (143). In more rural areas, “there was a strong positive correlation between being based outside London and prioritizing a sense of locality in the work” (144). As we shall see in the case study, the Ouroboros/*Making History* tour was based on this desire to explore the physical ties between site and performance. Previous performances had been held at the Samuel Beckett theatre in 2005 and it was through this production that the idea germinated to tour the play through the path taken by O’Neill in *Making History*. The main reason for this is renegotiating the performance through the site, the locality and the audience.

Another interesting outcome of the survey was the response to the question: Can site-specific performance tour? Does site-specific mean site-exclusive? The answers varied in all companies from those who felt what was lost from site exclusivity resulted in a different and as interesting experience from touring to those who felt that touring is not and never can be site-specific. Paul Binson, artistic director of Scottish theatre company, Boilerhouse, makes the point that, “that’s not pure site-

specificity. You can recreate a work in response to a number of differing sites, which is totally valid in itself and is an element of site-specificity but is different from making a piece of work in response to one specific site” (149). This argument has led to factions forming within site-specific groups, those who believe touring isn’t site-specific, and those who believe in the ability of site-specific work to respond to a number of sites and to create a renewed engagement and relationship with a site during the touring process, touring as a process being a crucial part of a theatre company’s repertoire.

There are many theatre groups that tour site-specific productions, and again I return to Carlson’s definition of site-specific productions of already written texts, “placed in locations outside conventional theatres that are expected to provide appropriate ghostings in the minds of the audience, or, in more extreme cases new works that are directly inspired by the extra theatrical associations of these locations” (2003: 134). For site-specific theatre companies to operate with a modicum of success, a new script or production for each new site is extreme and counter-productive. Not only will the funding needed to engage in such an enterprise be enormous but it can also be argued that even with twenty performances on one site, each performance creates a new relationship, a new negotiation on site. No two performances are the same and each night a new event is created.

Ouroboros sought to produce an established history play, such as Brian Friel’s *Making History* based on real events and to follow these characters through the very real places that they had passed through, lived in, fought over. The histories of the sites were tied to Hugh O’Neill’s historical and political legacy and had been long established in the mindset of the audience. The aim was to re-negotiate these sites, through the performance and in doing so, re-establish the relationship between history and locality as the tour progressed. The tour could not have taken place in other sites, it could not be mistaken for site-generic, because each site responded to an area or moment in O’Neill’s life. The momentum that built as the group progressed towards the Earl’s leave taking from Rathmullen and the ultimate exile of the O’Neill clansmen and their families echoed the very route O’Neill and his company took five hundred years previously. The play, Ouroboros, the Earls, all

followed this expedition and consequently created a site-specific tour in its most defined sense which will be discussed in more depth in the third chapter of the dissertation.

A framework that Wilkie draws from is Stephen Hodges' distinction between levels of site-specificity which he categorises and terms separately (details in Appendix B). Hodges is a member of Wrights & Sites, a group of four artist-researchers based in Exeter committed to producing experimental, site-specific work. Another member of the Company, and Senior Lecturer in Devised Theatre at University College in Falmouth, Simon Persighetti states that: "If Site-Specific work makes any departure from the usual premise of theatre it is made out of a desire to let PLACE speak louder than the human mediator or actor who enters the place" (Hunter, 2005: 368). Hodges, however differs from his colleague in defining a rigid template for what he feels site-specificity means. He distinguishes between four levels of site-specific work. The first, he terms, "outside theatre" and here productions such as Shakespeare in the park or "promenade theatre" as it is known are placed. These productions may be outside a theatre building but their environment is used as no more than a backdrop and no discourse exists between site and performance.

The second, "site-sympathetic" is the creation of an existing performance in an outdoor site. This new space should offer a deeper analysis of what the performance means and generate a deeper understanding of the play for the audience. The third term, "site-generic" is a performance generated for a series of like sites, (e.g. car parks, swimming pools), and lastly, "site-specific" defined as "a performance specifically generated from/for one selected site" (see Appendix B). Hodges feels that only with the last type of site-specific work are the layers of the site revealed, through historical documentation, site usage (past and present), found text, object, actions and sounds, through anecdotal guidance, personal association, half-truths and lies, and finally through site morphology, (physical and vocal explorations of site). Hodges definition not only contradicts that of his colleague but also Carlson's definition of performances creating ghostings in the minds of the audience. It's an example of a very narrow definition of site-specificity and one to which very few theatre companies would be able to adhere.

Speaking of the varying definitions in Hodge's uses in his different levels of site-specificity Wilkie notes that: "This scale reserves the label 'site-specific' only for performances in which a profound engagement with one site is absolutely central to both the creation and execution of the work (these performances work with and from one site, do not tour, and do not perform pre-existing scripts), and suggests new labels to distinguish other theatrical experiments with non-theatre spaces" (150). By this definition, all touring productions are not site-specific, the very fact of entering and negotiating a new site with each performance remains outside Hodges' definition. However narrow some definitions of site-specificity are, the fact remains that scripts and productions created apart from the site remain hugely influenced by the space in which they are enacted and are still seen as site-specific by the large majority of the theatrical audience.

Site-specific, site-generic, site-responsive, site-determined, site-orientated: the list illustrates the vibrancy of discourses on non-traditional locations for theatre performance, but fundamentally the category is still in its infancy and as it develops so too will the categories within it. Theoretical concerns surrounding site-specific performance have focused not only definitions within site-specificity but also how the genre fits into current academic discourses emerging from neighbouring disciplines. As the interdisciplinary nature of performance lends itself to adaptation from various fields of study from fine art to ethnography, a framework of usage is needed in order to explore the theory with rigour.

The seismic shift in recent years in the exploration of unconventional theatrical performance has led to a number of innovative companies exploring the boundaries in site-specificity throughout Europe. The rise of site-specific theatre companies and the current confusion surrounding the terms used is reflective of the need for a more concrete, in depth discussion within theatrical performance today. As Sally Cowling, Director of Drama and Dance at The British Council states:

We are increasingly seeing a merging and blurring of the boundaries... Without doubt the area of British theatre that is really exciting at the moment is the gamut covered by these companies, many of whom do site-specific and site-responsive work and who are looking to engage with audiences in a different way. (in Gardner, 2005)

Within the realm of the arts, it is the transitory nature of the performed event that is exclusive to performance. When theatre is taken out of auditoria, and embedded within external sites and structures, the fact remains that the “site-specific” conjures up images of progressive and exciting theatre in the minds of potential audiences especially where the performance is local and the audience may anticipate a sense of connection or renewal to a local site. It is the innovative nature of the genre that has allowed theatre groups to slip into the shorthand usage of the phrase “site-specific”.

Having previously noted the difficulty of talking theoretically about the performative act, a practice that is essentially ephemeral and fluid, I would now like to anchor the various definitions within tangible theatrical practice. Examining the differing types of site-specific plays and theatre groups is important to this research and in order to examine the conflicting definitions of site-specificity, I would like to look at six concrete examples from Ireland and Europe that I have identified as being characteristic of different practices. The six groups illustrate firstly, how different various productions of what theatre groups consider a site-specific piece can be, and secondly gives a broad range of examples of how space is utilized by various theatre practitioners. All the plays demonstrate an increasingly sensitive awareness of their site-specificity and in various ways challenge the rigid concept of site-specific theatre outlined by theorists such as Stephen Hodges. All define themselves as site-specific, package their performance as such, and create innovative and exciting ways for the audience to engage with the site, and yet many fail the site-specificity test as laid out in theoretical discussion.

The first is a site-specific audio tour, *Kanal Kirchner*, created by German group Hygiene Heute in November 2001 in Munich. The tour superimposes a theatrical narrative on the sites and spaces that the audience member encounters on a tour through the city. Secondly is a performance difficult to define, Dogtroep’s *Dynamo Mundi*, staged in Amsterdam in 1996, in a theatre especially adapted for the performance. Can a performance in a theatre be site-specific? The third is an examination of two works from the theatre director, Lotte Van Der Berg, *Braakland* and *Begijnenstraat 42*, both created in 2005, the first is a site-specific touring

production, the second is a project set in Antwerp prison. Can both be labelled site-specific? After, comes Brith Gof's *Three Lives* staged in 1995 on an abandoned farm in rural Wales, the company eager to expand on their theories of ghosting. The fifth production is Punchdrunk's adaptation of Goethe's *Faust* (2006) where the company created its own theatre across five floors in a disused archive building in London. The sixth and final production is what Hodges would describe as "outdoor theatre", Cork's Corcadorca's *The Merchant of Venice* staged in 2005 and taking place at differing locations across the city; Shylock's trial, for example, taking place in the Cork city courthouse, the baying mob made up of audience members.

A group that define themselves as site-specific although there is no specific site in their performance is the German theatre group, Hygiene Heute. They have created walking audio plays, *System Kirchner* in Giessen and Frankfurt in 2000 and *Kanal Kirchner* at the Spiel-art-Festival in Munich 2001. Audience members/participants set off at fifteen-minute intervals equipped with a headset and walkman. Described by Director of Theatre Studies at the University of Kent (Canterbury), Dr. Peter Boenisch as, "combining the common form of presenting cultural memory and heritage sites by an audio-guided tour with an extraordinary site-specific performance *Kanal Kirchner* similarly relies on techniques of alienation" (<http://www.hygieneheute.de/>). Given various instructions on the audio, they are led on a tour through the city as the story unfolds of the librarian, Mr. Kirchner, who had disappeared three years previously following the same trail of evidence that the participant is now retracing.

In Munich the audio instructs them to: "Observe the people at the tram-stop. Do you see the ones carrying suitcases?" Here the boundaries between fiction and reality are blurred as:

the participants themselves behaved increasingly strangely when following the instructions of the voice, so that people were bound to stop and stare back at them. The spectators turned into actors without being able to discern between actors, other spectators, and random passers-by. (Fischer-Lichte, 2008: 114)

Terming their project an “audio theatre play”, Hygiene Heute’s work responds directly to the dynamics of a particular city and yet deeming them site-specific is problematic in the sense that what we have is a touring play, but does site-specificity mean site-exclusivity? If we return to the definition laid out by Stephen Hodges, these plays are site-specific in the sense that they are specific to the city in which they are performed and each performance responds to that city and the areas, buildings and monuments that function to guide the audience member. Chair of Theatre Studies at the University of Amsterdam, Christopher Balme, describes the *Kanal Kirchner* plays as:

site-specific in the strictest sense of the term. The text led spectators through a precisely defined urban trail, in the course of which concrete references were made to buildings, streets, bus stops etc. The slightest deviation from the path led to complete disorientation and ultimately to a failure of the performance. (Chapple & Kattenbelt, Ed., 2007: 123)

In contrast to the work of Hygiene Heute, is the piece, *Dynamo Mundi* created by theatre group, Dogtroep, based in Amsterdam and specializing in visual and site-specific theatre (see fig. 2). The group became renowned for huge outdoor spectacles, but in August 1996, they returned to the theatre and *Dynamo Mundi* was staged at the Royal Theatre Carré in Amsterdam. On her website, the director, Threes Anna, states that, “changes were literally made in the building itself: a hole in the roof was made in order to descend a fourteen metre-long iron sling from the ridge among other things”.

The difficulty with the term “site-specific” is exacerbated in this context because the group use the term in accordance with the definitions laid out by Stephen Hodge. The site used, although a theatre, is integral to the performance and the piece cannot be moved or relocated from that site and yet the performance exists within the theatrical space and so



Fig. 2: *Dynamo Mundi*, The Royal Theatre Carré, Amsterdam, August 1996

confounds the conventional notions of site-specific performance. Founder member and first artistic director of Dogtroep, Warner van Wely, described themselves on their website as creating, “site-specific productions for architecturally or culturally interesting locations ... We do not work historically or thematically, but allow the location to spring to life by placing contrasting actions; sculptural scenes, constructions, musical compositions and choreographies”. This piece is indicative of Dogtroep’s site-specificity in that this play was designed specifically for this theatre, this site. All the elements of the building were utilised in the performance and yet the play was staged in a conventional theatre space.

Theatrical performance does not align itself to easy definitions and consequently to a conservative or authoritarian dogmatism. The locational aspect of performance has evolved from the physical site to the spatial site operating between performer and audience. Within site-specific theatre the notion of site has become multi-layered, carrying with it, not only the actual physicality and historicity of the site, but also the varying interpretations of each individual operating within that performative dynamic. Site-specific theatre works both in terms of the physicality of the space and the residual traces that such a space generates in the mind of the audience. For Miwon Kwon, writing in *One place after another: Notes on Site Specificity*, “in advanced art practices of the past thirty years the operative definition of the site has been transformed from a physical location – grounded, fixed, actual – to a discursive vector – ungrounded, fluid, virtual” (1997: 95).

Echoing this evolution from the site as a tangible reality to the site as a locational dynamic between performer and audience is the work of theatre director Lotte Van Den Berg, based at the Toneelhuis Theatre in Antwerp from 2005 to 2009 before becoming artistic director of OMSK in Dordrecht, Holland. An example of her work was the “site-specific play” *Braakland* staged at the Cork Midsummer Festival in June 2008 by the Compagnie Dakar; the piece contains no dialogue and tells the story of nine figures wandering around a wasteland (see fig. 3). Inspired by the work of J.M. Coetzee, *Braakland* echoes the violence and desolation that pervade modern society. Quoted in the festival programme, Van Der Berg said that, “in making *Braakland* I wanted to make fear palpable, not to offend or disgust, but to give the

audience a feeling of comfort. The way you feel, I feel too. The way you live, I live. The way you die, so shall I” (2008). Here the desolate landscape reflects the isolation of the figures who move silently at a great distance from the audience.

The performance could not be categorised as site-specific within Hodge’s definitions because as a touring production it does not relate to any particular site but would be labelled as site-generic in that it is a particular performance, “generated for a series of like sites”. Reviewing the performance for the *Irish Times*, Mary Leland described the surroundings as a “site abandoned by God and mankind, layered with detritus ... half-demolished as if no-one had the heart to either build or destroy” (2008: 2).



Fig. 3: Braakland, Lotte van der Berg, Cork Midsummer Festival, 2008

Almost all of Van den Berg’s work has no dialogue and the same happens with *Begijnenstraat 42*, a performance that could be labelled as site-specific in accordance within Hodge’s definition. The title refers to the address of a prison in Antwerp where the performance was held with professional actors sharing the stage with inmates and wardens. Van der Berg felt about the site that: “I could go into the details of life there, talk about the lack of belief in a difficult place, about being vulnerable in a community that doesn’t seem to tolerate it”

(<http://www.toneelhuis.be>).

The piece has many of the qualities Hodge associated with site-specific performance in that layers of the site are revealed through reference to the seven points, historical documentation, site usage, found material, anecdotal evidence collected from members of the community, personal association, mytho-geography and finally site-morphology ( <http://www.mis-guide.com>). The performance was process- driven, using improvisation techniques to see where the work would lead the group and exploring the dynamic between captive and captor in a uniquely site-specific performance. And yet both performances, *Braakland* and *Begijnenstraat 42* are deemed site-specific experiences because here, as Nick Kaye accurately observes, it is the restlessness that arises from the disturbance of ‘real’ space as opposed to the idealised theatre space that is “fundamental to site-specificity itself”:

It is restlessness, too, that site-specificity defers to the terms and practices of *performance*, even as it presents in relation to explicitly architectural, sculptural, or object-based modes of work. [This] formal “irresolution” or “uneasy gestalt” implicates the viewer in a process of locating the limits of their practice, and so in mapping and producing its sites, precisely in order to expose a place always already being *acted out*. (2000: 198)

To look at this amalgamation on a more practical level, another interesting exploration of the dynamic between site and performance is the work of Welsh theatre company Brith Gof. Internationally acknowledged as a leading experimental performance company, Brith Gof explored space as a layered entity with constant tension between the site and the performance. Led by their two artistic directors, Clifford McLucas and Mike Pearson the company described themselves aptly in their own brochure and I feel it is worth repeating in full given its obvious implications for Irish theatre:

Others continue to be hypnotised by the classical theatre text – the script – as the carrier of all of theatre’s hopes and aspirations, whilst in Wales we have witnessed an almost opposite development, with work built around the poetics of the two languages of Wales – Welsh and English, traditions of physical performance methods, extensive use of techniques developed within music, singing and oratory, and a keen attention to the location of performance and its relationship with audience – resulting in sophisticated notions of site specificity. (<http://humanitieslab.stanford.edu/BrithGof/87>)

Rather than focusing on a dramatic script, Brith Gof looked at the relationship between performance, site and audience. It was this dynamic that fed the work of the company. Becoming totally site-specific in 1988 with the arrival of Clifford McLucas, Brith Gof sought to reconceptualise sites through performance as, “it is the latest occupation of a location at which other occupations – their material traces and histories – are still apparent: site is not just an interesting, and disinterested backdrop” (Pearson, Shanks, 2001: 23).

Brith Gof use the terms the “Ghost” and the “Host” to explore the relationship between the site (host) and the performance (ghost). Clifford McLucas uses the terms to describe:

the relationship between place and event. The host site is haunted for the first time by a ghost that the theatre-makers create. Like all ghosts it is transparent and the host can be seen through the ghost. Add into this a third term – the witness, i.e. the audience – and we have a kind of trinity that constitutes the work. (McLucas cited in Kaye, *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place, and Documentation*, 128)

The ghost of the performance is layered over the original host site creating a tension and dynamic that lends itself to the performance and influences the spectators. Brith Gof, in particular, have used this dynamic to further their exploration of traditional performance techniques, heavily influenced by their origins, their Welsh history. In a TDR article, “Theatre/Archaeology”, Mike Pearson notes, “Performance generates two orders of narrative: the narratives of the watchers and the watched” (1994: 134). He also states that:

Site may allow the construction of a new architecture, the “ghost” within the ‘host’. Host and ghost, of different origins, are co-existent but, crucially, are not congruent. The performance remains transparent ... Site-specific performances rely upon the complex superimposition and co-existence of a number of narratives and architectures, historical and contemporary. These fall into two groups: those that pre-exist the work – of the host – and those which are of the work – of the ghost. (in Taylor 1997: 95)

In order to illustrate the concept behind Brith Gof’s work, I would like to look at one of their plays, *Tri Bywyd (Three Lives)* realised in October 1995 on an abandoned farm in a forest near Lampeter in Wales. Two sixteen metre steel scaffolds were constructed in the ruin of a farmstead running through the ruin and in amongst the trees. Three “houses” were fashioned from these scaffolds which became the settings

for three lives (and deaths) which were played out: Sarah Jacob, known as the fasting girl of Wales who starved to death in 1869 aged twelve; Lynette White, a prostitute murdered in the Cardiff Docklands in 1988; and the decline of a farm from providing a home and a livelihood. The three interlinked performances, each consisted of thirteen two minute parts, and were staged along with commentary and spoken materials from the records of the area. The audience of three hundred sat on seating built out of the scaffolding and were bussed to and from the location. The experience was described in the Welsh language magazine *Barn*, as follows:

[w]ithout a doubt, the reason for the success was the natural fusion of the location with the interpretation of the lives. The irony of the juxtaposition of three such different stories in one presentation-in effect, three lives coming to an end-could be seen, smelt and felt in the autumn chill around us. A falling leaf, a cold breeze, the stink of the sheep, the odd moth drawn to the light, and of course, the ruined farmhouse itself, which was the root of it all. The blending and weaving of the installation and the site echoed the poetic interpretation of themes... It would have been impossible to have created the same experience in a theatre. (Barn, November 2005)

In the notes accompanying the piece, Clifford McLucas, notes how we tend to regard rural locations as simple and natural saying that the site, “had to be problematised” so that the, “relationship between host and ghost had to be complex and confrontational” (1995: 2).

The very real challenge for site-specificity is to create a new and innovative site-specific piece from a well-known script. Creating a re-working of the play while also taking into account the residual effects of previous productions that comes with a known script can prove difficult when trying to instil a new relationship between audience and site. A good example of this type of work is the Punchdrunk Company based in London, where as their website states, “what we do differently is to focus as much attention on the audience and the space as we give the performers and the text”. Audience members are given masks so they can remain anonymous and the company, “rejects the passive obedience expected of audience in conventional theatre”.

An example of their work would be the hugely successful *Faust* staged in 2006 where it enjoyed a six month sold out run in a disused warehouse in Wapping. Described by the *Observer* journalist, Susannah Clapp as, “one of the most astonishing events, not just in theatre, but in the whole of London”. Punchdrunk’s *Faust* is adapted from Goethe’s *Faust* (Part I) written in 1806, itself based on a German legend. The protagonist, Heinrichson Faust makes a pact with the devil (Mephistopheles) in which the devil will do whatever he wants on Earth in return for his soul in hell. In Punchdrunk’s adaptation the action takes place in 1950s America.

Audience members are led into the five-storey warehouse and at different entry points in the story, in full costume and masked. You were free to enter whichever space or follow whichever character you wished as they moved from room to room with no two spectators seeing the same play. Anne Glusker of the New York Times describes a:

1,500-foot disused warehouse surrounded by wire fencing with a series of rooms and cordoned off area: a large undivided space, punctuated by real trees is called the Forest; a nifty re-creation of a Hopperesque American coffee shop is the Diner. Sometimes you enter a space and there’s action already going on – a fight, a dance, two characters menacingly circling each other. At other points in the evening, you find yourself in an area devoid of performers or other audience members. The lighting is low, eerie. The effect is spooky, an adult version of a child’s haunted house. (Dec. 17<sup>th</sup> 2006)

It is the spectator that chooses what character to follow, the narrative is decided by the audience and the fourth wall has collapsed leaving audience members to interact and take part in the action in front of them. The tension created by an enabled rather than a passive audience allows for a deeper interaction with the space around them. The site, the setting, is theirs to construct and change as they see fit and yet this performance with its reworking of a pre-existing script would never be deemed site-specific theatre in Stephen Hodge’s definition. In Carlson’s definition, however where “already written texts are placed in locations outside conventional theatres that are expected to provide appropriate ghostings in the minds of the audience” (2003: 134), the scope exists to allow for performances such as Punchdrunk’s *Faust*, a play that clearly and evidently functions as a site-specific piece (see fig. 4).



Fig. 4: *Faust*, Punchdrunk, London, 2006-2007

Often within the site-specific genre, Shakespeare is associated with outdoor or promenade theatre where a re-working of Shakespeare involves the creation of interesting backdrops for the classics. A performance where the audience have the freedom to roam where they want in the area is known as promenade theatre and has become an interesting subset of site-specific work. This type of work can be seen as inferior to truly site-specific work as the difficulty in re-using or re-negotiating a play as well-known as Shakespeare's can prove problematic and translate as gimmicky.

Another production closer to home was Corcadorca's *The Merchant of Venice* (see fig. 5). Running from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 25<sup>th</sup> June 2005, the performance was advertised as a promenade production with the audience of four hundred walking between the Old Irish Distillery, the City Courthouse and Liberty Street. Director Pat Kiernan reasons that:

In choosing to produce *The Merchant of Venice* ... it is our intention to examine the city as it is today, particularly within a European context. How we judge the caskets in Belmont ("All that glistens is not gold") or Shylock ("Hath a Jew not eyes?") is a central theme in the play. It seems appropriate to look at *The Merchant of Venice* at a time when in Cork and Ireland we find ourselves suddenly exposed to different resident cultures and colours. How tolerant and welcoming are we?  
(<http://www.corcadorca.com>)

In a review in the *Irish Times*, Mary Leland commented that:

While the action begins in a river-side business park (beware the remorseless midges!) a balustraded, velvet-lined Belmont, with a frustrated Portia, is reached through a cavernous hall shimmering as if about to consume Antonio's argosies. For the trial scene, the city courthouse, with its canopied dais, is several streets away and, as the 400-strong audience is ushered briskly along, we turn into something of a mob, out for the excitement of justice. (2005: 2)

Shylock's journey is described by Karen Fricker in *The Guardian*, as a "short journey on a sedan chair to the church for his baptism is chillingly effective as passers-by join the crowd, and city and production seem to merge" (18th June 2005).



Fig. 5: *The Merchant of Venice*, Courthouse, Cork, Corcadorca, 2005

The effect and influence that the theatrical space has on the audience such as in *The Merchant of Venice* creates a new field of memory, and if that experience is cross-referenced with a site/space specific to the minds of the viewer the resulting impression left is that of a stronger and more powerful spectacle. Playwright and lecturer in contemporary performance, Dr. Silvija Jestrovic, notes that, "just as the reality and instability of a historical space influence and alter the meanings of its

theatrical renderings, the theatricalization of an actual space reshapes its future meanings in cultural memory” (2005:358).

These six performances illustrate the challenges still evident within site-specificity today. The fluidity with which the term is used shows the need to engage in independent and collaborative research into contemporary site-specific theatre in order to link theory with practice and clarify the different models of site-specificity. The construction of meaning through the site is at the core of this type of theatre production and whereas conventional theatre spaces may work against audience engagement, site-specific theatre fosters a deeper artistic relationship between site and performativity, a relationship that reconnects an audience to its environment. For example, both the audio play *Kanal Kirchner* (where the city itself was what was specific) and *Dynamo Mundi* (where the theatre building was altered and adjusted to suit the production) were particular responses or iterations of the theatrical space as heterotopic. The challenges that these productions faced was engaging with these surroundings and they succeeded in creating an environment where the audience was made aware of the space that they were in: both productions were site-specific.

The notion of site as a multi-layered dynamic has been illustrated in the wide range of companies eager to develop work that provokes an engagement between site and performance. Lotte Van den Berg’s *Braakland* shows that site-specific work can successfully tour. The dynamic caused by disturbing and subverting the normal rules with which these surrounding engage is at the core of site-specific work and the ghostings created in the mind of the spectator are what make a work site-specific. Brith Gof’s *Three Lives* was a move from a focus on the text to a production developing directly from engagement with the site. As illustrated in this production, *Three Lives* would be impossible to produce in a theatre with the same level of complexity as the layering of history was superimposed on the site where multiple narratives coexisted. These productions show that through site-specificity pre-existing texts can be re-invigorated by innovative and radical staging.

Echoing the dynamic between site and performance as illustrated in the work shown, the *Ouroboros/Making History* tour operates on the same level of engagement with

its surroundings. It is through the site that the history is revealed, a concept known to Brith Gof's Cliff McLucas as a "hybridized piece of work" where multiple art forms intermingle and engage with the history of the site, "[a]nd between these two there are transparent architectures, sometime supporting each other, sometimes battling against each other" (in Nick Kaye, 2000: 55). Foucault speaks of spaces that exhibit multiple meanings, heterotopias, namely sites "that has the power of juxtaposing in a single real place different spaces and locations that are incompatible with each other" (in Neil Leach, 1997: 334). These sites, be they prisons, theatres or entire cities in the case of *Kanal Kirchner*, inhabit a space where, through the performative process, ghostings are created in the minds of the audience and it is this relationship that is truly site-specific.

### Chapter III: Case Study: Ouroboros/*Making History*

This case study investigates the general experience and issues of site-specific performance through the prism of Ouroboros theatre company's 2007 tour of Brian Friel's play, *Making History*. The study is guided by three research questions:

- 1) How do site-specific theatre performances interact with their host communities?
- 2) How can histories of spaces be renegotiated through site-specific performance?
- 3) What are best practices for modifying these sites?

These research questions address the issues outlined in both Chapter I and II in a focused and practical manner, theoretical concerns such as the need for concrete definitions within theatre practice explored in the first chapter and more practical concerns such as how theatre companies are creating new relationships with their surrounding through the dynamic of site-specific performance in the second. Using historical buildings and sites throughout the country as performance spaces, Ouroboros sought to directly connect the sites used within Brian Friel's *Making History* to the realities of Hugh O'Neill's rebellion and exile. Lifting historical scenes from the pages of the play and placing them within the realities of the sites synonymous with the legend of O'Neill, this case study offers a study of the relationship between place and meaning.

Director/Researcher, Amy Cook comments that, "Interdisciplinary work requires that scholars are bilingual – it does not require them to be converts" (2007: 580) and whilst the case study remains grounded in its original field, theatre studies, the challenge within the research is to explore the work through a medium that will reflect the interdisciplinary nature of site-specificity. Framing the case study within two theoretical models previously discussed in the literature review offers an insight into the workings of site-specific performance and is particularly relevant to historical spaces. I will use the theories to offer a greater insight into the workings of

site-specific performance and to allow established and working models of site-specificity to permeate the study.

The first theoretical model I will be using has been developed by theatre researchers, Clifford McLucas and Mike Pearson through the work of their performance company, Brith Gof. Pearson notes that, “Site-Specific performances rely upon the complex superimposition and co-existence of a number of narratives and architectures, historical and contemporary. These fall into two groups: those that pre-exist the work – of the host – and those that are of the work – of the ghost” (quoted in Turner, 2004: 374). The complex relationship between the two is what proves so engaging or compelling for the audience as, “a place and what is built there bleed into each other” (quoted in Nick Kaye, 2000: 56).

With Brith Gof’s work, the emphasis is placed upon the dynamic between the structures of the work and that of the site. The tension within the performance arises as a direct response to this “reworking” of the site. The “ghost” refers to the layers (be they structural or verbal) imposed on the “host” which already brings with it the legacy of lived space and its histories. The audience, in turn, bear witness to the performance, “and we have a kind of trinity that constitutes the work” (McLucas quoted in Turner, 2004: 2).

In the writing of a five year development plan for “Cultural Industries in Rural West Wales” Brith Gof Creative Director, Clifford McLucas, felt that devising new models of performance will succeed in,

Cutting across existing conceptual and institutional boundaries between culture, education and economics in quite new and adventurous ways – ways that will lead not simply to increased economic activity, but to culturally enriching economic activity carried out on a regional basis – in this case, in west Wales, but potentially in other so-called “peripheral” regions in Britain and Europe. (1992: 2)

The possibility for new modes of practice within performance contributing to a local audience both economically and culturally is a crucial aspect of site-specific theatre. The need for performance that is historically informed by its locality rather than

“airlifted” in is at the crux of site-specificity and should be central to modes of practice within historical sites.

The second theoretical model is Foucault’s concept of Heterotopias, as discussed in Chapter One. Primarily based on a lecture, *Des Espaces Autres*, delivered in 1967, Foucault talks of “different spaces” which he terms heterotopias,

real places – places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society – which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted.  
(<http://foucault.info/>)

Foucault maintains that all heterotopias embody these values to some degree. The twenty-two sites used in the tour relate, not only to their local surroundings, but also to each other by means of a journey that took place 400 years ago, a story that is examined in Friel’s *Making History* and is re-enacted or re-performed in the Ouroboros tour. Peter Johnson describes heterotopias as sites that, “...relate to other sites by both representing and at the same time inverting them; unlike utopia, however, they are localized and real” (2006: 78). In looking at these sites as heterotopias one can explore the tour as an entity in and of itself and explore the concept of the site within that group dynamic.

Themes of history, nationalism and the trauma of memory permeate Friel’s work, “For Brian Friel, both as man and as playwright, the past and all our images of it are slippery and untrustworthy. And yet, for all his doubts about making sense of the past ... it is the very darkness of the past, the tricks of memory, that continue to shape his work” (O’Toole, 1989: 141). Born in Omagh, Co. Tyrone, and living in Derry from the age of ten, history and place form the backbone of Friel’s manipulation of the past and the struggle between fact and fiction culminating in his 1988 play, *Making History*. The play is set in 1591 and centres on its main protagonist, Hugh O’Neill’s uprising against the English and focusing primarily on the Battle of Kinsale and the subsequent Flight of the Earls. Friel’s play emphasises the power historical figures have today and how that influence can be manipulated or altered to suit different needs, “In some ways the inherited images of 1916, or 1690, control and rule our

lives more profoundly than the historical truth of what happened on those two occasions” (Pelletier, 1994: 190).

The creation of history and the role of the writer in myth-making has proved a controversial one within modern literature. Discussing the lack of history plays in Ireland despite a general popular interest in Irish history, Critic Fintan O’Toole notes that,

Here – perhaps because history still has a present tense – there isn’t. What we have are not history plays but plays about history: how it is made and why. In its title and content, Brian Friel’s *Making History*, a play not about Hugh O’Neill but about the construction of a historical narrative around him, is emblematic.

*(The Irish Times, 25<sup>th</sup> March 1997)*

In the summer of 2007, Ouroboros Theatre Company (Ireland) embarked on a national tour of Friel’s *Making History*, using various historical buildings and sites throughout the country as performance spaces. Initially conceived as a means of connecting Friel’s play about Hugh O’Neill to local historical domains, the company toured to sites with an historic or symbolic connection to O’Neill’s ill-fated rebellion and 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. Speaking of Ouroboros and site-specificity, *Irish Times* columnist, Sara Keating notes that with site-specific theatre, a company 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” (2008: 14).

Friel’s *Making History* was staged in venues related to the O’Neill’s rebellion and exile. Fifteen of the venues in the Republic were managed by the OPW and were used along with five sites in Northern Ireland and three in mainland Europe (Appendix C). A Kinsale newspaper, based where Charlesfort the site of the first performance is located, illustrated that the Ouroboros/*Making History* tour is an example of the emergent relationship between site-specific performance and historical sites,

The ambitious partnership between Ouroboros and the OPW is a first in Europe and a unique merging of a theatre company and a state body to mutually promote historical plays and historical sites. These site-specific performances will take place at locations largely unfamiliar with theatre performances, and the staging of the play itself utilises the historical value of each venue, drawing out their close bonds to the stories that make up the identity of the Irish people. (*The Southern Star*, 2008: 7)

This partnership, enabling a new way in which to engage with our historical sites, can provide a new dimension to the way in which a community engages with its history. Through site-specific performance, an audience can re-negotiate their history and their relationship to it and this type of innovative and radical theatre is an example to theatre and funding agencies across Europe. These historical sites are of emotional significance to the local community, and audience expectations and behaviour differed hugely from when the play was staged in traditional venues. As Artistic Director, Denis Conway, notes:

When I think about the response to the first production [in the Samuel Beckett theatre] to the response we got from performances in locations where the characters actually passed through – and where they eventually ended up, like the church we performed in Rome – well, the effect is incomparable. What 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. (Keating, 2008: 14)

The Ouroboros/*Making History* tour represented a huge undertaking, spanning the island of Ireland, before embarking on a European leg performing in Italy, France, Switzerland and Belgium, the route of which is shown in Appendix C of this dissertation. In continental Europe the sites marked the journey O'Neill took in his exile, finishing in Rome where the final act of *Making History* was staged and the site where O'Neill is buried today. The company's choice of site was influenced by many factors including the performance of the play, which moves from inside to outside, and so the sites need to reflect that. I have listed in Appendix D, the sites chosen and the reasons Ouroboros choose each specific site. For the purposes of this research, however, I have grouped and classified the twenty-two Irish sites in relation to my own criteria. In constructing a working methodology to cope with the unwieldy amount of sites within the tour, I began by informing myself about the sites, examining the videotape and footage collected by Ouroboros, interviewing

participants, theatre practitioners', spectators etc, and reading archival material. This research allowed for the construction of a case study where the theoretical material explored in previous chapters informs the choices made to: firstly reduce the number of sites under examination, secondly to construct a typology of sites based on my understanding of site-specificity, and thirdly to offer an exploration of site-specificity through the lens of a particular series of events and spaces. Keeping in mind the research questions, I divided the sites into three categories each reflecting not only the historical and emotional resonance for *Ouroboros* but also the architectural differences found at each site.

The first category is the “military sites” space where the realities of O’Neill rebellion still scar the landscape. Examples include Barryscourt Castle in County Cork. The castle’s Lord David Barry refused to side with O’Neill and O’Neill subsequently attacked and destroyed the surrounding lands in retaliation. Emo Court in County Laois, a site near the infamous Battle of the Plumes where Robert Devereux, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Essex engaged rebellion forces, and Charlesfort where the Battle of Kinsale proved the O’Neill’s undoing. The second category is the “domestic site”, namely the castles where O’Neill, his family and allies resided. Bagenal’s Castle in County Down is the birthplace of O’Neill’s third wife and she is one of the main figures in Friel’s *Making History*. Donegal Castle, stronghold of the O’Donnell’s, and O’Donnell is another central figure in the play. Castle Hill in County Tyrone is the birthplace and residence of Hugh O’Neill. Finally the “religious sites”, where the surrounding architecture lends a spiritual dimension to the performance: The Rock of Cashel, seat of the Kings of Munster where O’Neill was joined by James Desmond whom he titled the Súgan Earl; The Hill of Tara in County Meath, high Seat of the Kings of Ireland and a site of huge archaeological significance, a title O’Neill wanted to reclaim; and Melifont Abbey, the site where O’Neill submits to the Queen.

Although my interest in various sites overlapped at points with the company’s, there were sites chosen for the tour that are of less interest to this research. For example the site in Ballymote in Sligo was used not only because of a tangential link to the O’Neill/O’Donnell story but because the OPW wanted to draw attention to it as an historical site. It wouldn’t be a very well-known or well-visited site, compared to

some other more popular locations. In order to examine this case study with depth and clarity, I have narrowed the study from the original twenty-two sites within the tour, to five sites that I believe sufficiently enable an exploration into the historicizing of the space under discussion in this dissertation. As illustrated in the previous chapter the definition of site-specific theatre still remains fluid with various attempts at explanation differing hugely from each other. For the purposes of the dissertation I have focused on the term, “ghosting” (Carlson, 2004, McLucas & Pearson 1994) to illustrate the new dynamic created on-site by the performance. Exploring that dynamic in depth using a reduced number of sites allows for a more incisive and complex analysis of the relationship between the performance within the space. In order to reflect the differing typologies equally, I have chosen sites that have conflated some of the distinguishing functions of the various sites. The history, the tangential links to the dramatic text, and the architecture have all contributed to the twenty-two sites in different ways and the five sites I have chosen illustrate these differing connections be they structures, open air, castles, interiors, military associations, homes or religious sites.

The first site is chosen because it represents a direct connection to the dramatic text, Charlesfort, a star-shaped fort protecting Kinsale Harbour in County Cork is a unique military fortification in Ireland. The structure was built as a result of the Battle of Kinsale, the main event in *Making History* and the moment which the action of the play is built upon (the first Act takes place before the battle and the second after O’Neill’s defeat). The site is emblematic as a site functioning within the narrative of the play, and also is a physical representation of a landscape changed by the history of the play. The Battle of Kinsale marks the high water mark both in the play and historically, and the beginning of O’Neill’s decline. Charlesfort, the military site, represents the post-rebellion colonialism of Ireland and is a powerful symbol of the dominance of English military might in the country. The space provided a historical dynamic which, when overlaid with the Ouroboros performance, created a powerful “ghosting” in the minds of the audience.

The second site, Donegal Castle, was chosen because, firstly, it is representative of the vast majority of the sites on the tour: castles. Secondly, it is, architecturally, one

of the best and most intact examples of this type of structure on the tour. Donegal Castle was home to Red Hugh O'Donnell, an ally of O'Neill and a central character in *Making History*. As the site has a direct connection to one of the main characters in the dramatic text, the space reflects the domestic sphere which the main protagonists of the play would inhabit. This allows the audience to imagine the realities of the historical figures in the play and the site embodies the lives of the characters. Another important factor in the choice of this site is that both the exterior and interior were fully restored by the OPW and so Donegal Castle illustrates the domestic aspects of the performance in a way that other castles could not.

The third site, Mellifont Abbey represents the numerous religious sites on the tour. Sites like Clonmacnoise in Co. Offaly, and the Hill of Tara in Co. Meath, have proven to be sites of huge spiritual significance for the audience. Working with such a powerful pre-existing relationship, the key component here is exploring how staging *Making History* in such a site can affect the performance. For OPW site manager, Yvonne Mulligan, Mellifont Abbey was transformed by the performance, "The play was in the evening and we witnessed dusk descend. The sounds of nature were all around us and we felt transported back in time to the days of O'Neill" (Interview, 26/10/2010). I have chosen this site over other religious sites as this space works both on a spiritual level but is also of crucial importance historically, Mellifont Abbey is the site where O'Neill surrendered to Queen Elizabeth I.

Castle Hill in Dungannon, Co. Tyrone also comes with a charged and tense atmosphere but for different reasons. The site was by far the most political and divisive site on the tour. Main stronghold of the O'Neill's, and standing on one of the highest points in Ireland, the site functioned as a British army base for the duration of the Troubles and only returned to the local council in August 2007. For many of the audience the performance was the first time the site was accessible to them in their lifetime and so the relationship between audience and site was already fraught with existing tensions. This site is firstly, the stronghold of the O'Neill and secondly, a site of intense conflict for the local community. Castle Hill represents not only the past but is part of our living history and therefore is a crucial site on the tour.

The last site examined is the point of departure for the Flight of the Earls, Rathmullan Fort in Co. Donegal. The decisive and final act that paved the way for confiscation of the lands owned by the Earls, plantation and colonisation, the site played out the endgame to O'Neill's rebellion. Staged on the 13<sup>th</sup> September, 400 years to the day after the incident occurred, the site signals the end of the story: O'Neill died in Rome and never returned to Ireland. Each site offers differing interpretations of the play from an historical, architectural and religious standpoint and also reflects the discourses surrounding contested histories, a central concern of *Making History*. The remaining sites form part of the evidentiary database discussed in the previous chapter.

Discussing the staging of the play, Artistic Director, Denis Conway, recalls that he and the Director Geoff Gould,

hit upon the idea the idea of staging the 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. (2007: 7)

The differing locations lent themselves to representation of the passage of time. These split-stages were to be repeated in each venue and where the outdoor space was not appropriate a marquee was erected to separate the space as 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. (2007: 7)

The site-specificity allows for and re-enforces the central crux of the play, the tragic history of a country as embodied in the dualistic nature of one man, the unfolding rebellion marking the landscape and culminating in exile, a story that is echoed and repeated throughout Irish history. Ireland, as represented by Hugh O'Neill, is a figure vastly altered by the unfolding events. The differing locations, and the movement of the audience from one space to another as the light fades, exposes the viewer to these sites and the realities that have occurred there. In a sense the *Ouroboros/Making History* tour is about bearing witness, examining the history, stories, the truth and the lies that have fed the myth-making machine, the heroic

nationalist that has consumed recent Irish history since the birth of the Republic and that is still evident within Irish culture to the present.

“An autobiographical fact can be pure fiction and no less true or reliable for that” (McGrath, 1999: 38). History as fiction has played on Friel’s mind and materialised in his oeuvre alongside questions of myth, identity and memory, themes that have dominated his work since the late 1970s and 1980s. Discussing the structure of history plays specific to Ireland, given its recent troubles and interest in its history, critic Fintan O’Toole notes that, ‘What we have are not history plays but plays about history: how it is made and why’ (*Irish Times*, 25<sup>th</sup> March, 1997). The questioning of historical narrative and the instability or unreliability of historical documentation is at the heart of Friel’s 1988 play, *Making History*.

Grouped together with other history plays that emerged from Northern Ireland during this period, *Making History* seeks to dismantle the mythologizing that underscores contemporary nationalism. The play seeks to understand the construction of tribal identities in exploring (and undermining) its historical origins. In undermining the historian’s work Friel also frees himself from the burden of bearing witness or taking account, as O’Toole explains, “The play abjures history, undercuts all political hero-worship. By dealing with the impossibility of ever constructing a narrative which is more than an acceptable fiction, Friel frees himself from any perceived need to be a chronicler of his times” (in Pelletier, 1994: 196). *Making History* in some sense echoes the fact that all history is fiction, existing as collective memory until written down, dependent on the author, the creator. Different views or different histories written on the same event, collude in the creation of myths.

In this case-study, I would like to give an overview of the Ouroboros/*Making History* tour of historical sites and examine the implications such a project had for site-specific theatre in Ireland, as in the words of Ouroboros Artistic director, Denis Conway, “...a space can shape us culturally as much as a story can and our landscape is also our history. In the same way a building is not just bricks and mortar. There is a whole culture embedded in stone” (in Keating, *The Irish Times*, 7<sup>th</sup>

July 2008). I will argue that the importance of site-specific performance lies in its ability to engage with potentially new audiences. An engagement with the site functions to generate a deeper understanding between the audience (who can engage in the historical context of the site) and the performance which is evident in the outcome of the *Ouroboros/Making History* tour. The difficulty in exploring this tour is the nature of performance itself, its temporality. The tracing of a live performance is constantly refuted or contested by the performative act's natural impermanence.

The documentation of the performative act rests upon the creation of an archival record of the original event. Video Recording, photo-documentation and reviews offer a mapping of the original performance while alluding to its "liveness" (Auslander, 2008). The documentation of live performance, however, has created a new spatial environment within which to engage with the work. For Nick Kaye, "site-specificity arises precisely in uncertainties over the borders and limits of work and site," and the tension arising between the original performance and its documentation echoing, "their sensitivity to their own limits, their willingness to concede the impossibility of reproducing the object toward which their statements, speculations, fragments, memories and evocations are aimed" (2000: 215). Examining the material traces, the memories, and the oral archive we can garner an idea of the relationship between the performance and its audience.

### ***Making History: A Literary History***

Voicing his opinion on the Irish people in 1972, Friel declared that "we are all obsessed with ourselves and cannot see ourselves in a global context" (in Richards, 2000: 260). *Making History* exemplifies Friel's pre-occupation with the tribalism that pervades our history and uses that insularity and myth-making as a tool to explore our cultural mores. Having lived in Derry since 1939, Friel said of the town, "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” (in Hickey & Smith, 1972: 221). Indeed, the city became a flashpoint for sectarian violence and became quickly known as the “cockpit of the Troubles” (Richtarik, 1997: 13) and although the term turned out to be exaggerated, the impression of the city as a hostile and tribal location was quickly embedded within the wider community primarily through the work of the media.

The British military presence in Northern Ireland and the tensions that erupted within the civilian population in Friel’s childhood years has led to a political undercurrent in the majority of his plays. In *Making History*, Friel uses history-making and our knowledge of it to construct a dialogue between our past and our present. Writing in the *Times Literary Supplement*, he illustrates this treatise,

I do not believe that art is a servant of any movement. But during the period of unrest I can foresee that the two allegiances that have bound the Irish imagination – loyalty to the most authoritarian church in the world and devotion to a romantic ideal we call Kathleen – will be radically altered. Faith and Fatherland; new definitions will be forged and then new loyalties, and then new social groupings. It will be a bloody process. (1972: 305-6)

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. In the programme notes for the Field day premiere in 1988, Friel writes that, “when there is a tension between historical ‘fact’ and the imperative of fiction, I’m glad to say I kept faith with the narrative” (in Jones, 2000: 124). Historical notions of place are closely linked with the construction of identity and in *Making History* Friel links particular sites with the history and memories associated with them.

Loosely adhering to Seán O’Faolain’s, *The Great O’Neill* (1942), which was published when Friel was thirteen, *Making History* was premiered at the Guildhall in Derry in September 1988. The play takes place over the course of two years and is divided into two acts, one before and one after the Battle of Kinsale (1601). Beginning in 1591, *Making History* revolves around a significant period in the life of the Earl of Tyrone, Hugh O’Neill, as he is forced to choose between the English

crown and the old Gaelic way of life. Although an Irish Chieftain adhering to Brehon laws and customs, O'Neill had also inherited the Earldom of Tyrone, a title his grandfather, Conn O'Neill had been granted by the English. He had just married Mabel Bagenal, "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" (*Making History*, Act I, Scene I) and seemed content to straddle both English and Irish camps.

Relations with the English soon break down and O'Neill embarks on a path 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 death knell for the traditional Gaelic way of life and paved the way for the colonization of Ireland. In examining the history of O'Neill's life, Friel exposes the falsity of a single, all-encompassing narrative or truth. For Sean 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 worlds history" (1986: 279). The core of the argument rests with the mythologizing of O'Neill where the collective memory of a community rests on an image that is constructed and fabricated.

Hugh O'Neill was born in 1550, making him contemporaries with, amongst other luminaries, Shakespeare, Caravaggio and Galileo. Eight years after his birth, Elizabeth Tudor succeeded to the throne, heralding an age of unprecedented success for the English monarchy. The Renaissance had brought Europe out of the regressive Middle Ages and that meant a society that, "... had moved from a world of tribes and chiefdoms – in which rights of property were mainly defined through membership of a kin-group – to a society in which lordship over all land and men were increasingly assumed by state rulers" (Jones, 1999: 65). For Ireland, however, the majority of the country remained quite insular and outside the remit and control of the English crown.

Fearing an alliance between Irish chieftains and Catholic Spain, Elizabeth I was eager to expand control over the island through the replacement of traditional Gaelic customs with English cultural norms through settlement and plantation. 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 (Morgan, 1993) 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. Seen as an ally of the Crown, O'Neill was initially granted the Earldom in order to spearhead the plantation. Speaking both English and Irish, he had been groomed to bring English ways to Ulster. In *Making History*, to illustrate the dualistic nature of O'Neill's character, Friel has him speaking for the majority with "an upper-class English accent" (1989: 1). In moments of high emotion, however, O'Neill's accent becomes, "pure Tyrone" (1989: 70).

O'Neill was inaugurated as a chieftain or 'Ó'Néill Mór', as was his title, in 1595 in a traditional Gaelic ceremony at Tulach Óg in East Tyrone, presided over by the 'Ó Catháin', the sub-chief of the Ó' Néill clan upon whom the act of legitimization depends. Now considered the Great O'Neill by neighbouring chieftains, Hugh O'Neill embarked on a campaign of open hostility towards English settlers which culminated in the Nine Years War. The reasoning for O'Neill's "defection" to the Irish side is attributed chiefly to O'Neill's religious fervour. When the Queen opposed Catholicism, and was excommunicated by the Pope in 1570, O'Neill sided with Catholic Ireland rather than stay loyal to a Protestant Queen. In 1600, O'Neill informed the Pope that he was fighting, "*pro Romana et libertate patriae*" (Morgan, 1993: 23). In a proclamation dated November 1599, O'Neill made the claim that,

I will imploy [sic] myself to the utmost of my power in their defence and for the extirpation of heresy, the planting of the Catholic religion, the delivery of our country of infinite murders, wicked and detestable policies by which this kingdom was hithero governed .... (Morgan, 1993: 25)

In Friel's play, we are made keenly aware of the creation of the myth as O'Neill, throughout the unfolding events ponders his legacy, "Which choice would history approve?. if the future historian had a choice of my two alternatives, which would he prefer for his acceptable narrative?" (1989: 28). The key figure in this mythologizing is that of Archbishop Peter Lombard who, when introduced into *Making History*, is writing a contemporary biography of O'Neill's life. A rather canny if cynically

minded Lombard believes that history is created and seeks to mythologize the Earl and his part in the Irish story,

I don't believe that a period of history – a given space of time – my life – your life – that it contains within it one “true” interpretation just waiting to be mined. But I do believe that it may contain within it several possible narratives: the 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. (1989: 15, 16)

O’Neill disagrees with Lombard’s approach to history and wants the facts recorded truthfully rather than 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” (1989: 63). This image, however has no place in Lombard’s story as he seeks to re-invigorate a race demoralized by colonization,

Ireland is reduced as it has never been reduced before – we are talking about a colonized people on the brink of extinction. This isn’t the time for a critical assessment of your “ploys” and your “disgraces” and your “betrayal” – that’s the stuff of another history for another time. Now is the time for a hero. (1989: 67)

Lombard is in the process of writing history, of forming the myths and legends that have shaped Ireland’s national conscience, but Friel is showing O’Neill as a troubled man torn by contrasting allegiances and reluctant to play the martyr. The manifestation and the fabrication of the heroic figure followed quickly by his martyrdom is a recurring theme within all history writing. With Irish history, however, this hero-worship takes on nationalistic undertones, the results of which are evident today. Indeed writing in the preface of his seminal depiction of the life of Hugh O’Neill upon which Friel based *Making History*, Seán O’Faolain, prefigured this discourse surrounding historiography,

If anyone wished to make a study of the manner in which historical myths are created he might well take O’Neill as an example, and beginning with his defeat and death trace the gradual emergence of a picture at which the original would have gazed from under his red eyelashes with a chuckle of cynical amusement and amazement. Indeed, in those last years in Rome the myth was already beginning to emerge, and a talented dramatist might write an informative, entertaining, ironical play on the theme of the living man helplessly watching his translation

into a star in the face of all the facts that had reduced him to poverty, exile, and defeat. (O'Faolain, 1942, Preface)

This “creation of the myth” that began in Rome has had a profound effect on Irish history as the story, the legend has seeped down through generations and the realities have been all but lost through the story-telling of men like Peter Lombard. The instability of meaning and historical truths have crystallised into fact in Friel's history play, the facts that have created the history we learn today. In the staging and re-enacting of history, so that narrative is made real, but in the staging and re-enacting of the play, that narrative is undermined, as the play is just an act of “performing history” not tied to historical truth. History is being relived as these sites are the physical representations of a history of which the myth already exists in



Fig. 6: The original set for the Field Day production, 1988.

the minds of the audience. This re-staging is a lesson in confronting the myth, of re-engaging with the history through its physical representation, the sites. In essence, history is being re-staged, re-played for a contemporary audience giving them the change to re-negotiate their past.

### ***Making History: A Performance History***

*Making History* was first staged at the Guildhall in Derry on the 20<sup>th</sup> September 1988 by the Field Day Theatre Company (fig. 6) before transferring to the National

Theatre in London for the month of December. It was directed by Simon Curtis and the cast consisted of four men and two women, most notably, Stephen Rea played the part of Hugh O'Neill and Niall Toibín the Archbishop Lombard. Field Day had been founded by Friel and Stephen Rea the year previously with the staging of Friel's *Translations* (1980) also performed at the Guildhall. The company was a cross-border initiative financed by the Art Councils on both sides of the border. *Making History* and the work of Field Day was building a new wave of understanding and introspection that was focusing on the relationship between North and South. Stephen Rea commented that,

History for the Irish is something that has not yet been completed because of the conflict we live in. Obviously if it can't be completed it has to be re-examined all the time, to find ways that we can move on. The pleasing irony is that Friel is making his own version of history that is useful for us today, a history ... of reconciliation. (in Jones, 2000)

The role of these sites is to distil for the audience the memory of this myth and to deconstruct that myth through the performance. Within site-specific performance the site relies on a complex coexistence of numerous narratives that pre-exist the work. Narratives are attached to these sites and it is through the performance that the narratives are re-negotiated for and by the audience. The sites chosen for the *Ouroboros/Making History* tour were chosen because those spaces were predisposed to this discourse due to the narrative of the play. Documenting these sites is yet another incident of writing history and so, in attempting to pin down the very conceptual dynamic between site and performance, there needs to be the very concrete analysis of what really happens in that space and in that time. For these reasons, I am examining five sites and through the prism of those five, reflecting on how the history of these sites was re-conceived by the audience through performance, and also reflecting on the challenges (economic, cultural, artistic) of researching, producing and documenting site-specific performance.

## Five Sites where History Meets Performance

### Site 1: Charlesfort

The first point of intersection between performance, play and history is the Battle of Kinsale, the culmination of the nine years war which took place on the 24<sup>th</sup> December 1601. The Battle is the central event in Friel's play unfolding offstage and affecting all outcomes. Act One takes place before the battle where O' Neill is pondering the outcome of the rebellion, "Do I keep the faith with my oldest friend and ally, Maguire and indeed with the Gaelic civilisation that he personifies? Or do I march alongside the forces of Her Majesty?" (1989: 27). The second Act takes place after Kinsale, the first scene in the Sperrin Mountains and the second in the Penitenziari Palace in Rome. All is lost as the country has fallen and O'Neill is forced into exile. As Yvonne Lysandrou notes in *Hugh O'Neill as Hamlet-Plus*,

O'Neill is removed from any significant participation in society, either as a mimic English Earl or a dispossessed Irish Feudal Lord; in other words he is far removed from any meaningful representation in the order of things that he can only regain centrality as a character in Lombard's fictionalisation of "history" where his real predicament of marginal isolation is denied. (2006: 99)

A fleet of about 4,000 soldiers had been sent from Spain under the stewardship of Don Juan Aquila. It arrived in Kinsale in September 1601 and inhabited Ringcurran Castle (now Charlesfort) for the duration of the battle. The newly appointed Lord Deputy, Charles Blount, otherwise called Lord Mountjoy, had been dispatched from London to bring about an end to the O'Neill rebellion. Upon hearing of the Spaniards arrival he and his troops immediately travelled to Kinsale and surrounded the besiegers. By December, Mountjoy was in a very weak position, cut off from the sea by the Spaniards, and surrounded by the combined armies of O'Neill and O'Donnell. The crown forces were trapped, and through desertion, starvation and disease, were reduced to about 1,500 men.

Under pressure from O'Donnell and the other chieftains to attack rather than wait, O'Neill made the momentous and calamitous decision to mount an attack on the 23<sup>rd</sup> December, but a traitor amongst the Irish had alerted the English who were prepared for the onslaught. The resulting battle of Kinsale lasted all of three hours and proved the decisive victory of the Nine Years War. A contemporary map from the second edition of the *Pacata Hibernia* shows a bird's eye view of the harbour and the batteries and encampments of both the English and the Spanish Armada controlling



Fig 7: The Battle of Kinsale, Thomas Stafford/ George Carew, 1633 (pub. 1810)

the harbour (see fig. 7). It shows both Jamesfort and Ringcurran Castle (Charelsfort's predecessor) at the opening of the harbour.



**Fig. 8:** *A Prospect of the New Fort built at Kinsale*, Thomas Phillips, 1685, National Library of Ireland

Having regained Kinsale from the Spanish, the English began to fortify the harbour, constructing James Fort in 1602 and Charlesfort in the 1670s and 80s on the ruins of Ringcurran castle. Built by the architect of the Royal Hospital in Kilmainham, William Robinson, Charlesfort is an exemplary model of a star shaped fort complete with five defensive bastions and walls up to six metres thick. Associated with some of the key battles in Irish history, the Williamite War 1689-91 and the Civil War 1922-23, the fort was burned down by retreating anti-Treaty forces in 1922. A description dating from 1685, made by Sir Richard Cox, Lord Chancellor of Ireland, emphasised the importance of the newly erected structure in preventing further attacks like the Battle of Kinsale,

Neare one of the best harbours in Ireland which is therefore guarded by the old fort of Castlenipark and a new royall structure called Charlesfort, built at Rincorran by his Grace the Duke of Ormonde at his Maties charge & with great art and magnificence and and is thereby rendered a sanctuary for Shippis in tyme of war. (in Johnston and Lunham, 1902: 358)

Thomas Phillips, however, Military Surveyor to King James II, whose painting of Charlesfort (see fig. 8) was made in 1685 considered the fort to be, “very ill situated under the command of the hills” (in Murtagh, 2007: 108). The site has proved controversial and, as already mentioned, was burned to the ground in 1922. It had been left neglected for decades until 1973 when it was declared a national monument and taken over by the OPW who began an extensive restoration plan. The restoration



is still

Fig. 9: Contemporary view of Charlesfort

ongoing, but there are many sections open to the public.

The *Ouroboros/Making History* tour opened at Charlesfort on the 8<sup>th</sup> July, 2007 to an audience of 50 people and the accompaniment of the pipe-players of traditional Irish musicians, the Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann. Site Manager Evelyn Long Coleman spoke of the innovative nature of the event,

The fact that permission was granted by the OPW to host Brian Friel's play at Charlesfort was in itself ground-breaking. Where the play was staged in Charles Fort – Charles Bastion – was indeed the first time ever that a theatrical performance ever took place. Since Charlesfort was declared a National Monument in 1973 there has been no public access to this section of the fort. The Charles Bastion is a magnificent casemated structure with a vaulted roof comprising height dimensions of approx. 40ft. (interview, 8<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2010)

Structurally the most interesting of the sites, Charlesfort was also a challenging space and proved to be on the night when bad weather conditions foiled plans to stage the second act outdoors where a stage had been erected. Using a historical site as a location isn't without challenges. If the actors have to perform at ground level it can prove difficult for all the audience to see and some of the dialogue can be lost. Peter Crawley, reviewing the play for the *Irish Times* felt that although Charlesfort was, "undoubtedly atmospheric" the structure, "was never designed with a theatre audience in mind; its troublesome sightlines and lack of rigging ensuring an economical staging". He goes on to say, however, that, "there is still something

rewardingly complex in the characters it constructs, served by this production's uniformly excellent cast. In that achievement it shrugs off sanctimony, ignites debate and keeps history compellingly, infuriatingly alive" (2007: 12).

The difficulties point to one of the key issues with site-specific theatre: for an audience accustomed to a performance happening in a theatre, to have to navigate an historical site with its sometimes less than suitable structure, compromise sometimes has to occur. With the opening act staged in the dungeon of the building and the second act due to happen outdoors (as already mentioned, this never materialised because of adverse weather conditions), the performance would never have achieved the perfect staging conditions available to them in an auditorium. Director Geoff Gould said of their choice to stage Act one in the dungeon,

Charlesfort was the first venue of the tour and as such very important to us as a launching point. I remember Denis [artistic director] and I getting a tour of the fort and being offered numerous venues on the surface i.e. in the main body of the fort ... we persevered and asked to see every space in the venue. When she showed us the dungeon we both nearly keeled over, it was perfect. Nothing had ever been staged there though, ever, and she (the guide) was very negative as to its possible use added to the fact that there would be a number of health and safety issues. We battled on and got the all clear from [the] OPW. (interview 6<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2010)



Fig 10: Stage erected outdoors at Charlesfort, 2007

The compromise involved in staging site-specific performance as opposed to conventional auditoria was made clear in Charlesfort at the beginning of the tour as, "to facilitate this performance substantial health and safety works were undertaken by the Charlesfort OPW Works team. The OPW Events & Facilities Management Unit were involved in all stages of the production" (Site Manager, Evelyn Long Coleman, interview,

8<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2010). A second stage was erected outdoors and proved more troublesome

as the rain hampered any usage. Staging a production in an historical site was not without its difficulties as actors and crew faced challenges in the staging and performing of *Making History*. Overcoming issues with staging, sound and sightlines, the importance of site-specificity lies in using the space to its full advantage, embracing the atmosphere it creates and compromising when needed as stage manager Shane Ward echoes,

Charlesfort was the first show and from a stage-management point of view was a nightmare. We were ages away from the road access so humping all the equipment took ages, we had to get the OPW to sort out a tractor trailer to carry all the stuff. We had two different venues set up one inside and one outside. Over the three nights we performed in Charlesfort we never got to use the outdoor venue because of the rain. It was incredibly atmospheric in the venue but tough to do a show in, a tiny stage, the offstage space was even smaller. All the actors were huddled into a tiny space hidden behind a semi transparent black waiting to come on. The stage manager also back there operating sound off a tiny boom-box ... We learned a lot from Charlesfort that we then applied to the other venues as we went along. The importance of offstage spaces, looking after the actors, because they were forced to use odds places as dressing rooms etc. And keeping the lights simple. (interview, 1<sup>st</sup> Nov, 2010)



**Fig 11: Act one Scene One, Denis Conway (Hugh O'Neill) and Chris Moran (Harry Hoveden), Stage erected in the dungeon of the fort, 2007**

The fact remains that staging a show in a theatre designed for the purpose is a lot easier than using ruined structures that bring with it safety and space issues. Negotiating these sites can prove difficult when, with each performance having to adapt to each site, it is the space that has the power over the performance. These practical considerations can limit the production companies' ability to stage a flawless performance but the site does however change the dynamics of the performance and vice versa. Consequently, the dynamic is in the relationship between the site and the performance and this relationship has proven to be a new and innovative way of engaging with the audience as Director, Geoff Gould notes,

An hour before we opened there, Denis [Conway] and I were looking down the bay, with the lights of the venue streaming down over the sea shore and wondering how lucky we were to be staging *Making History* on the site of the battle of Kinsale in a place (the dungeon) that probably held some O'Neill prisoners. It was an amazing feeling in the auditorium (i.e. the dungeon) that evening. The audience of only fifty felt as privileged as we did and had to make their way in the dark down narrow stairways to get to the venue which was a cavernous shaped dungeon dripping with water but also resounding to the pipes of Ceoltas Ceolteoirí and then the wondrous voices of the cast of *Making History*. The venue, the place, the time, everyone, cast crew, OPW crew and audience were so aware of the space and its relevance. (interview 6<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2010)

From the perspective of the OPW the production was also a success where, due to public demand, every performance was sold out. Site manager, Evelyn Long Colman felt that, "Visitors were as enthralled as much by the military and historic settings as they were by the performance" and also noted that the OPW team involved in the production, "derived great pleasure in the hosting of these events" (interview, 8<sup>th</sup> Nov.2010). For actor Chris Moran, who played Harry Hoveden, the historical resonance was palpable,

A journey for the audience across the drawbridge at the top of the castle, through an enclosed but open space and down into a dripping, dark room right in the guts of the fort at the very edge of the sea could only have ratcheted up expectations and acted as the clearest possible indication of the scale of the events of the events of the play. As our first performance it was hair-raising, and the weather meant getting outside for the third act was impossible, but the atmosphere was extraordinary-the resonance with the location rang out like a bell. (interview, 8<sup>th</sup> Nov.2010)

Following the Battle of Kinsale the decision was made to send Red Hugh O'Donnell to Spain to request re-enforcements. He never returned, dying in Spain on the 10<sup>th</sup> September 1602 aged twenty-nine.

Des Swords of the Events Unit at the OPW provided ongoing support to the tour in the challenges faced at the sites. Speaking of the show, he noted that “an Event Management plan had to be prepared specifically for each site in advance. For this reason, staff briefing was extremely important as the Emergency Evacuation procedures and Fire Assembly points varied so much from venue to venue” (interview, 17<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2010). With Charlesfort the venue had no electricity as an area was used that was not usually open to the public, “a risk assessment has to be carried out and a series of control measures had to be put in place as a result” (interview, 17<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2010). Seven issues arose at Charlesfort that were of concern to the OPW in the staging of *Making History*: no electricity, limited space, restricted access, remote venue within the site, Health and Safety issues, limited capacity, and emergency lighting and signage had to be installed. The production faced challenges as illustrated by both the OPW and the Ouroboros crew, challenges that were exacerbated by the typology of the site, the adjustments needed and the adverse weather conditions.

The staging of site-specific theatre in historical locations as with the Charlesfort site illustrates the challenge faced in using and modifying the natural and architectural environment and re-negotiating the site for the purposes of performance. And yet the site was hugely successful in fostering the relationship between performance and audience that is attributed to site-specific theatre. The performances emerge from the place between the different strands of story or history-telling. The dynamic between, in Brith Gof's words, the host (Charlesfort) and the ghost (*Making History*) create a depth of feeling or connection for the audience that is unattainable were it not for the site, that space where it all happened. Discussing this dynamic in *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre claims that,

The Historical and its consequences, the “diachronic”, the “etymology” of locations in the sense of what happened at a particular spot or place and thereby changed it – all of this becomes inscribed in space. The past leaves its traces; time has its own script. Yet this space is always, now

and formerly, a present space, given as an immediate whole, complete with its associations and connections in their actuality. (1991: 37)

The historical resonances associated with a site are not just evident in its material traces. The site carries with it the histories that have continued up to the present day and negotiating this history is the key to successful site-specific theatre. The relationship between the history of the site and the user of the site is not fixed and determined but a subjective understanding which can be more profoundly understood by meaningful engagement with the site. The objective of site-specific theatre should be to facilitate this meaningful engagement and allow that relationship to develop and re-inform or re-invigorate the history of that site. The success of performing *Making History* in Charlesfort is indicative of the layered or contested history that is embodied within that particular landmark. Charlesfort reflects the fragmentation within Irish history explored in Friel's play, the juxtaposition of which, is most evident in the character of Hugh O'Neill. Charlesfort is the symbolic equivalent of this history and as such embodies the "other" described in Foucault's Heterotopias. This space has laid claim on the audience in a meaningful way not found in conventional theatre spaces.

## **Site 2: Donegal Castle**

Donegal Castle proved to be an easier site to adapt than Charlesfort had been. With an enclosed space which operated more like a theatre space, the play was moulded around the interiors of the castle. The site was a stronghold of Red Hugh O'Donnell, Lord of Tír Connaill, chief ally of Hugh O'Neill and one of the main protagonists in *Making History*. O'Neill and O'Donnell proved to be great allies, O'Neill was a great supporter, and was present at both O'Donnell's inauguration as Earl of Tír Conaill, and to his submission to the Queen before Lord Deputy Fitzwilliam in 1592. Later that same year O'Donnell married Róise, a daughter of O'Neill (O'Neill's second wife was a sister of O'Donnell's) to further strengthen their alliance. Donegal castle consists of a 15<sup>th</sup> century keep, a Jacobean style wing and is surrounded by a 17<sup>th</sup> century boundary wall. Built in 1474, the castle remained in the hands of the O'Donnells until their departure in the Flight of the Earls whereupon it

was handed over to Basil Brooke who added the Jacobean wing in 1611. The castle remained in the possession of the Brooke family until it fell into ruin in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In 1898, the then owner, the Earl of Arran donated the castle to the OPW,



**Fig. 12: Donegal Castle, Stronghold of the O'Donnell family**

then called the Board of Works, which had been founded in 1831, and the building was renovated by the OPW from 1991 to 1996. In 1601 before Red Hugh O'Donnell began his march to Kinsale he destroyed the castle lest it fall into enemy hands. That same year his bard, Malmurry MacWard wrote on the castle's destruction, that,

The reason that he left thee as thou art  
Was lest the black ferocious strangers,  
Should dare to dwell within thy walls  
(quoted in 'P' Petric, 1840: 186)

Donegal castle, as the stronghold of a central character both in Irish history and Friel's depiction of its making, reflects O'Donnell's role in the "making" of history. In writing to the Queen on the 12<sup>th</sup> November 1566, the castle was described by Lord Deputy Sidney as,

one of the greatest that ever I saw in Ireland in any Irish man's hands and would appear with good keeping one of the fairest, situated in a good soil

and so high a portable water as a boat of ten tonne, may come twenty yards of the castle. (quoted in McGettigan, 2005: 21)

In *Making History* O'Neill refers to O'Donnell as "loyal, faithful, Hugh" (1989: 60). In the final moments of the play when Lombard and O'Neill are discussing the legacy of the rebellion and the flight that followed it, Lombard talks about how he's going to write the "overall framework" (1989: 62) of his story and outlines his plans for O'Donnell,

I then move onto that special relationship between yourself and Hugh O'Donnell; the patient forging of the links between Spain and Rome; the uniting of the whole of Ulster into great dynasty that finally inspired all the Gaelic chieftains to come together under your leadership. And suddenly the nation state was becoming a reality. (1989: 64)

Lombard is preoccupied with the creation of the grand narrative, one that sits well with Ireland as a colonised country. He does, however, attempt to appease O'Neill in telling him that the celebrated scholar, Ludhaidh O'Cleary has written the story of O'Donnell,

And talking of Hugh O'Donnell – (*He searches through a pile of papers.*) this will interest you. Yes, maybe this will put your mind at ease. Ludhaidh O'Cleary has written a life on Hugh and this is how he describes him. Listen to this. 'He was a dove in meekness and gentleness and a lion in strength and force. He was a sweet-sounding trumpet. (Act Two, Scene Two)

As Lombard continues, describing O'Donnell in glorious terms, O'Neill responds incredulously to some of the more outlandish compliments in O'Cleary's book and again Lombard uses this example to illustrate the varying interpretations of history, "But you'll have to admit it has a ring about it. Maybe you and I remember a different Hugh. But maybe that's not the point" (1989: 65). Again the meta-narrative or grand narrative of history is challenged in what could be termed a Derridean play, an exploration of the deconstructive power of language where words can lead to the dissolution of truth and dissolving the barrier between fact and fiction. Here history is constructed through language not through the realities of O'Neill's life.

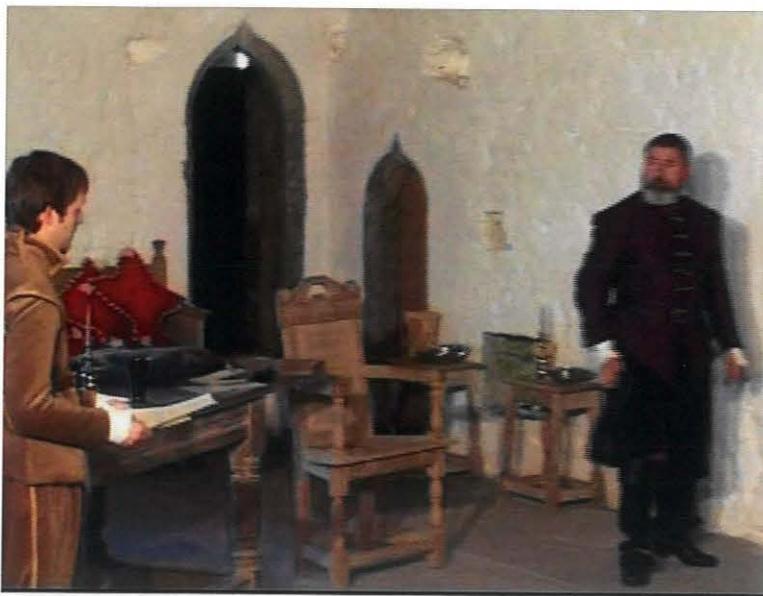
Two of the sites on the tour, Donegal Castle and Rathmullan fort, were integral to a year-long commemoration already taking place throughout Donegal organised by the Donegal County Council for the anniversary of the Flight of the Earls. Given O'Donnell's central role in Friel's *Making History* and in the history of the Flight of the Earls, and consequently the Plantation of Ulster, Donegal Castle is an important site embodying both the historical and the literary aspects of the play. For actor Chris Moran, the site was, "a domestic castle for a domestic play which suited the interior scenes wonderfully well" (interview, 8<sup>th</sup> Nov 2010). The Ouroboros production of *Making History* played on the 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of July. Scene 1 and 2 in the opening Act took place on the first floor of the building, Act 2, Scene 1 took place in the courtyard, and the final scene took place back in the first floor of the castle. Geoff Gould spoke of his impression of the site,

Denis [Conway]) and I visited Donegal Castle months in advance of the tour. We couldn't believe that two workmen carpenters from the OPW had spent twelve years of their lives restoring the roof of the main building. It looked like a work of art. They were so excited at the idea of the production and the fact that the castle had originally been owned by Hugh O'Donnell, one of the main characters in the play. For the actors on stage that night they felt an eerie chill as if Hugh O'Donnell was in the room with them but it was a chill that gave a frisson to the performance. Again all present, including Gay Byrne, were so aware of the history attached to the castle the play and the character of Hugh O'Donnell (played by local Ballyshannon man Conan Sweeney) that it made for two magical performances. (Interview, 6<sup>th</sup> November, 2010)

The two performances were unhampered by the weather and again the performance echoed the history of the site. Sean McLoone, OPW Supervisor and Site Manager for Donegal Castle, illustrates the depth of emotion felt by the audience,

Ouroboros produced their play here at Donegal Castle. The Castle is the medieval home of Red Hugh O'Donnell and as such resonated with the fabric of the building. Great interaction took place as the audience moved from inside Hugh O'Neill's home (the castle banqueting hall) to playing the love scene outside (in castle courtyard) under floodlight creating a very strong bond between actor and audience. Then the audience moved back to [the] original venue, now turned around to represent O'Neill in Rome. By limiting [the] audience to 60 the action literally played out in front of and around the audience. Strong performances further added to a very special, exciting night's drama. (Interview, 26<sup>th</sup> Oct, 2010)

Stage manager, Shane Ward felt that in comparison to Charlesfort this site was a lot easier to set up, whilst actor Chris Moran felt that “the position of the castle in the very centre of the town meant that the necessary sense of location was lacking. There was an unavoidable feeling of playing football in front of the home crowd” (interview, 8<sup>th</sup> Nov, 2010). Des Swords of the OPW echoed these sentiments saying the, “outdoor scene attracted attention from onlookers as the only outdoor area available was along the roadside. (interview 17<sup>th</sup> Nov 2010). The distraction took away from the performance as main focal point.



**Fig. 13. Interior of Donegal Castle, Denis Conway (Hugh O'Neill) and Chris Moran (Harry Hoveden)**

The comments illustrate the difficulties in staging a performance outdoors and at the mercy of external factors. For Shane Ward the interesting thing about doing site-specific theatre was, “the challenges of doing performances outside of the safety net of the theatre. Theatres have developed a

structure that is designed to be able to repeat performances with as few surprises as possible. When doing site-specific work you have to be up for dealing with strange and unpredictable challenges” (interview, 7<sup>th</sup> Nov, 2010). The challenges of producing *Making History* in Donegal Castle lay in the constraints of the architecture; the interior scenes were staged on the top floor of the building and proved difficult to get to with the equipment needed, the outdoor scene was not ideal in its proximity to the road and the site itself was situated in the centre of Donegal making the area quite busy and noisy and not reminiscent of 16<sup>th</sup> century Ireland.

Looking at Brith Gof's theoretical model, one can see the relationship emerging between the dramatic text and the performative site. Within the confines of Donegal Castle (host) the performance (ghost) seeks to develop a framework in which this relationship can develop. This site can offer:

a particular and unavoidable history

a particular use (a cinema, a slaughterhouse)

a particular formality (shape, proportion, height, disposition of architectural elements, etc.)

a particular political, cultural or social context. (quoted in Kaye, 1996: 213)

Pearson likens the performance to, "the latest occupation of a location where occupations are still apparent and cognitively active" (in Kaye, 1996: 214). This relationship goes to the very heart of site-specific performance and, in particular, the performance of historical plays in their original settings. The traces of history that are found in these sites create an ideal context within which one can engage with the performance. Pearson terms this theatrical practice to, "the attractive notion of 'deep maps' which combine the geography and natural history of a given location with accounts of the history and lived experience of its inhabitants" (Harvie 2005: 45). Through the lived experience of its inhabitants, Donegal Castle, bring its own historical dynamic to the performance allowing for a deeper relationship with the audience.

### **Site Three: Mellifont Abbey**

Mellifont Abbey, an ecclesiastical building was architecturally one of the most interesting of the sites. Although the ruins themselves were beautiful, the play was not performed there due to safety concerns as the venue had no roof, and a large marquee was utilised on the grounds instead, which had to be installed two days before the performance. The Abbey, situated in County Louth, is a 12<sup>th</sup> century ruined Cistercian monastery, the first of its kind in Ireland. The Cistercians, a religious order founded by St. Malachy of Armagh in France in 1098, arrived in Ireland in 1142 and Mellifont Abbey became the first of twenty-six monasteries by

the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. After the dissolution of the monasteries under King Henry VIII, the Abbey was demolished and sold. In 1556, a fortified Tudor Manor house was built on the site by Edward Moore in order to change the abbey into a residence. In the time of Sir Gareth Moore, Edward Moore's son and ally of O'Neill, the residence would have been formidable, described in 1592 by Lughaidh O'Cleary as, "a dense busy grove ... and a large rampart all around it, as if it was a kitchen garden. There was a fine mansion (called the Mhainistir Mór)" (in Moss, 2007: 86). The house was occupied by the Moores until 1727 when it was sold to the Balfour family. In March 1603 the Nine Years War was ended at this site with O'Neill's submission to the Queen, and he was to return here in 1607 prior to his departure with the Flight of the Earls.

What remains of the site today is the octagonal lavabo (c1210) and chapter house (c1220) illustrating the French influence on construction and a gate house dating from the medieval period. The abbey is mentioned indirectly in *Making History* in Act 2, Scene 1 after the Battle of Kinsale when O'Neill is in hiding in the Sperrin Mountains. Harry Hoveden, O'Neill's private secretary tell him of an invitation to the abbey from his friend Sir Gareth Moore, "Oh yes, Sir Gareth Moore wants to get in touch with you- I imagine at Mountjoy's prompting. He wants to explore what areas of common interest might exist between you and the crown" (52). O'Neill seems dismissive of the offer but we know that he spent time there prior to the Flight of the Earls.

Speaking of Mellifont Abbey, Denis Conway notes that the site

is particularly important as it was the last place O'Neill visited before he left Ireland. He went there to visit his old friend Gareth Moore and it was where he signed his last submission to Elizabeth I. In terms of the Flight of the Earls, the Abbey is the proper beginning of it all.

(in Gorman, *Irish Independent*, August 25<sup>th</sup> 2007)

It was at the Abbey that O'Neill succumbed to his fate, signing the treaty of Mellifont and taking his son back to Ulster to flee the country. In Fintan O'Toole's mind, "For Brian Friel, both as man and as playwright, the past and all our images of it are slippery and untrustworthy" (2003: 302). At the time of the submission the Queen

had already died, unbeknownst to O'Neill who had renounced the title of O'Neill and agreed to support the crown in return for her pardon, and the restoration of his Earldom. Upon hearing the news of her death, "it caused him to weep with rage" (Conway, 2007: C7)

Although O'Neill had been in the dark concerning the Queen's death, the hard bargaining in the run up to the Treaty of Mellifont resulted in O'Neill gaining a pardon and retaining his lands, and although the title of O'Neill was relinquished he was allowed to keep his chief or uirrí, O Catháin, the family who held the ability to inaugurate a new O'Neill.

In Act 2, Scene 1 O'Neill and O'Donnell discuss the submission to the Queen,

I do resign all claim and title to any lands but such as shall now be granted to me; and lastly I offer to the Queen and to her magistrates here my full assistance in anything that may tend to the advancement of her service and the peaceable government of this kingdom.( Act 2, Scene 1)



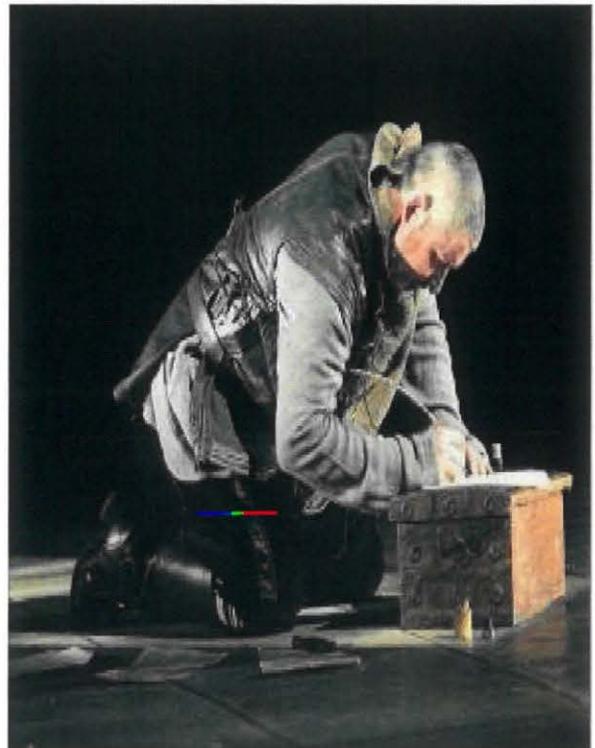
Fig. 14: Marquee used in the Ouroboros tour

Again the dual nature of O'Neill's loyalties is reflected in his submission as O'Donnell's mocking illustrates, "Particularly will I help in the abolishing of all barbarous Gaelic customs which are the seeds of all incivility" (Act 2, Scene 1 ).

So close was the relationship between O'Neill and Sir Gareth Moore, that O'Neill had placed his eldest son by his fourth wife, Catherine Magennis, to live at Mellifont Abbey. Born in 1599, the boy was eight years old when O'Neill arrived on the 8<sup>th</sup> September to stay at the Abbey.

Having signed the treaty O'Neill left the next day taking his son with him. Upon hearing this news from Moore, the Lord Deputy, Lord Chichester wrote to the Earl Salisbury,

The manner of his departure, carrying his little son with him who was bought up in Garret's house, made me suspect he had mischief in his head; harm I knew he could do none, if they were upon his keeping, for he was altogether without arms and munition; and his flight beyond the seas I should never have suspected, but I thought by posting after him, I should in a short time understand more of his purposes. The first news I heard was of his departure which, in my opinion, is far better for the King and Commonwealth than if he were in the Tower of London. (quoted in Kerney Walsh, 1996: 59)



**Fig. 15 : Denis Conway as Hugh O'Neill signing the Treaty at Mellifont,**

The Treaty at Mellifont on the 30<sup>th</sup> March 1603 officially ended the Nine Year War and Gaelic Rule in Ireland. Although O'Neill had submitted to the Queen the plans were already underway for exile. As Steven Ellis notes, "Militarily, Tyrone's submission at Mellifont signalled the completion of the Tudor conquest, but politically it marked, not the solution of the crown's Irish problem, but simply the start of a new phase of Anglicization" (1998: 352). In the eyes of the Gaelic Lords

who left as part of the Flight of the Earls, exile was the only alternative to Anglicization, bringing with it some hope of receiving continued military support from European allies.

In terms of the stage production Mellifont Abbey is a site that is difficult to categorise as the performance was not held in the structures that are left onsite, but in a marquee that had been sponsored by the OPW. Shane Ward, stage manager, describes it as,

massive to say the least and a very different sort of experience than the small intimate little space that we were performing in. It was really amazing the durability of the actors and their capacity to adapt so quickly to these huge variations in spaces. I think it has to do with how comfortable they all were with the piece. They were able to trust in the basic bones of the performance and take risks fitting it into various different spaces.' (interview, 7<sup>th</sup> Nov, 2010)

Des Swords of the OPW spoke of the decision to utilise the marquee, "We did not install one side of the marquee, the area behind the stage. We used ruins of the abbey as backdrop and we used uplighting on the ruins for effect" (interview, 17<sup>th</sup> Nov, 2010). The surprising outcome of using the marquee, when it proved impossible to use the actual structure available on site, was that it didn't change or alter the people's response to the performance. The histories of the site were tied to O'Neill's legacy and had been long established in the mindset of the audience. The aim was to re-negotiate these sites, through the performance and in doing so, re-establish the relationship between history and locality as the tour progressed. The tour could not have taken place in other sites, each site responded to key occasions in O'Neill's life and the audience is aware of that. His unconditional surrender happened at Mellifont Abbey and with it the beginning of the end for the Hugh O'Neill and his followers, as actor Chris Moran who played Harry Hovenden notes,

One of my favourite locations, despite (or perhaps because of) its tangential connection to the text. As an actor the sudden sense of a world opening up behind a barely-referenced place name was huge for me. Suddenly every one of those places I mention in the opening exchanges of the first act seemed to have a weight and importance and life that I had failed to give them before. (interview, 8<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2010)

This is at the core of site-specific performance; the site expands the meaning of the text. Where the play is performed in conventional venues as opposed to sites directly linked to the outcome of the play, the response is much more muted. To connect the dramatic text and the very real history of the story to the site where the action happened is where the “ghosting” of history occurs for the audience. Their understanding of the play and their history was extended through the specificity of the location.

#### **Site Four: Castle Hill, Dungannon**

Castle Hill in Dungannon is 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, 2007: 21). O’Neill was born in Castle Hill in Dungannon, the 4<sup>th</sup> site, stronghold of the O’Neill’s and an area that can lay claim to a number of structures built there, the earliest built by Domnall O’Neill in early 14<sup>th</sup> century. Hugh O’Neill had been made a ward of Giles Hovendon after the death of his father and so was brought up in anglicised Dublin. In 1561 upon the death of his brother, Brian O’Neill, title Baron of Dungannon fell upon Hugh, with the title Earl of Tyrone awarded to him in 1585. O’Neill based himself in the castle until he burned it in 1602 at the close of the nine years war lest it fall into English hands. After the Flight of the Earls the lands were granted to the Earl of Chichester who remodelled the castle into an English fort and in turn sold the site to Thomas Knox in 1692. Knox built a castle on the site and it is two towers of his structure that we see on site today (fig. 16).

*Making History* was staged on the site, Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> September 2007 to coincide with a festival of culture celebrating the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Flight of the Earls.

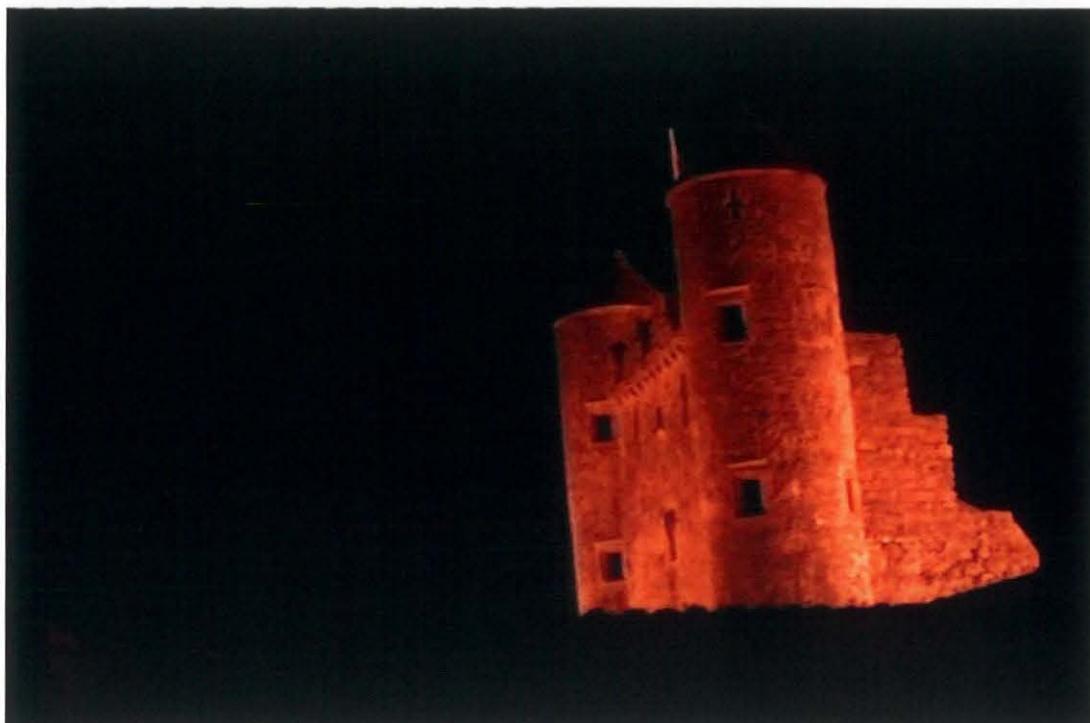


Fig. 16: Two towers dating from 1692, what is left on Castle Hill today.

Artistic Director, Denis Conway, felt that Dungannon was the most important of the sites on the tour in that it remains a contested site,

Then we head to Dungannon, where O'Neill was born and bred. 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. A cross-party committee wants to re-open the hill with a festival called The Return of the Earls, which we feature in. I think O'Neill himself would chuckle in his grave that we're finally getting around to what he was telling us all along. (quoted in Sophie Gorman, 2007)

More recently Dungannon has been at the centre of the "troubles" becoming notorious as one corner of the "murder triangle" after holding the first civil rights march in Northern Ireland on the 24<sup>th</sup> 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 have



Fig. 17: Marquee used in Dungannon

never set foot on the site and, “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” (Denis Conway, 2007: C7) Journalist, Frank McNally, commented that

The site of a security installation throughout the Troubles, 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 ... on Saturday last, the long wait was over and the people of Dungannon could finally enjoy the view from the spot where Hugh O’Neill once surveyed his realm. (2007: 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” (1989: 1). 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 (see fig. 17). The energy resulting from the performance had a powerful impact on audience members, “nothing prepared me for the experience on the [Dungannon] castle grounds and the combination of the breathtaking backdrop and the performance of the actors” (Ouroboros archive, 2007).

Here 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' but had shared with O'Neill a broader view of the world, they might have absorbed the new colonial English and more of their Celtic traditions would survive in Ireland today" (Ouroboros Archive 2007).

Far from being a history writer, Friel seems to function in an anti-historical way, expressing the difficulties, the subjectivity within history writing, O'Neill himself is continually confronted with the inadequacies within his own biography, "The overall thing-we don't even begin to know what it means.' O'Donnell says, 'Another History! Jesus if we had as many scones of bread as we had historians'" (1989: 52). With regard to history and politics in Friel's work, Fintan O'Toole claims that, "Friel is a writer in despair at, or in flight from, all these things. *Making History* and *Dancing at Lughnasa*, far from being plays which set out to analyse society or history, are plays which deny the power of rational analysis at all" (1993: 205). All that is left is the unspeakable, the trauma of history and what is experienced by those who witness the consequences such as the community gathered at Castle Hill in Dungannon on the 8<sup>th</sup> September 2007.

Because the only remaining structure on site is a ruined tower, the performance was staged in a tent erected before the company arrived. Geoff Gould felt that

Dungannon Castle was strange. There is nothing there. It's just a site where Hugh O'Neill's castle used to be. There was however an incredible electricity in the audience as the area up until a few years previously had been used as a British army observation post. Now communities from both sides of the divide were watching a production that was reminding them of the last great military leader who had lived on this spot. The actors would best tell you but I think the reaction was amazing from the audience with huge outpouring of emotion. (interview, 8<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2010)

The tent slightly hampered proceedings but it was the emotional outpouring from the audience that cemented the performance as one of the most powerful in the tour. Stage Manager, Shane Ward, comments that,

Across the board the play was definitely given a heightened sense of relevance by the history of the venues. This was most noticeable in Dungannon, interestingly because of recent history as well. We performed in a crappy tent on Dungannon hill on the grounds where Hugh O Neill's castle once stood. What was very special about the performance was that O Neill's castle had been obliterated ages ago and the site was used by the British army during the troubles. The Army decamped after the Good Friday agreement and our performance was the day after the hill had been re-opened to the public of Dungannon for the first time. The atmosphere was absolutely electric. The play more powerful than any other time it had been performed, and the setting was this crummy little tent. So when I say history added something, it wasn't just bricks and mortar, when it really worked it was something much more than that. (interview, 7<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2010)



Fig. 18: Outdoor scene looking over the Sperrin Mountains

The power of the performance at Dungannon was unforgettable for both audience and performers, as actor Helene Henderson who played Mary Bagenal felt, “Dungannon Hill was a particularly moving and electric performance for all” (interview 8<sup>th</sup> Nov 2010). The site and the performance succeeded in changing the audiences’ relationship to their history. The performance also felt significant for Chris Moran,

This show felt special from the second we climbed the hill and looked out across the seven counties just as O'Neill would have done from his home in his own day. That, of course, was an astonishing backdrop to the third act, but it was the audience that made it special – an eclectic mix of modern and historical relevance gave them an almost palpable connection to the play combined with the fact that this was the first time that the formerly British-army occupied hill was opened to the public since the Troubles began. It was unforgettable, I think, for both the audience and the performers.

(interview, 8<sup>th</sup> Nov 2010)

Castle Hill in Dungannon is a site embodying the “other” as in Foucault’s Heterotopias, the space relates to the audience and becomes a manifestation of their history. Foucault speaks of orthodox theatre as having two different spaces, “the real space of the audience and the virtual space of the scene. When the play begins, the virtual become real (and the Real disappears); when the play is over, the reverse happens...” (Dehaene and de Caeter, 2008: 93) Within site-specific theatre the virtual space becomes a real space to be negotiated by the audience. With a contested site such as Dungannon where the split within the community can be traced to the space, the process of engagement with the site can prove cathartic as Denis Conway notes,

The most important thing about the week [Flight of the Earls Commemoration] is that this committee crosses the communities. We had Francie Molloy of Sinn Féin and Walter Cuddy of the UUP both rooting for us to come up. With the peace process in mind the play is highly appropriate to the idea of reconciliation and moving on. Many of the ideas that O'Neill struggled with are still with us today.

(“Making History at Historic Sites”, 2007)

Castle Hill is one of the most important sites on the tour because although there is no architecture relating to O'Neill on site, the legacy of that time has cast a long shadow over contemporary politics and the site retains the history of the building used there, in particular the Army Barracks which served as a locus for the subsequent violence in the area. The site serves as a symbol of the aggression between loyalist and nationalist factions with layers of history ghosted onto the site through generations within the community. Speaking of the local communities' reaction to the performance Frank McNally illustrates the complexities embedded in the history of the site, “If his story was uncomfortable for any unionists in Dungannon, It must also have confused some nationalists to hear a Gaelic icon speaking in plummy, anglicised tones” (2007: 21). The history of the site is the history of the local community, from

both sides of the divide their story is embodied within Castle Hill. The site provides the host through which the ghosting occurs.

#### **Site Five: Rathmullan Hill**

The final site on the Irish tour, Rathmullan was chosen as an example of the dangers of site-specific theatre, the performance had to adapt to adverse weather conditions and abandon the planned site for the production. Playing Red Hugh O'Donnell, Conan Sweeny, spoke of, "a real feeling of excitement, each site that we perform at brings its own slant to the show and Rathmullan will be particularly great to perform as this is where the Flight began" (Ouroboros, 2007). Now housing a heritage centre, Rathmullan Hill, the final site where at midday Friday, the 14<sup>th</sup> September 1607, ninety-nine sailed from Lough Swilly, described by witness as "leaving their horses on the shore with no one to hold their bridles" (McCormack 2002: 73). Amongst the group was O'Neill and Red Hugh O'Donnell's brother and successor, Rory O'Donnell. The journey was met with confusion by both the English and the native Irish illustrated in *The Annals of the Four Masters* written in the 1630s, "Woe to the heart that mediated, woe to the mind that conceived, woe to the council that decided on the project of their setting out on a voyage!" (Cusack, 1868: 98)

The decision to flee was the result of many contributing factors, principally reluctance to adhere to governmental pressures for Gaelic Chieftains to conform. Some English were unhappy with the apparent leniency of the Treaty of Mellifont and in 1607 O'Neill was summoned to London to answer charges of treason. Instead of going to London, where he was convinced he would be assassinated, O'Neill left for Spain. Storms plagued the journey however and the group landed in France, before making his way to Spanish Flanders and finally Rome where he lived on a papal pension. Disillusioned by the lack of support by his allies for a return to Ireland, O'Neill died blind and feeble in 1616, at the age of seventy and was buried at the Church of San Pietro in Rome.

The Flight left Ireland and, in particular, Ulster, open to plantation and colonization, the repercussions still reverberating today. Why has one event come to convey or embody the country? *Irish Times* Columnist, Fintan O'Toole feels that,

The answer lies precisely in the way the complex history of the times became a romantic story. The narrative that was forged by Irish priests and writers from their continental exile in the decades after the Flight have been, as Brian Friel explored in his play *Making History*, a sanitised tale of saintly Catholics fighting a noble but doomed struggle against Protestant heresy. But it was a great story and the Flight gave it an almost artistic conclusion that enhanced its power. In a culture that would be characterised by emigration, the moment of departure and the deaths in exile resonated with the ordinary experience and made complex, haughty men like O'Neill into mythic figures who would embody a defeated nation. (1<sup>st</sup> May, 2007, B1)

The creation of the myth, the legend was moulded by Archbishop Lombard and with it history was made. In the work of site-specific theatre we are also made aware of the “making” of theatre when performance happens outside orthodox theatre spaces. A space is remade and re-negotiated historically when produced in a historical site. Through its connection to the O'Neill story the space, which has many subsequent histories layered upon the site, establishes a new history and is also remade as a theatrical space. This making unmaking and remaking is central to the notion of performance and with it a new narrative is created. At Rathmullen, adverse weather conditions made the staging at the site impossible. With four hours to go the performance was moved to a building close by and a complete refitting had to be done by the production crew.

In Friel's play the feeding of this historical narrative is epitomised in Lombard's postulating where he decides to name the exile “The Flight of the Earls” which he feels, “has a ring to it ... that tragic but magnificent exodus of the Gaelic aristocracy ... when the leaders of the ancient civilization took boat from Rathmullan that September evening and set sail for Europe” (65). O'Neill counters, “The Flight of the Earls – you make it sound like a lap of honour. We ran away just as we ran away at Kinsale” (66). The eulogising in Lombard's “history writing” runs in direct conflict with O'Neill's desire for a more moderate reading. He wants Lombard to include the realities of the exile, “As we pulled out from Rathmullan the McSwineys stoned us from the shore!” (65). Here Rathmullan, Dungannon, and the other twenty sites on the Ouroboros Tour have become “contested sites”, echoing the continuing discourse surrounding historical narrative, the main theme in *Making History*.

The Flight of the Earls proved to be the end of many of the Chieftains' roles in Ireland. Both O'Donnell and O'Neill died abroad and it is telling that *Making History* does not end with the dramatic departure of the Earls but with a poignant redemptive O'Neill in exile in Rome. Again the Annals of the Four Masters describe the Flight:

That was a noble shipload, for it is certain that in modern times the sea has not poured forth from Ireland ... a shipload that would have proved finer or more illustrious, or nobler on grounds of ancestry, or better for deeds or bounty, valour or exploits. (Mooney, 1955: 196)

The Earl's departure was the death knell to an old Ireland and it is from Rathmullan that they left. The realities of the histories (and they are plural) of both Northern Ireland and the island as a whole find a concrete locus at sites such as Rathmullan and Dungannon. Rather than staging *Making History* in the conventional theatre setting, Ouroboros choose to re-enact the struggles experienced by O'Neill in the sites that have become synonymous with his name.

Before the performance, Denis Conway noted that, "The stage and marquee being set up for the Rathmullan performance is very unique ... the backdrop of the stage will literally be Rathmullan itself, whereas, the audience will be covered by the marquee" (Ouroboros Archive 2007). Unfortunately, Rathmullan proved to be the site that caused the most disruption to the Ouroboros and OPW crew. Due to be staged in the same marquee used at Mellifont Abbey, the wind proved so deafening on the day that the performers could not be heard. Director, Geoff Gould said of the change,

The marquee was large and the wind howled around it creating such a rattle that there would have been no way of hearing the actors speak. With about four hours to go to the show we had to find a new venue entirely (an old folks' home) and completely refit it with staging and lighting. The OPW crew were brilliant and our own production manager Mick Lonergan did an amazing job to get it ready in time. We squeezed every last person into the hall and the reaction was stunning. (interview 8<sup>th</sup> Nov 2010)

Again the challenges of staging site-specific theatre are illustrated. The need for quick thinking and an adaptable crew to deal with the unexpected, especially adverse weather conditions is crucial to the successful operation of site-specific performance.

Chris Moran called the performance in Rathmullan, “A perfect example of the ‘Blitz spirit’ the show could fall back on in the event of a disaster ... there’s nothing like determination and improvisation in adversity to bring people together” (interview 8<sup>th</sup> Nov 2010). The quick changes and upheavals illustrate just how different site-specific theatre is from conventional theatre spaces which functions along the same lines as the “white cube” of a gallery space, remaining as neutral as possible in order to show the performance as un-influenced by external factors. One of the casualties was the lack of any photographic documentation of this particular performance and, therefore, none are included in this section. This site, however, embodies the challenges faced by site-specific theatre companies in the researching, producing and documenting of performance.

Often considered an egalitarian form of theatre, site-specificity allows for a new audience to participate, an audience who would not attend a conventional theatre space, and thus creates a new and innovative relationship between performer and spectator. The *Ouroboros/Making History* tour, by the sheer proximity to rural communities, attracted an unconventional theatre audience along with people attending with an interest in the historical dimensions of the site. Michael Shanks claims that,

Performance and the performative are always archaeological: that is, there is always, with performance, the question of origin or precedent (what came first? What holds precedence? Script? Event? Character? Author? Audience?) and the question of document and trace (what remains? What is left after the performance? How is its material and physical presence to be represented?) (2004: 150)

In uncovering these material traces, site-specific performance can enhance the experience of theatre-goers. The *Ouroboros/Making History* went far to show the connections local communities feel to their history and the difference the play was when staged in these historical sites. Actor Chris Moran saw the play from both sides, in a conventional theatre in Letterkenny and performing in the *Ouroboros* tour,

I was lucky enough to see the original production of the show in Letterkenny [as a member of the audience] and one of the things that astonished me about the play was Friel’s almost perverse insistence on a domestic tone to convey the key turning point in the history of an entire nation. It’s what I absolutely love about the play, and for me makes it a masterpiece, and is one of the reasons that counter intuitively perhaps,

makes this tour work so well. Locating something so human within these ancient, and sometimes vast buildings (even if the stage area itself was small, the audience often travelled through wider grounds to reach it) made that essential link that can sometimes be so difficult for us to establish with historical events. It gave the domestic action of the play a historical weight and gave the OPW sites a sense of humanity that scale or age can sometimes eradicate. (interview, 8<sup>th</sup> Nov 2010)

Moran echoes the reasons site-specific theatre is an important aspect of theatre production and its value is entirely its own within the theatre sector. Using the resources and knowledge of the OPW, Ouroboros succeeded in staging a tour in which the geographical location and the historical resonance layered on an established text creates a profound and innovative performance that proved memorable for all involved. The challenges faced in producing and documenting site-specific performance both independently and as part of a team is illustrated by the work conducted by Ouroboros and through their work the construction of regional and cultural meaning through historic sites.

“The more a study contains specific propositions, the more it will stay within reasonable limits” (Yin 1994: 137) and in the light of the research questions proposed within the dissertation, I would like the case study to be used as a medium with which the practicalities of staging site-specific performance can be explored. Three research questions are explored in the light of the *Ouroboros/Making History* tour,

- 1) How do site-specific theatre performances interact with their host communities?
- 2) How can histories of spaces be renegotiated through site-specific performance?
- 3) What are best practices for modifying these sites?

Beginning with the first question, what is evident from the *Ouroboros/Making History* tour is the profound connection the audience felt to the site. The performance was literally been layered over an already established relationship and this is central to the success of site-specific theatre. What was created was a re-affirmation of identity for the audience, their history, enacted on a site that belongs to them. Adapting a site which is of cultural significance to the local community generally

engenders good will and support amongst the local inhabitants. If site-specific performance is to be developed in Ireland, the good faith of the local community can be harnessed through a supportive and mutually beneficial cultural policy framework. The relationship between the performance on site and the host community is a critical one and although it can be very dependent on individual circumstances, the development of legislation which supports both the theatre companies and the local community and their historic sites is of great benefit to the development of site-specific theatre.

The second question, how can histories of space be re-negotiated through site-specific theatre is, perhaps, the easiest to answer. Through the re-engagement with the site, the performance gives the audience and the local community the opportunity to re-evaluate their relationship with their history. In the case of *Ouroboros/ Making History* tour, the history of the Flight of the Earls, which had long passed into legend, was re-negotiated through the performance. The question of hero-worship, history-making and the relationship between a community and its story all come up for re-negotiation. Site-specific theatre is the closest a community comes to re-living its past, to ritualistically re-entering the space of its history and re-negotiating its relationship with it. The material traces of the local history is always evident in these cultural sites but to create a framework in which the history can be relived, which is what happened in the case of the *Ouroboros/Making History* tour, can prove invaluable to the local community.

The final question, what are the best practices for using these historic sites is currently facing a changing funding landscape. Creating the framework, exploring the best practices, and applying the results to a cultural policy document that can, in turn, be used to create site-specific performance in sites of cultural significance throughout the country has yet to be achieved. Funding cuts have made the possibility of this type of model doubtful. With a cut in funding to theatre companies and the development of the “production hub model” of theatre practice, the relationship needed to negotiate a tour/performance on a protected and historical site will prove to be more difficult. Within the new model for theatre currently being developed by the Arts Council, a model that has the space to incorporate site-

determined work rather than group-determined work, will give the opportunity to incorporate the new and evolving dynamic of site-specific performance. These production hubs will encourage once-off performances for one-off funding ventures. The practitioners coming together in this theatre hub will join and separate moving from production to production. The fear remains that this nomadic work will not be conducive to formulating the long-standing relationships needed to create a tour such as the *Ouroboros/Making History*.

In *Of Other Spaces*, Foucault claims that, theatres, “are linked to slices in time”, they make a break with conventional time. To create a theatrical space within an historical landmark such as Charlesfort and within that structure perform a piece such as Friel’s *Making History* enables a multilayered interpretation of that space. It solidifies the historical for re-interpretation by the audience. As in Foucault’s heterotopias these sites are, “not orientated towards the eternal, but are rather absolutely temporal”.

In *The Order of Things*, Foucault talks of how heterotopias are disturbing,

Probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy “syntax” in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also the less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to “hold together”. (1970: xix)

These sites 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 its 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the flight of the earls which this tour commemorates. This is a living history and the sites not only retain the story of Hugh O’Neill but layered upon that story is the resulting fallout that rests in the collective memory of the audience attending this performance as historian, David Blight notes,

Historical memory...was not merely an entity altered by the passage of time; it was the prize in a struggle between rival versions of the past, a question of will, of power, of persuasion. The historical memory of any transforming or controversial event emerges from cultural and political competition, from the choice to confront the past and to debate and manipulate its meaning. (2002: 95)

While focusing on inter-disciplinary discourses and debates currently informing performance and theatre studies, bringing together emerging performative theories with the practicalities of staging and funding site-specific can revitalize and challenge existing theatrical mores. An important factor, however is to examine the case study in relation to the varying contexts to which the research will be beneficial. A valuable term here is Cronbach's *working hypothesis* where case studies are used to understand and enrich research conducted in related fields as, "When we give proper weight to local conditions, any generalization is a working hypothesis, not a conclusion" (Cronbach, 1975 quoted in Gomm et al, *Case Study Method*, 2000: 39).

The Company toured to twenty-two national locations as part of the 2007 tour of which only two performances were in conventional theatres. All of the sites had some connection to the Flight of the Earls in 1607. Audience reaction at the venues and subsequent to the event proved noteworthy. Many commented that they had never been inside a particular building before despite having lived in close proximity to the historic site all their lives. The aim of the OPW in its collaboration with Ouroboros was that,

... they want the local people in these areas to think about their history and these historical sites differently; to think of them as places where people once lived, where decisions were made, decisions that had impacts on our lives now. They want people to feel that they have some connection to these buildings, even now, however many hundred years later. (Denis Conway quoted in Sara Keating, 2008: 14)

Archival material from Ouroboros reveals the depth of the impact on the audience: "one of the best productions I've seen in years ... the bats whistling around the castle added to a memorable outdoor scene in Roscrea Castle ... nothing prepared me for the experience on the [Dungannon] castle grounds and the combination of the breathtaking backdrop and the performance of the actors" (Ouroboros Archive, 2007). There was a substantial difference to the quality and performativity of the play when taken outside of the traditional theatre space. The historical space naturally lent itself to a deeper understanding of our heritage as Denis Conway notes: "it's been extraordinary performing in all these places that existed at the time of O'Neill and O'Donnell – and still exist in virtually the same state to this day. They bring their own atmosphere and it has been quite emotional" (2007). The experience

of Ouroboros Theatre Company and its collaboration with the OPW in touring Brian Friel's *Making History* in 2007 is indicative of the types of initiative that engages with "found space", attracts national and regional audiences, and invites a renegotiation of an historic venue through the staging of a play that addresses the very question of ownership of history.

## Chapter IV: Culture and Commerce: from Practice to Policy

A flagging cultural economy has necessitated changes to traditional funding structures, be they arts councils, local authorities or EU support networks. The search for a funding model that will revitalise a changing landscape has in some ways been answered by an increased awareness of the relationship between culture and commerce. Terms previously unused in the creative arts industry, cultural assets, design economy, creative capital, have become the emerging language for a new conceptual framework driving the arts, cultural enterprise. The role of cultural enterprise in urban development has gained momentum in recent years, in particular the creative cities model which has sprung up throughout Europe. The creative cities model hot houses cultural clustering where pockets of creative entrepreneurialism sprout up throughout a city, and affect the wider economic pattern. For Hans Mommaas,

Cultural clustering strategies represent an interesting turn in urban policy-making and the organization of the urban cultural field. Whereas in former days local cultural policy-making mostly restricted itself to its redistributive role within a vertically organised public arts sector, today urban cultural policy-making has to operate on a much more comprehensive level, including horizontally articulated linkages of thinking and acting. A more inclusive, process-orientated and transverse perspective, consciously taking into account “external” economic and spatial effects and conditions, has replaced or complemented a confined, vertical perspective, predominantly based on notions of artistic progress and the refined citizen. (2004, 508)

Within this model cultural producers are economically viable and create work cooperatively often using spaces that have been vacated in post-industrial cities, an example being the regeneration of Temple Bar in Dublin. These clusters have been initiated by groups and individuals in order to pool resources and have been operating privately, only recently being the subject of governmental interventions, partly to foster growth in declining urban areas, but also as a new model for cultural policy making. Culture, as it once was, has fallen away to become instead creative industries incorporating the broadest range of cultural activities, and having a very definite currency within the economy. But is this model exploitative? Maybe what

began as localised, radicalised cultural entrepreneurial hubs have now become just another way for governmental agencies to use, package and commodify the arts. Is this model a development of a new type of cultural policy or just a dumbing down of highbrow culture and a ploy to hide the diminishing financial support for the Arts. Driving the cultural economy from the bottom up is still in its infancy as James Simmie observes,

The cluster idea ... has taken many academics and policy-makers by storm. It has become the accepted wisdom more quickly than any other major idea in the field in recent years ... at the expense of previous explanations and lacking in relevant empirical evidence. (in Evans, 2009: 1005)

I now turn to examine how cultural policies and initiatives, such as those emerging from the cultural enterprise model, can facilitate the development of a framework in which site-specific performance can be supported outside of the conventional theatre space. As shown by the OPW/Ouroboros *Making History* tour, the desire for a progressive and innovative theatrical experience using spaces (owned and run by the State) of specific historical, cultural and emotional meaning outside of the hallowed halls of traditional auditoria begs the question; does Ireland need a cultural policy framework dealing with site-specific performance in revitalising the spaces of heritage and if so, what form will this initiative take? Because of the changing landscape within cultural policy, the shift from centralised governmental support to dispersed ad hoc creative clusters, there is need for clarity and a functioning support system that doesn't exist presently.

These questions arise in relation to Ouroboros because of the nature of the spaces, they were predominantly OPW sites and we need guidelines if we are using fragile State-owned resources, not only because of health and safety but because the sites themselves are part of our heritage. Very few of the OPW sites have guidelines, as evidenced by the case study where the guidelines were mostly about public liability and health and safety. Kilmainham Gaol is the only OPW site which has something close to a specific cultural policy. Working within Ireland's state heritage service for twenty years, Pat Cooke was Director of Kilmainham Gaol during its implementation,

I did develop an interpretative philosophy for the site that crucially identified the role of artistic intervention in exploring the meaning of historic sites, heritage themes and museum collections. This policy evolved from an experience in staging an open-air sculpture exhibition in association with the Sculpture Society of Ireland at the Pearse Museum and St. Enda's Park as part of the Millennium Dublin celebrations in 1988. This was the seed that opened my eyes to the possibilities of artistic interventions in the heritage field. For a good number of years afterwards, as far as I am aware, I was the only member of the OPW staff to pursue this line of interpretative practice. (Interview, 30<sup>th</sup> May 2011)

The policy at Kilmainham Gaol determines that any cultural event MUST have a direct relationship to either a) the architectural space of the Gaol or b) the meaning of the Gaol. This is the kind of cultural policy that needs to be put in place so that sites not only retain their integrity but also are able to expand their meanings in the way outlined in Chapter One and Two of the thesis, such as their ability to realise and explore the relationship between site and performance through concepts such as Foucault's heterotopias. The policy retains the integrity of the building but still allows for various interpretations as Pat Cooke notes,

The crucial element of the policy was that any artistic intervention, in whatever art form, had to demonstrate an organic relationship with the site as either a disused jail (e.g. generic issues of human freedom and bondage) or symbolic site of Irish nationalism and republicanism. This gave us considerable scope, particularly on the first parameter. Thus, for example, we staged Beethoven's opera *Fidelio* at Kilmainham Gaol in 2006 as that work is actually set in a jail context and thus capable of being interpreted through the architecture of the Gaol itself.

The issue of integrity is central to the development of a policy opening up historical sites for performative use. Conservational work within historical building now allow for performances, art exhibits, etc to draw in a new audience without damaging the structure but the need for policy to protect the site, and what it stands for historically, needs to be addressed throughout the country. What was needed was a policy that ensured an exploration of the meaning of the place. For Pat Cooke,

The challenge that faced the state heritage agency ... was to ensure that Kilmainham remained inclusive in its appeal and central to a consideration of the core issues of modern Irish history. In our favour was one inescapable reality about the Gaol: here the nationalist and republican ideology could be encountered in a distinctive, intense and authentic form; here that tradition had found its ineluctable *sense of place*. (2000: 3)

This ad hoc approach to cultural policy in theatre is reflective of the relationship between governmental agencies and the arts in general. Indeed the first Director of the Arts Council which had been founded in 1951, former Fianna Fáil Minister P.J. Little, observed that the Irish have been, “indifferent and almost hostile to culture with a capital ‘C’” (in O’Neill, 2000: 765). This hostility towards the elitism within “high” culture resulted in conservative funding towards the arts with monies allocated to theatre mainly swallowed up by traditional theatre venues such as the Abbey and the Gate. Irish theatre was still very much focused on conventional traditional script and narrative based performance and although there was experimentation within radical theatre, particularly in the Project Arts Centre in Dublin, it never gained footholds in mainstream venues with little interest in avant-garde or radical theatre until the 1990s. While supporting conventional theatre locations, the opportunity to explore the relationship between site and performance, is being missed. The location, in Ireland, of sites of significant historical value, and the success of tours such as the *Ouroboros/Making History* tour, should encourage funding toward spaces where the site speaks as loudly as the performance. Not to denigrate traditional theatre venues but the value of site-specific performance is inherently different in that it creates a different dynamic for the audience. With regard to Kilmainham Gaol, Pat Cooke speaks of how the physicality of the site makes culture and history a reality for the viewer as opposed to the synoptic exhibits found in museum collections:

The distance between places gives a palpable physical dimension to cultural difference – it is the actual distance between two points on a map: identity as circumscribed by domain, territory, geography. (2000: 6)

The value of using historical sites as performance spaces is difficult to assess, given the conservatism surrounding theatre support since the Arts Council has been used as the vehicle for allocating funds. There was a transfer of a number of major arts bodies to the Arts Council in 1975, and with this increased responsibility came a need for increased bureaucratic organization and the development of a broad cultural policy to administer funds. The launch of Aosdána in 1983 sought to recognize and support artists of distinction and the publication of the government paper, *Access and*

*Opportunity* in 1987 cemented the Arts Council's role in supporting the Arts. But the need for a cultural policy that allows for unconventional theatre production remained elusive as the Arts Council distributed funds through traditional theatre spaces such as the Abbey. Although unconventional and off-site theatre was occasionally attempted, a policy for such performances has proven difficult to negotiate. Cultural policy as a concept has been around in some shape or form as long as governmental agencies have sought to foster and support the Arts. The question that needs to be addressed is how to formulate a cultural policy regarding site-specific theatre in historical spaces and what agency should be creating this document, the Arts Council or the OPW?

### **Making Cultural Policy**

The crux of cultural policy is that it can be seen as the politicization of what is an essentially ephemeral and unstable concept. Post-modernist relativism has undermined the universality of high culture, with its legitimization of popular or low cultural forms. An example being the publication of *Les Pratiques Culturelles des Français 1973-1989* (a study carried out by the French Ministry of Culture which cites among cultural pursuits, knitting and holidays) sparking debate on how cultural democratization is effectively the downgrading of cultural pursuits into generalization and amateurism (Finkelkraut, 1987, Fumaroli, 1991). Governmental cultural policy has been accused of atrophying culture, a process in which, "Today's culture has thus broken up into a thousand consumer demands, which the Ministry attempts to satisfy by resorting to statistical surveys and market research" (Looseley, 1997: 218). Culture has become commodified and driving this cultural economy is governmental pressure where success is driven not only in protecting cultural values but also in the number employed in cultural industries and the population engaging in these activities.

At a basic level, however, cultural policy functions, among other things, to protect the arts that would not, otherwise, be commercially viable within the marketplace. The aim of cultural policy is to foster such practice as site-specific theatre and to

offer support to performance that is considered radical and innovative. The term is generally thought of as a progression from the arts policies which were considered elitist and exclusionary whereas cultural policy functions as an umbrella term covering both high and low cultural forms. According to Kevin Mulcahy,

A cultural policy encompasses a much broader array of activities than what was traditionally associated with an arts policy. The latter typically involved public support for museums, the visual arts (painting, sculpture, and pottery), the performing arts ... historic preservation, and humanities programs .... A cultural policy would involve support for all the aforementioned activities, but also other publically supported institutions such as libraries and archives; battlefield sites, zoos ... as well as community celebrations. (2006:321)

The scope of cultural policy is much broader than the traditional arts policies in order to engage with and reach the populous on any cultural level, in order to be deemed non-elitist. The shift reflected a move from the top-down to the bottom-up culturally so that all denizens of society can participate in cultural activities. The move allowed for all activities that were deemed cultural to be brought under the auspices of cultural policy and to be supported as such. Cultural activities could no longer be deemed too “lowbrow” to be celebrated and were encouraged in the local communities. The resulting explosion in the bureaucracy required to cope with this expansion was staggering. As far back as the 1930s the premise of a “culture industry” was lambasted by the social philosopher, Theodor W. Adorno, who likened the “administered world” as “one from which all hiding places are fast disappearing”. He did, however, allow for a critically progressive cultural policy, to be put in place to counteract the power of the administration, “by virtue of the powers of men of insight” (1991: 130). The need for a critically progressive policy in which the “local” can be protected within a globalised society has become a crucial issue for wider organizations such as the EU and UNESCO.

Seeking a broadening role for the development of cultural policy in governance, and furthering the research done by the World Commission on Culture and Development, resulting in the three-year study, *Our Creative Diversity*, UNESCO held a world conference in Stockholm in 1998. This “Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development”, comprising 2,500 participants from 149 countries, sought practical ways of recasting and redeveloping cultural policy in participating states.

The initial study that fostered these ideas, sought to capture the role of UNESCO within cultural policy-making, described as a, “document which heroically and often skilfully attempts to manoeuvre in the muddy waters between the Scylla of nihilistic cultural relativism and the Charybdis of supremacist universalism” (Eriksen, 2001: 127). Eriksen sees the report as, “characterised by indecision regarding the use of the concept of culture” (130). The indecision stems from the inability of the report to distinguish between what culture is, on the one hand culture as artistic product and on the other culture as a traditional way of living with no attempt to distinguish between the two. The contradictions within the report, however, are perhaps to be expected in what is a courageous attempt to create a, “multifaceted description of culture in the contemporary world” (141).

The value of site-specific theatre staged within sites of cultural significance is illustrated in anthropologist, Victor Turner’s *From Ritual to Theatre*, where he termed the process a “cultural performance” where the “limoid” qualities of the performance enabled performer and audience to cross a threshold, “a threshold that releases them momentarily from the normal constraints of the social world outside and generated forms of ‘cultural creativity’ that can subvert or at least offer alternative pictures of human behaviour and interaction” (Jackson, 2000: 214). This layering of interpretation upon history, a feature that was evident in the *Ouroboros/Making History* case-study creates a dialogue that all facets of the local community can explore,

Humankind’s use of local features or their wider associations can create sources of pride and identity. Cultural sites, places and artefacts can, therefore, be considered to be physical representations of perceptions of self, community and belonging and their associated cultural values. This indicates that places and material culture have social and traditional values that lie external to the fabric. (Michael Turnpenny, 2004: 299)

The cohesive effect of these works on the community and the construction of identity is invaluable and the development of a programme of cultural policy which enables and encourages site-specific performance within sites of cultural significance will contribute to the conservation and preservation of the local within the global. As David Brett notes,

The Irish countryside bears everywhere a rich patina of ancient sites, going back to the very early periods in European history. For reasons connected with the relative lack of economic development, semi-colonial status, land use and numerous other matters, these sites have remained undisturbed to a degree most unusual in Western Europe.

(1996:2)

The difficulty with supporting site-specific theatre is the broad definition of site-specificity which can cover a gamut of sites, anything outside the theatre, as illustrated in Chapter One and Two. The creation of a cultural policy which focuses on the historical sites, as opposed to the theatre companies, will allow for a document that can cover all historical sites within its remit and yet give each particular site the ability to negotiate which performance pertains to their specific history. Here the notion of a “cultural site” comes to mind, which can be an historical site which is of cultural importance as opposed performances randomly happening on interesting sites. The term “cultural site” will help to distinguish between site-specific and promenade or site-generic theatre which are commonly used interchangeably. But what is culture? Renowned for his work in the field of cultural studies, Raymond Williams’ explanation is the most widely held, in which culture is, “the signifying order through which necessarily a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored” (in Nash, 2001: 14). The sites used in the Ouroboros/ *Making History* tour relate to this definition of “cultural site” a space where our cultural identity is explored.

The valuation of cultural sites and indeed culture itself is of central importance to cultural policy makers. The issue with regard to these sites is that the valuation is somewhat intangible and the benefit of the sites is not necessarily tied to visitor numbers etc. In this sense the value of the site that is deemed of cultural significance is beyond financial valuation. Cultural policy makers need to grasp that the aesthetic and recreational value also comes under the umbrella of cultural policy, is of incalculable benefit to both the local community and visitors, and so should not be underestimated as former Director General of UNESCO, Koichiro Matsuura, stated during his address welcoming 2002, the year for cultural heritage,

People all over the world need to be made aware of the importance of cherishing our varied heritage, both the treasures of our physical cultural

heritage and the intangible heritage of traditions and cultural practices. In learning to appreciate and value our own heritage, we can learn to appreciate the heritage of other cultures. This is an essential step towards ensuring peaceful dialogue and mutual understanding. Furthermore, heritage preservation is essential if we are to retain the wealth of our cultural diversity and ensure that the world is enriched rather than impoverished by globalization.

(<http://www.unesco.org>)

With site-specific theatre the value of the site is implicit in the nature of the work, in particular work that responds to our cultural heritage such as the *Ouroboros/Making History* tour. This genre has so much to offer in terms of understanding and appreciating these sites be they the ancient ruins of Clonmacnoise (*Ouroboros* 18<sup>th</sup> July 2007), or part of our modern cultural history such as the Ballymun Towers (*Performance Lab @ Roundabout Theatre* 2005), these plays enable a community to re-engage with their past, their culture and re-negotiate their relationship with their history.

Although the term “production hub” is only mentioned once in the Arts Council’s most recent publication, *Examining New Ways to Fund Theatre* (published in June 2009), the term has come to the fore as a new approach to theatre funding. The production hub model allows for theatre makers to work outside the theatre company structure and to have their work produced by a major theatre location or company such as the Abbey or Druid. The Arts Council has made the claim that this new model of theatre, production hub, allows for theatre to become part of the community rather than enclosed in the conventional theatre space. Given the formation of a cultural policy document fashioned by the Arts Council, with full inclusions of theatre groups and practitioners and disseminated as a given not only to sites of cultural importance but also to theatre practitioners willing and eager to respond to modern and contemporary cultural sites, the framework will be in place to allow a vibrant and progressive interplay between site, performance and community. This idea has sparked huge debate amongst the theatre community however, with David Parnell, Head of Theatre at the Arts Council, commenting that this, “is a good opportunity to at least re-imagine the model by which we make theatre” (in Peter Crawley, *The Irish Times*, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2010) and existing theatre companies feel

that they had previously worked collaboratively and this “new” model has been executed by theatre companies for years. In fact the model of the production hub was previously ditched in favour of building up companies of expertise with administrative structures, a process that has served Irish theatre well in the past.

Funding issues have faced the Arts Council, as with all government agencies, and in 2009, they faced a cut of €6.4 million and were granted €68 million in 2010. The dispersal of their allocated funds was criticised where a large number of theatre group’s funds were cut completely, groups such as Galway’s Druid theatre and Dublin’s Rough Magic saw increases leading to claims of unfairness. An example of those dealing with cuts are The Dance Theatre Ireland whose funding has been more than halved from €341,220 in 2008 to €140,000 in 2010. Director and Founder, Loretta Yurick feels that,

The Arts Council has decided who should make what work and where. It’s prescriptive funding. The funding we have received is ring-fenced for education and outreach only, so our practise as artists to make and tour new work is on hold. We’re incapacitated.

(in Rosita Boland, *The Irish Times*, 17<sup>th</sup> September 2010)

In rolling out these production hubs, the Arts Council have slashed funding to already established theatre companies with little to no dialogue forthcoming. On the 1<sup>st</sup> February 2010 they announced that funding to theatre practice was to be cut from €16,311,000 to €13,327,000 with eleven companies having their funds discontinued entirely amongst them Barabbas, Meridian and the focus of this case study, Ouroboros, whose funding allocation had been €105,000 in 2009. Other companies had their funding severely cut, by 48% for the Corn Exchange and 35% for the Performance Corporation. Jo Mangan, Artistic Director of the Performance Corporation made the comment that, “We’d all been quaking in our boots waiting for it to happen. But for it to have been this bad is shocking” (Crawley, *Irish Theatre Magazine*, 4<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2010). It seems that what this “new” model relies on the hope that theatre practitioners such as those working within the Ouroboros theatre company will continue to stretch already thin resources and be forced to depend on private funding for theatre production.

The difficulty emerging from the debate over funding cuts is how our arts practitioners are engaging with our cultural and artistic wealth on an economic level (cultural enterprise) as artistic endeavours should not be happening in an intellectual and elitist vacuum and should be constantly engaged conceptually and administratively, not with the financial result, but with economical success. Cultural enterprise is a marrying of cultural policy and artistic enterprise and is concerned with the success of artistic endeavours. The Arts Council claims that the arts community is out of touch with the economic concerns of governmental agencies. Through the development of the Arts Council's rollout of production hubs, and the reluctant acceptance of production companies as no longer being a valid model of funding, there has emerged a need for a framework to enable the development of innovative and progressive theatre to be established. The roll-out of production hubs appears to be detrimental to the system already in place, with a proven record of supporting the performing arts as shown by the success of Irish theatre nationally and internationally. The development of production hubs seems to be a quick and easy way to slash funding to the arts and an easy way to integrate the principles of the cultural economy to Ireland. Although traditional funding lacked the structure to support site-specific theatre from site to site, the new proposal, the production hub, serves to cut funding to theatre companies already struggling to produce work.

The way to support and fund site-specific theatre, given the funding cuts within the theatre sector, is to see site-specific theatre as a melding of theatre and heritage, of value not only to theatre goers but to cultural tourism, to local heritage, and to historical preservation. The search for meaning through cultural heritage is of huge consequence to our desire to understand and appreciate our shared history. This cultural heritage is embodied in the sites that have played a part in our shared history. How these sites are interpreted by its users creates a dynamic by which a community can interact with their history. This dynamic needs to be encouraged and respected as the relationship between site and user needs a supportive framework within which to operate. This framework or cultural policy can provide the backbone within which this relationship can evolve. The significance of the relationship between communities and cultural history is supported by a 2003 UNESCO report which expands our understanding of what is considered cultural heritage. The report

arose from the, “Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage” (ICH) which suggested that cultural heritage was not just about the importance of the artefact or the space but about the relationship between material objects and spaces and their intrinsic, local or collectively constructed meanings. The report acknowledges that cultural heritage also includes “practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills, – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage” (ICI: 2003: art. 2). This report contends that heritage is not just about the site but how the site’s meaning and context can be extended, challenged and interpreted through practice, and in the case of this research, performance. This validates the importance of site-specific performance such as that espoused by the Ouroboros theatre company within the programme of cultural heritage and suggests that there is room for challenging sites through performance and allowing for space of practice which is not heritage theatre or re-enactment in that it offers a cultural product which is artist-led not cultural economics led.

This approach was further consolidated by the “European Convention of Faro: Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society” in 2005. Crucially for this research, the convention defined cultural heritage as, “a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions. It includes all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time” (Art. 2: a). Ratification involves undertaking to “enhance the value of the cultural heritage through its identification, study, interpretation, protection, conservation and presentation” (Art. 5: b) and taking steps to, “improve access to heritage ... in order to raise awareness about its value ... and the benefits which may be derived from it” (Art. 12: d). More importantly, participating countries must, “encourage interdisciplinary research on cultural heritage, heritage communities, the environment and their inter-relationship” (Art. 13: d). Heritage is not just about the site but how the site’s meaning and context can be explored through interactions such as site-specific performance.

Unfortunately, perhaps due to the rights and responsibilities involved, only eight countries have ratified thus far and Ireland is not included.

Although funding models such as the Creative Cities Network initiated by UNESCO in 2002, to recognize cities of cultural excellence, can help in channeling funding towards areas of cultural significance and highlighting the economic value of these ventures, the main funding received by arts practitioners, theatre companies, and so forth, is governmental, which in Ireland's case is handled by the Arts Council. What is necessary here is to create an environment in which local communities can re-engage with their identity/history and to create a dynamic in which a group can maintain their cultural force within a wider community. The use of theatre, in which the content of the piece engages with the history of the site, can function as a bridge between local history and contemporary space attracting a new, and more importantly local, audience. This new relationship between history, site and audience can inform and instruct cultural innovations in policymaking within the wider community. Any alternative model of theatre practice, such as site-specific theatre, goes to the heart of current funding agendas in Ireland and abroad. The need for innovative and radical policymaking will assist future audiences, and particularly in the case of historical sites, where local communities can benefit from a reinterpretation of history through a cultural medium. The current dialogue surrounding the diminution of the local in favor of the global, has led to an eagerness amongst policy makers to protect cultural minorities in the face of cultural globalisation.

Here in Ireland, the Arts Council commissioned a survey of attitudes towards the arts in Ireland in December 2006, in order to establish comparative data with earlier 1994 and 1981 surveys. These comparative surveys were entitled, *The Public and the Arts*, and of those surveyed in 1981, 20% had attended a play in the last year. This rose to 37% in 1994 but fell to 30% in 2006, however, attending a play now ranks second only to attending a mainstream film in the field of arts illustrating its importance within the arts in Ireland. Although *The Public and the Arts* surveys is a broad outline of the tastes of the Irish public for the Arts, two research reports published on

theatre, *Views of Theatre in Ireland 1995* and *Dialogues 1996* have given more insight into the trends surrounding theatre practice in the country.

*Views of Theatre in Ireland 1995* documents an unprecedented breakdown and analysis of Irish theatre. The study combines three aspects, firstly, “International Perspectives” (the views of three international theatre practitioners), secondly, “Theatre in Ireland” (a research based overview of the theatre sector in Ireland) and thirdly, “A Doing of Life” (a profile of Drama and Theatre Practices involving Young people and the broader community). Discussing the document in the foreword, Chairperson of the Arts Council, Ciarán Benson, noted that, “the process is new and the document is deliberately experimental ... no single viewpoint, in my opinion, could do justice to the richness of perspectives currently at play in Irish theatre”.

Within the policy document, perhaps the most important section related to this research is the second section, the overview of theatre in Ireland. There was a multi-methodological approach combining documentary sources, interviews with key informants and a survey of theatre production companies and venues. Section five of this overview relates to *Touring* and Section 6 relates to *The Audience for Theatre*. The significance of touring was evident in a survey completed on the “Importance Attached to Different Aspects of Irish Theatre” (Table A3:181) and the most important aspects related to firstly, “Innovative and experimental forms in the Theatre”, secondly, “Touring of Professional Irish Theatre production in Ireland” and thirdly, “Touring of Professional Irish Theatre Productions abroad”.

“Touring of Professional Irish Theatre Production in Ireland” was ranked as most important by 64% of survey respondents with 14% ranking it as their first priority for funding. An important factor of this research is to undertake a review of how touring policy has fared in the intervening thirteen years since the survey. Another crucial aspect of the survey is exploring the development of audience for theatre. An interesting factor that has emerged with relation to audience development is the difference between regular play-goers and the rest of the population with relation to priorities within theatrical arts expenditure (*Views of Theatre in Ireland*: 154). The majority of the public who attended a play rarely or never listed funded for local,

amateur and community based arts groups as a priority. Of the regular play-goers 43% prioritised funding for national organisations such as the Abbey Theatre, Galway Arts Festival.

*Dialogues 1996* (Phase 2) expands on the dialogue initiated by *Views of Theatre in Ireland 2005* that marked the end of Phase 1. The result of seven consultative meetings commencing with The Theatre Review National Meeting in Dublin Castle on the 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1995 and finishing in the Irish Museum of Modern Art on the 17 February 1996. The most important sections in relation to this research are “Part 3 Territories”, and “Part 5 The Public”. At the Monaghan Meeting (Garage Theatre), Úna McCarthy, referring to the communication between the venue and touring companies, said, “I see this kind of triangle: the venue; the productions and the audience. I do not feel there is enough dialogue between those three points” (38). Jane Daly of the Druid Theatre Company noted that, “An imaginative approach to touring has to be adopted by all parties – the Arts Council, the companies, the venues and, in the final analysis, the audiences. The key word I think is flexibility” (36).

“Part 5 The Public” focused on, “what some described as the most important or fundamental question of all – the relationship with the audience and the place of theatre in the community” (55). This relationship is the central most crucial aspect of the theatrical experience. As Polish director and father of experimental theatre, Jerzy Grotowski states, “Can theatre exist without an audience? At least one spectator is needed to make it a performance” (1968: 32). Speaking at the conference in Galway entitled, “Who is Irish Theatre For?” Declan Gibbons, of Macnas Theatre Company, said,

There is a strong link in our company’s work between the people watching, the themes of the performance and the performers themselves .... There is a sense of ritual about our parades – the excitement of an event that only a large audience can generate. We tour our parades and we go to the place a couple of weeks beforehand and we muster troops locally. That brings a huge sense of occasion to it; that it is not a professional theatre company presenting something abstract and inaccessible. It is a part of the community. (58)

The business plan issued by Macnas in 2008 highlights the concerns and aims of a theatre company focused on touring and community based production. Founded in 1988, Macnas, combines street parade and spectacle with indoor theatre work touring throughout this country and on the continent. Writing in *The Sunday Business Post*, Mary Kate O’Flanagan notes that, “Macnas has made a name for itself in bringing theatre to unusual venues and reaching audiences who, when they hear the word culture, would normally reach for a gun” (Oct. 2000). The twelve-page document, *Macnas Business Plan 2008-2011*, illustrates the priorities and seeks to create a framework upon which Macnas can function in the coming years. Under the subsection, *Artistic Policy*, the company notes that the Arts Council includes Macnas in the multi-disciplinarily arts category (MDA). It also notes that, “It very quickly began to refine its outdoor work and explore creating indoor events of a theatrical nature in unusual and unconventional venues.” Noting the influence of the French actor and mime artist famous for his methods on physical theatre, Jacques Lecoq (1921-1999), and again in *Dialogues*, Declan Gibbons states that,

We try to bring the audience from the street into the theatre. This year for our street show we had 65,000 people. When we did our indoor show we did not have those sorts of numbers and it is not just the fact that we are charging for the ticket. There are barriers there that exist that have to be broken down. People are willing to stand in the rain and the wind for an hour and a half to see a parade in the street but yet they are not willing to go into a comfortable theatre.

In recent years, The Arts Council has been implementing their policy for the development of the Arts in Ireland. Entitled *Partnership for the Arts 2006-2010*, one of the intentions of this scheme was to, “affirm and promote the value of theatre in Ireland” (32). It was felt that theatrical production had been neglected for some years. In 2005, a policy paper entitled, *Theatre-Background Discussion Paper*, (2005) outlined the need for an increased structural and critical framework for theatre practitioners in Ireland, without which:

Theatre will remain an unnecessarily haphazard process ... impaired by its lack of knowledge of performance theory, the absence of adequate and flexible performance spaces, poor current marketing information, and the deprivation of the safe critical space provided by formative training methodology in all area of practice. (4)

A further initiative established by the Arts Council was a two-year research project designed to inform and shape future policies for touring in Ireland, *The Touring Experiment*, which sought to answer two key questions in relation to touring: What are the real costs of putting on a tour and what do audiences want or need? The Arts Council in conjunction with The Irish Theatre Institute invited up to fifty touring projects to participate in the research project submitting financial data and a tour report. The resulting report, *A Future for Touring in Ireland 2010-2015*, recognised the audience as the most important element to cultural activity and the need to develop cultural policy in response to their broadening tastes and preferences. The audience represents an intrinsic reward for artists and an essential force in developing appreciation of the arts. Placing the audience at the centre of a strategy has clear positive implications for how tours are constructed, planned, promoted and delivered (2009: 21).

Another initiative established by the Arts Council is an online database to review planning, programming and provision of performance arts venues in Ireland. *Auditoria* is a comprehensive survey of theatrical venues covering both the physical dimensions and the management details. Director of The Arts Council, Mary Cloake, spoke of the initiative:

It is clear that certain findings – for example in the area of capital funding, audience development, repertoire, touring and local partnerships – remain pertinent to the debate. In this context, three issues arise; the availability of touring productions, the financial stability of our now enlarged venues and the long-term sustainability of these venues. In the coming months, this document will provide the Arts Council with a valuable basis for informed debate and discussion as we enter a new phase of planning for the performing arts throughout the country” (Arts Council, Foreword, 2004: 2).

On the one hand, site-specific performance is enabled by the support of agencies tied to funding the performing arts, and on the other, is dependent on the relationship between theatre companies and the managers of the sites that they perform in. In the case of groups such as Ouroboros, the sites were public property and managed by state agencies, whose particular responsibility it is to maintain and protect these historical spaces. With regards to policies governing the management of cultural sites, The Office of Public Works is responsible for the built heritage in state care

and divided into three sub categories, National Monuments Service, Historic Properties Service and Visitors Service. The National Monuments Service maintains over 750 monuments throughout the country. The Historic Properties Service oversees over twenty properties from Phoenix Park to Emo Castle and the Visitors Service manages the interpretative facilities and guide services that look after the 2.5 million fee-paying visitors annually.

Care for the 750 National Monuments covering sites such as Newgrange and Charlesfort is operated on a geographical basis. The country is divided into six regions with their own regional depot taking on the bulk of conservation and restoration. These regional depots are in Athenry, Dromahair, Kilkenny, Mallow and Killarney. The Works Manager in each depot reports to the senior architect for each region. In the case of historic properties, each site is maintained by a local management structure that looks after the day-to-day running of the property. Legal, policy, permission to use the facility and financial matters are referred to central administration in Merrion Square in Dublin. The specific policies in place in these OPW sites are quite haphazard and can vary from site to site. Phoenix Park, for example, the largest enclosed urban park in Europe first opened in 1747, has three documents governing the usage of the park. The Phoenix Park Recreational Analysis for 2006, The Operational Policy Framework relating to the use of Phoenix Park for Cultural Events published in July 2005. Lastly, a draft written up in December 2008 for The Event Policy Framework for the park, which became operational from January 2009 and which shall be in force for a minimum of ten years. (Event Policy Framework, 2008) For the most part though, there are no specific policy documents in place for managing events.

The OPW also highlights the need for cultural events on the sites that they manage as a way of encouraging interest and awareness from those who might otherwise not engage with the historical significance of the site. The focus of operational policy governing management of heritage sites generally is primarily one of conservation, protection, management and presentation of the sites in their own right, with the objective of increasing public awareness of the National Built Heritage in OPW care. In this context, however, the value of appropriate events in creating greater public

awareness of our national built heritage, in attracting a more diverse audience and bringing added value to the Park management ethos, is fully recognised. (E. P. F. 2008)

The aim of cultural policy-making is to foster cultural practices amongst the population and not to limit its scope through the commoditization of cultural goods. In an increasingly globalized society with a media saturated with external influences, the audience's referential world has increased. With the muddying of cultural mores, governmental agencies have the responsibility to step in to re-establish cultural identity. In his seminal essay, *Putting Policy into Cultural Studies*, Tony Bennett sees culture as an instrument of the government,

A historically specific set of institutionally embedded relations of government in which the forms of thought and conduct of extended populations are targeted for transformation – in part via the extension through the social body of the forms, techniques and regiments of the aesthetic and intellectual culture.

(in Barnett, 1999: 371)

Documenting best practices for the implementation of cultural policies allows us to track successful ways that government agencies can work within the framework, examples from the EU being publications such as, *Catalogues of Good Practice Projects supported by European Commission Programmes*, showing how strong dialogues translates into concrete action that can then be applied to a vast array of cultural practices. As Dick Stanley concludes in his study prepared for the Council of Europe,

There are a wide number of initiatives taking place across Europe and the rest of the world to produce social effects from cultural activities. We are still, however, in a state of early experimentation, with many initiatives being undertaken in isolation and doubtless in ignorance of what had been accomplished elsewhere, it would, therefore, appear to be timely to undertake a project to document best practices in the area of social effects across the member states of the Council of Europe. (2006: 93)

In order to establish governmental policies which retain their ability to grow with changing cultural climates, there is an assumption of, “the existence of an elaborate public sphere of cultural institutions mediating the relationship, between nation-state and citizenry” (Barnett, 1999: 375). In Ireland that rolling out of governmental policy is the Arts Council which functions as an agent of the state in matters of

cultural policy. The Arts Council's approach to the changing face of cultural policy in Europe is to imitate it and in the case of theatre this approach has manifested itself in the creation of production hubs which promote the same type of clustering evident in the creative cities model. The enthusiasm for this type of funding is understandable given its fast paced and radical results in areas previously rundown but with that enthusiasm comes a lack of analysis and exploration of the long term effect this change in funding would have on already established funding practice. The mixing of culture and commerce and focus on outputs, and numbers rather than the process of nurturing promising arts practitioners from the very outset, is bound to have a destabilizing effect on arts practice in Ireland. Although the clustering of theatre practitioners in production hubs rather than traditional production companies may seem like it will give rise to more output, more commercial work, bigger numbers, more tourist friendly theatre, the long-term effect for theatre practice will prove detrimental. Already theatre companies have suffered from funding cuts as Peter Crawley notes,

These days ... theatre companies are folding, not incorporating. Island, Storytellers, Galloglass and Calypso have all disappeared since 2008. No new company has received revenue funding from the Arts Council since the Performance Corporation was bought on to the funding ladder in 2006 – the council's only new theatre company client *this decade*. (2009: 18)

With reduced theatre funding the Arts Council is asking the theatre community to do more for less funding as illustrated by, head of theatre, David Parnell speaking to Peter Crawley,

The question is: how many of those companies can we afford? At the moment we're looking at European models where the state offers those kinds of [administrative] support which allows the artists to get on with making the work. That's the thinking, but obviously it's early days ... I'm not an economist, and I believe the level of funding for the arts should be at least maintained, but we have to be realistic about the possibility it's not going to happen ... this is a good opportunity to at least re-imagine the model by which we make theatre. (2009: 16)

Using the arts to drive a knowledge based economy is not the answer because the creative industries talked about in government policy documents are not theatre companies like Ouroboros. All the evidence of fast growth in creative enterprise is

driven by the vast companies with private investment in sectors such as advertising, gaming, television etc. These creative industries rely on practitioners based in the traditional arts, music, theatre, literature and so forth to produce original and innovative work. What is happening with cultural enterprise is government agencies, whose job it is to protect and foster the arts, are making way for multinational privately owned companies to sponsor, support and appropriate from the traditional arts, who will look to them for funding. In his book, *Management and Creativity: From Creative Industries to Creative Management*, Chris Bilton looks at how cultural policy functions in this dynamic,

At one end of the policy spectrum, a pure neo-liberal cultural policy is not merely passive and would typically include an active attempt to roll back state involvement in the creative sector through deregulation, removal of subsidies and tariffs, and the embrace of free trade and market economics. (2007: 166)

Privatizing the arts under the guise of creative enterprise is not healthy and productive for the majority of small theatre companies in Ireland who now face a severe curtailing of the creative work as they can no longer create theatre that can break new ground but theatre that responds to the needs of their new patrons. Depending on the theory that cream always rises doesn't allow for a system that embraces the creative process rather than the end product as Bilton affirms,

Set against the neo-liberal, national economic and talent-oriented models of creativity and cultural policy, a systems view of creativity leads to an appreciation of the infrastructure, networks and collaborations which underpin the visible peaks of creative output. This logically leads away from a policy based on cultural production towards a policy encompassing the developmental phases which precede and follow cultural production, including cultural distribution. There is also likely to be greater attention paid to process, especially the invisible or "non-creative" elements in cultural production, and to non-quantifiable social outcomes as well as economic products. (2007: 167)

The model of production hubs can work if the same nurturing of talent is created by the support systems that are currently operating within the theatre company structure. The infrastructure needed to, "underpin the visible peaks of creative output", as Bilton terms it, are being all but cut out of government funding and so must rely on private support. These measures create a situation for theatre companies trying to continue their work under trying circumstances. The difficulty with the production

hub model is the danger that theatre practitioners lack any established career path as funding is received on an *ad hoc*, project by project basis. Theatre Forum Chairperson, Fergal McGrath echoed these concerns, “It is clear ... that the role of the company model is effectively being reduced. Most feedback we’ve been getting is that it raises the question, what becomes of the shelf life of productions, employment of artists, and do career paths exist anymore?” (in Crawley, 2010).

The merging of culture and commerce in recent years from the initiatives of UNESCO in establishing “creative cities” and funding the cultural clustering that are a natural part of the artistic development of urban centres, to the cutting of funding to the established model of theatre companies has shown how important cultural policy is in the development of the artistic life of a country. The reluctance of theatre practitioners to relinquish the older model of theatre companies operating a consistent output of performances and nurturing young and emerging talent be it in stage management, playwriting, directing etc. is obvious. This model has proven successful time and time again in creating world renowned performances such as the works of the Druid and establishing great playwrights such as Conor McPherson, Martin McDonagh, and Enda Walsh. The creation of the production hub model is based not on the desire to see an improved system of creating theatre, but as a haphazard model brought about by lack of funding. The production hub will produce good theatre, like the four plays staged by Belltable in Limerick, but the reason is because theatre practitioners will be forced to operate in these conditions or not operate at all. The production hub advocates the production of once-off plays applying for once-off funding which is counterproductive to the research, production and documentation of radical and innovative theatre in Ireland.

In the case of theatre companies such as Ouroboros, the new funding model for the performing arts is one dependent on private funding, production and consumption. The increasing commodification of culture and the introduction of approaches such as the creative cities model and the introduction of a discourse on management, entrepreneurship and creative enterprise is creating a changing landscape for funding in Ireland. The instrumentalisation of art for enterprise, added to the financial meltdown, has meant a renegotiation of funding models, not only in the production

hub model but also in what is made and funded. As funding becomes more proscriptive it becomes less artist-led, if it is answerable to the objectives of arts councils and government agencies. What these agencies want is not that clear, given the proliferation of different reports over the years a clear over-arching policy is missing in order to cope with the increasing struggle to obtain funding and to counter the mainstreaming or pooling of funding towards larger companies to the detriment of innovative and radical theatre being produced by less well-known companies.

Artists and performers have always been innovative but the arts council has a responsibility to support work which is not commercially viable but of artistic importance, and yet new funding models are stifling theatre companies. However, site specific work offers a chance for innovation in line with European cultural policy (which is essentially the parent of Irish funding as government agencies such as the Arts Council are expected to fund in line with European priorities) with regard to the promotion of cultural heritage, by acknowledging that practices and knowledge and collective meaning are part of what constitutes the context for a cultural heritage as much as a material object or a space.

Performance in sites of cultural interest as demonstrated on the *Ouroboros/Making History* tour, are important ways of producing, challenging and interpreting cultural heritage. The blind spot with regard to the potential offered by site-specific performance (creative enterprise, cultural tourism, local engagement and regeneration) has not been maximised by current funding models whose remit is to support touring, and yet the tendency is to support traditional arts-council funded theatre venues. The danger of policy making is that it does not always sufficiently privilege the creative aspects of artistic production, the makers and artists themselves, therefore it is in danger of becoming prescriptive and to miss artist-led opportunities to engage creatively and imaginatively with our cultural heritage.

## Conclusions: Site and the Performative Effect

In engaging in independent and collaborative research, from both an historical and critical perspective, this study has illustrated its worth as investigating this line of enquiry has contributed in the establishment of an interdisciplinary methodology that addresses both theatrical performance and cultural policy. An increased understanding of how historical sites can be used and interpreted by site-users will provide a basis on which a body of information can develop in order to inform programming of site-specific cultural events in both theatre and further afield. This research can in turn contribute to the current discourse surrounding cultural policy and help formulate new models of engagement for future policy makers. Whereas the basis of the *Ouroboros/Making History* tour was the relationship that developed between the *Ouroboros* theatre company and the OPW, the key point now is how to foster these relationships without the concrete structure of the traditional theatre funding model: the theatre production company. Exploring the discourses currently operating within cultural policy legislation does not necessarily deliver any conclusions, but maps the territory available within which theatre practitioners and funding bodies such as the arts council can operate in the future.

Immediately apparent, when examining the current discourses within the field, is how the notion of performance has filtered through to all aspects of our private and public lives. I began this dissertation with a look at the basic definitions of terms such as performance, theatre and site-specificity, and explored how these terms operate within various disciplines. From Schechner's ritualistic practice, "to recycle, reuse, archive and recall ... to seek roots, explore and maybe even plunder ... is to ritualize" (1993: 19), to Baz Kershaw's performative societies where, "the performative becomes a major element in the continuous negotiations of power and authority," (1999:13), the term has become a key concept that touches off a multitude of behaviours and processes illustrating human interaction and informing a vast array of disciplines. The use of these terms apply not only performance studies but has become an object of inquiry that, "unites the tradition of theatre studies with techniques and approaches from anthropology, sociology, critical theory, cultural

studies, art history and other disciplines” (Connor, 2004: 100). Within site-specific performance the concept of site has become multi-layered absorbing not just the physicality and the historicity of the space but also the dynamic created by the performance and the audience. The residual traces that operate at these sites function to reiterate the performance in the mind of the spectator as shown in Foucault’s heterotopias.

Bridging the widening gulf between the theorists and the practitioners was a difficulty evident in the work of this dissertation. The grandiose theorising might be far removed from the practicalities the Ouroboros theatre company faced staging their work in protected historical sites but ultimately the heart of performance is in the act itself. Documenting, discussing, analysing the performative effect after the fact negate the very act of performing. The “axes of sameness and difference” (Jackson, 2004:31) left by modernist and post-modernist readings of the performative have influenced this rupture between thinking and doing. Creating a framework where theory and practice could intersect in exploring the act of performance was most appropriately captured by the term “ghosting” which describes the performative act layered upon the existing structure. The term allows for the difficulties engendered by the ephemeral nature of performance and the difficulty in documentation. By using the term “ghosting” the dynamic that is central to the performative act, the mix of site, performance and audience is named. One of the pre-eminent postmodernist theories, Michel Foucault’s concept of heterotopias, echoes the important relationship between site and performance that is at the core of site-specific theatre. In *Of Other Spaces* (1967), Foucault uses the term heterotopias to describe a place that, “is something like a counter-site ... in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (1986: 24). This concept of site echoes those used within site-specific theatre where the site is used as a medium with which a new relationship between performance and audience is explored.

Heterotopias are a physical site embodying a conceptual space in which the audience can ritualistically reaffirm their identity through the performance. The site itself is not neutral, it too engages with the performance, as it reflects and inverts its surroundings. These sites stand “outside” the society that made them and are generally thought of as subversive. The spaces used within site-specific theatre

function as heterotopias because the site is used as an entity in itself. When using sites that come layered with historical resonance such as those used in the Ouroboros/*Making History* tour, the audience reaction illustrates the depth of connection between the site, performance and the audience that engaged with it. Looking at the more concrete aspects of site-specific performance and exploring the practicalities of staging and creating a site-specific production, the Ouroboros theatre companies production of Brian Friel's play *Making History* used historical buildings and sites as performance spaces; the tour was conceived as a way of connecting Friel's historical play to the localities in which this particular history unfolded. The sites were of historical or symbolic significance in the years leading up to the ill-fated rebellion and subsequent exile of Irish Chieftain, Hugh O'Neill and his followers. The project sought to produce an established history play, such as Brian Friel's *Making History* based on real events and following these characters through the very real places that they had passed through, lived in and fought over. The histories of the sites had been tied to O'Neill's legacy and had been long established in the mindset of the audience. The aim was to re-negotiate these sites, through the performance and in doing so, re-establish the relationship between history and locality as the tour progressed. The tour could not have taken place in other sites; it could not be mistaken for site-generic, because each site responded to an area or moment in O'Neill's life.

Focusing on five of the sites used in the tour, each representing a type of the main tour sites, for example, Mellifont Abbey as a religious ruin, the sites illustrated the powerful pre-existing relationship between the audience and the performance. Before Ouroboros arrived on site, the story and the history of Hugh O'Neill would have been known to the audience, in the case of Mellifont Abbey, for example, the audience would know that this was the site where Hugh O'Neill made an unconditional surrender to Lord Mountjoy in 1603. Although the site is now a ruin, the remnants of that act are still palpable within the site and in the collective memory of the audience. The momentum that built as the group progressed towards the Earl's grand finale and their ultimate exile echoed the very route O'Neill and his company took 500 years previously. The play, Ouroboros, the Earls, all followed this pilgrimage and consequently created a site-specific tour in its purest sense. The five sites consisting of Charlesfort, Donegal Castle, Mellifont Abbey, Co. Louth,

Dungannon, and finally, Rathmullan Hill, each site offers differing interpretations of the play from an historical, architectural and religious standpoint and also reflects the differing types of site that Ouroboros had to deal with in the staging of the play. Framed by two theoretical models, that of Foucault's "heterotopias" and the working model of the "host/ghost" developed by Brith Gof, the case study sought to provide answers to questions posed by the research, how do site-specific performances interact with their host communities? And how can histories of space be re-negotiated through site-specific performance? What are the "best practices" for modifying these sites?

The first question reaffirms what was evident in the *Ouroboros/Making History* tour, the profound connection between the site and the audience. The development of legislation to support this emerging relationship will enable this innovative and radical form of theatre to re-connect local communities to their historic sites. The second question, how can histories of space be re-negotiated through site-specific theatre, is evident in how the history of the Flight of the Earls was re-negotiated through the *Ouroboros/Making History* performance. Site-specific theatre is the closest a community comes to reliving and re-engaging with its past and exploring how a particular period in history has affected their lives. The ritualistic aspect of performance, as discussed by Richard Schechner, is a factor in this dynamic as the audience re-enter the space of their history for example, Dungannon, and re-negotiate their relationship with it. The last question, what are the best practices for using historic sites, is more difficult to answer given the changing funding landscape. With a cut in funding to theatre companies and the development of the "production hub model" of theatre practice, the relationship needed to negotiate a tour/performance on a protected and historical site will prove to be more challenging. These production hubs will encourage once-off performances for one-off funding ventures. The practitioners coming together in this theatre hub will join and separate moving from production to production. The fear remains that this nomadic work will not be conducive to formulating the long-standing relationships needed to create a tour such as the *Ouroboros/Making History*.

Examining how economic factors foster or limit site-specific theatre is crucial as analysing the role of government legislation on the production of theatre and how this role can be improved for the benefit of theatre audiences can prove beneficial to

regional communities who have most to gain from re-invigorating historical sites. The desire for a progressive and innovative theatre experience outside of conventional theatre spaces is clear but the ad hoc approach to funding in the past has reflected the focus of the arts council which has been with established venues. Currently with the funding cuts, measures have been drawn up to support theatre production but without the annual funding to individual theatre companies, the “production hub” model can itself lean towards the “quick” production rather than the long-term outlook and research that goes into site-specific theatre. Within this new model of theatre funding, the Arts Council has also identified a need to devise policy recommendations for touring and audience development. However, what is missing in the research framework outlined by the Arts Council’s initiatives is an interrogation and critique of the politics of site-specific locations. A theoretical and practical approach to understanding audiences and widening access must involve a much wider evaluation of the idea of a venue. If ongoing research is limited to purpose-built or adapted theatres and ignores site-specific locations, then existing participation models of cultural production remain uninterrogated. The possibility of developing radical models of alternative and sustainable cultural practice has already been explored elsewhere; investigations into the politics of touring have encompassed a broad understanding of touring and audience access in relation to the significance of site-specific performance. The possibility of like minded policies being created here in Ireland would ensure that the innovative form of theatre espoused by groups such as the Ouroboros theatre company will provide the economic and cultural benefits for local communities.

In mapping all the theoretical aspects of theatre and performance that are relevant to my own field of research and exploring the practicalities involved in staging a site-specific production, I want this current line of inquiry to inform the framework currently being devised by the art council in funding theatre production. Because much of the study hinges on contested sites of meaning, I feel that a pragmatic and basic foundation in what site-specificity means for a theatre audience will deepen the understanding of a new and emerging discipline. Using various theoretical examinations of site-specific performance as well as examples from practice-based theatre groups this research sought to lay a foundation for the further exploration of the relationship between site and performativity. Exploring the dynamic nature of the

audience/site relationship is crucial to the success of a site-specific performance where the participation and interaction of the audience has become a more central component with the collapse of the much-maligned fourth wall.

This was a unique study that specifically addressed two key areas of enquiry: the artistic relationship between cultural sites and performativity, and the construction of regional and cultural meaning through historic sites. It is especially significant that this study focuses on the question of how existing theatre spaces (funded and promoted by Arts Council policy) may work against both the engagement of audiences (including attracting new and emergent audiences) and the performer. An examination of whether it is possible for an alternative model of theatre practice and engagement to exist outside of conventional theatre spaces goes to the heart of current funding agendas. Ultimately, this study proposes that national and regional histories can be challenged and revitalized by engaging with new cultural forms such as site-specific theatre and furthering these sectors' ability to grow can, in turn, inform, identify and develop new modes of engagement which will allow for a better understanding of our history, a deeper community and regional network and a transformation of publicly owned space.

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## THE QUESTIONNAIRE

### Site-Specific Performance in Britain

#### Questionnaire for companies/practitioners

The 'Site-Specific Performance in Britain' survey is being conducted as part of PhD research at the University of Surrey. Its aim is to produce meaningful statistics regarding a performance form that is little documented and whose practitioners are often working in isolation from a sense of the wider context within Britain. While I realize that most people working in performance are always overworked, I would greatly appreciate your taking the time to complete and return this questionnaire and hope that the results may prove to be of benefit to your work. Please number your answers on a separate page, or create space for your answers between the questions below if you prefer. The fuller your answers, the better represented your company will be in the final report. You may feel that some questions do not apply to you; please answer only those questions relevant to your group. If your group has been disbanded or no longer produces site-specific performance, please indicate this and go on to answer the relevant questions in the past tense.

#### General

- In what year was your group founded?
- Is your group operational at this time? If not, when did the group disband and for what reasons?

#### Terminology

- How would you define 'site-specific performance' in the context of your work?
- According to this definition, roughly what proportion of your work fits the category 'site-specific'?

- In what year did you produce your first site-specific performance?
- Would you use the term 'site-specific' when describing your work:
  - to someone within the performance profession?
  - to someone outside of the performance profession?
  - on a funding application?
- If not, what other terms would you use to describe this sort of work, and why?

#### Practicalities

##### How is your work funded?

- By whom (e.g. Arts Council, Regional Arts Board, sponsorship, workshops and education projects)?
- On what basis (per project, or for the company over a specified period)?
- Are you funded differently for site-specific and non-site-specific projects?
- Have you ever been commissioned to produce a particular site-specific performance by the controllers of that site? If so:
  - who commissioned the work?
  - for which site?
  - in which month and year?
  - please give the name, and any further details if possible, of the resulting performance.
- What are your reasons for producing site-specific performance? (Please expand on your answer and choose more than one category if appropriate.)
  - financial
  - political

- aesthetic
- challenge/experiment
- reaching a wider audience
- other (please specify)

- content (narratives and stories inspired by the site)?
- both of the above?
- other (please specify)?

#### Material

- What proportion of your site-specific work would you class as 'local' to the area in which you are based? Is a sense of immediate locality important to your work?
- Does your site-specific performance tour? If so, do you feel that this affects the 'site-specificity' of the work? In what ways?
- What proportion of your site-specific performance takes place:
  - indoors?
  - outdoors?
- What proportion of your site-specific performance takes place:
  - in real space?
  - in cyberspace (e.g. on the Internet; on CD ROM)?
- Is the majority of your performance work:
  - text-based?
  - non-text-based?
- Does this differ for your site-specific performance – i.e. is the majority of your site-specific work:
  - text-based?
  - non-text-based?
- In your work, does the site tend to influence the performance in terms of:
  - form (the physical aspects of the performance)?

#### Membership

- How many members does your group have? (Indicate both permanent members and associates regularly worked with if applicable.)
- Have any of your group members been (or are they currently) involved with other companies producing site-specific performance? Please give details (e.g. who? which other companies? on which projects? when?).
- Have you ever collaborated with other companies or individuals to make site-specific performance? If so:
  - please give details (e.g. who? on which projects? when?).
  - for what reasons was the collaboration instigated?

#### Other Information

- Please name (and give details of if possible) any other British companies or practitioners you know of who produce site-specific theatre/performance and should therefore be included in this survey.
- Any further details you could provide of your company and your site-specific performance would be greatly appreciated. For instance, a list of your site-specific performances with date and site information would be extremely useful in compiling the survey report. Any publicity or press material would also be very useful.

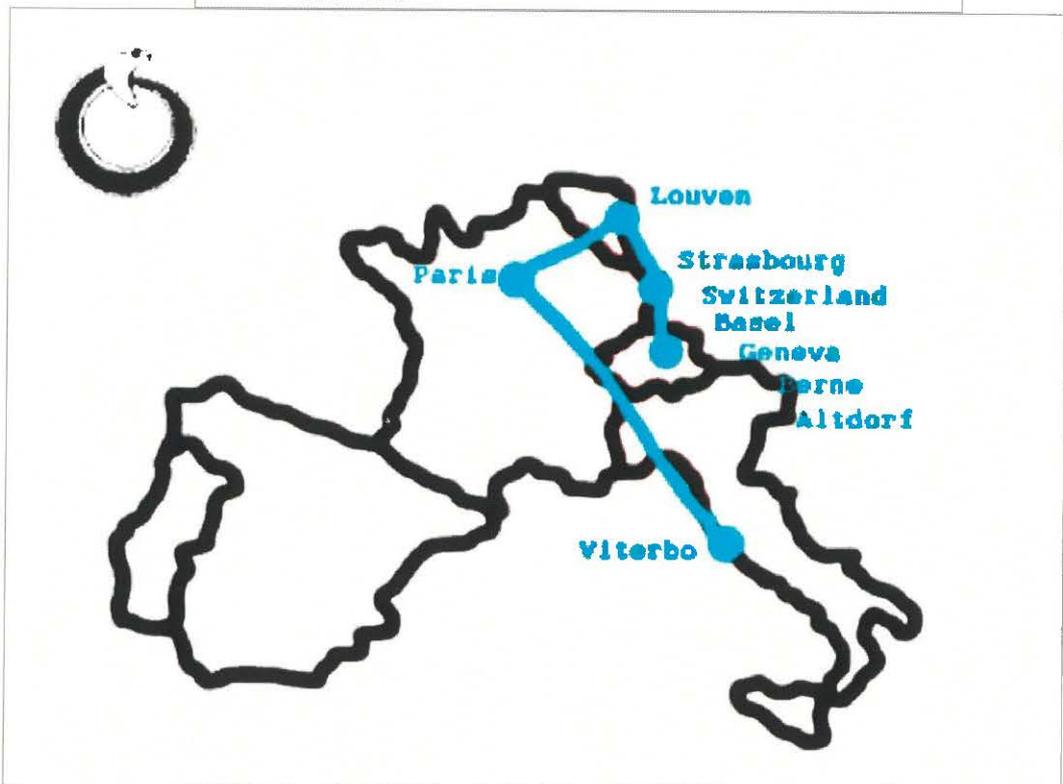
## Appendix B



<b>In theatre building</b>	<b>Outside theatre</b>	<b>Site-sympathetic</b>	<b>Site-generic</b>	<b>Site-specific</b>
	e.g. Shakespeare in the park	existing performance text physicalized in a selected site	performance generated for a series of like sites (e.g. car parks, swimming pools)	performance specifically generated from/for one selected site
				layers of the site are revealed through reference to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• historical documentation</li><li>• site usage (past and present)</li><li>• found text, objects, actions, sounds, etc</li><li>• anecdotal guidance</li><li>• personal association</li><li>• half-truths and lies</li><li>• site morphology (physical and vocal explorations of site)</li></ul>

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## Appendix C



Route of Ouroboros/ Making History tour and reasons for the choice.  
 Source: *Making History* programme

## Appendix E

Promotional video illustrating the depth and breadth of the *Ouroboros/Making History* tour 2007. DVD format. Back sleeve of thesis.