Performing Beckett at the Irish border: bodies, lines and haunted landscapes

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Performing Beckett at the Irish Border

Bodies, Lines and Haunted Landscapes

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Abstract

This article examines the place of Beckett's work amongst recent artworks sited at the Northern Irish border/ north of Ireland border. Using Dylan Quinn's *Fulcrum*, the Happy Days Enniskillen International Beckett Festival's *Walking for Waiting for Godot*, and the collaborative community project *Across and In-Between* as key examples, I explore how Beckett's work has become absorbed into the kinds of wider arts and political discourses—and indeed crises—that this border-site reflects. These projects share a concern for placing bodies at the border, asking us to see *from* the situation of the border, to trace its often-impalpable contours with the frail tools of words and bodies.

Résumé

Cet article examine la place qu'occupe Beckett dans une série d'œuvres d'art récentes situées à la frontière nord-irlandaise. J'utilise comme exemples clés *Fulcrum* de Dylan Quinn, *Walking for Waiting for Godot* du Happy Days Enniskillen International Beckett Festival et le projet communautaire collaboratif *Across and In-Between*, et je considère comment l'écriture de Beckett a été absorbée dans certains types de discours artistiques et politiques plus larges – et même de crises – que ce site frontalier reflète. Ces projets partagent le souci de placer le corps à la frontière, nous demandant de percevoir à partir de la situation frontière, de tracer ses contours souvent impalpables avec les outils frêles des mots et des corps.

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Keywords

Northern Ireland/ the north of Ireland – critical border thinking – walking – Suzanne Lacy – Dylan Quinn – Arts Over Borders

1 Borders and Binaries: Tracing ‘ / ’[1]

In 2018, a fascinating collision occurred between Beckett’s work and Ireland’s internal edges through the Happy Days Enniskillen Beckett Festival, specifically its project *Walking for Waiting for Godot* (henceforth *Walking*) in which audiences hiked to a rural part of the south-eastern border between Ireland and Northern Ireland to see staged readings of the play. This production was one of a number of “border-minded” projects that happened at the Festival that year.[2] These included walking projects, a community arts project, as well as more traditional theatrical representations. *Fulcrum: On the Irish Border*, a dance piece inspired by Beckett’s *Catastrophe* and created by Enniskillen-based dance artist Dylan Quinn, was performed in September of that year at the border near Manorhamilton, Co. Leitrim. While not part of the festival that year, its première took place at the 2013 Happy Days festival. In surveying these recent border arts, comparisons will be drawn with *Across and In-Between* (also from 2018), an arts project that saw artist Suzanne Lacy collaborate with border communities. Each of these artworks addressed in some way the contested boundary between the north and south of Ireland, and did so by bringing bodies within touching distance of its haunted spaces.

When Britain decided to leave the EU in 2016, the status of this border dividing the island of Ireland (a border that had largely become imaginary in the years since the 1998 Good Friday Agreement) came sharply into question. Northern Ireland was suddenly the frontier of a land border between the UK and the European Union, with all the issues that presented for managing the movement of goods and people across its length. For the first time in many years, talk of Irish reunification was heard—a prospect that the Nationalist part of the population found welcome. It was heard as a threat for those who identify as Unionist and British. Regardless of its outcomes (still unresolved at the time of writing in 2022), Brexit represented a threat to peace in the region. In its wake, there emerged a wave of border-focused arts projects that sought to use bodies and performances as a means to physically mark the border, touching upon the epistemological chasm that it often represents—especially within the Irish psyche.

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[1] This essay is indebted to the ideas that emerged during the 2021 online Beckett Brunch event entitled “Cross-Border Beckett/ Beckett par-delà les frontières.” Held at Trinity College Dublin and hosted by Céline Thobois, Megane Mazé, Dúnlaith Bird and Nicholas Johnson, this event provoked participants to consider the borders—disciplinary, artistic, geographic—that Beckett crossed in his lifetime and to take critical tools to the very notion of a ‘border’ in itself.

[2] These included: *Three Billboards* (*Or More*) *Outside Enniskillen and Sligo*, a cross-border collaboration between the Happy Days Festival and Sligo’s Tread Softly festival, connecting Yeats and Beckett. The billboards contained quotes from Yeats poem “The Tower” and from Beckett’s *Neither*. Alan Milligan’s *Samuel Beckett Chess Set* sculpture was positioned also on the bridge at Pettigo, exactly on the border with the ‘white pieces’ in one country and the ‘black pieces’ in the other.

Although this border does not feature in Beckett's writing in a literal way, he lived through its creation and has a biographical connection with the Co. Fermanagh town of Enniskillen, where the festival is now held. Seán Kennedy notes that Beckett was "barely a teenager when, in order to attend secondary school in Enniskillen, he was compelled to cross the new and somewhat arbitrarily imposed border between a nascent Irish Free State and the six county remnants of political union with Great Britain, now called Northern Ireland", and found himself a member of an increasingly minoritized Protestant community within the newly formed Republic (2009, 55). Kennedy observes the relationship between these facts of history and Beckett's "alienation from mainstream Irish cultural life" (ibid.). Beckett also taught at Campbell College in Belfast and Anna McMullan notes that both that school and Portora were "concerned with shaping a future Protestant elite, a role that Beckett vehemently rejected" (94). Yet it is here, almost a century later, that we find a festival event marking Beckett's relationship with that border region and even a theatrical version of his work sited directly upon that arbitrary geographic demarcation of nation from nation. For McMullan, Beckett's early work evidences a "dynamic of cultural dislocation" (99), reflective of the author's status as middle class, urban and Protestant within the Catholic Irish Free State. Beckett's later work sees the positing of any stable frontiers or boundaries as "disturbed, so that the masks of self and other keep slipping, revealing precisely 'the lack or loss at the heart of our fantasies of identity'" (after Ernesto Laclau), even as the work makes "space for the articulation, however traumatic, of fragmented incommensurable identities" (105). David Lloyd shows Beckett's oeuvre as devoted to "the dismantling of the adequacy of both representation and reference in all their dimensions" so that it "resists from the outset any reading that would seek to draw from the work a stable cultural or political reference to Irish matter" (35). Placing Beckett's work within the border's sphere of influence invokes the Beckett that is "antagonistic to representation or to any dialectical integration of part with whole", as Lloyd puts it (37). In many ways, as this article will show, the Happy Days Festival frequently literalizes Kennedy's call for a move away from the pursuit of an "Irish Beckett", toward attending rather to the "overlapping geographies" evoked in his later work in particular (2010, 8). *Walking* presents a rather pointed example of this.

In his introduction to *Beckett and Ireland*, Kennedy notes the tendency within scholarship on the Irish Beckett to engage in a "partitioning of Beckett" into distinct binarized compartments (2010, 5). Citing Rónán McDonald's description of the "sclerotic opposition" (qtd. in Kennedy, 2010, 4) that often characterizes critical responses to the question of the "Irish Beckett", Kennedy finds scholarship navigating binaries such as Ireland-World, Ireland-Europe, local-global and traditional-modern. Beckett's biographical and aesthetic trajectory is often understood as moving from one of these to the other (Kennedy offers the example of Richard Kearney's account of Beckett's rejection of the "native nostalgia" of the Celtic Twilight, 2010, 4). Kennedy seeks to complicate those binaries and points out that Beckett may have left Ireland but "certainly did not leave Ireland behind" (2010, 7), given the multiplication of references to place that fluoresce, however obliquely, in his later work. While *Walking* and *Fulcrum* might seem to present a further litany of binaries, north/ south, Ireland/ UK, nationalist/ unionist, they engage, in fact, in a similarly forensic examination of the site where one thing stops being itself and becomes another. The contested status of Northern Ireland/ the north of Ireland as part of the United Kingdom is expressed in this compound naming (though for convenience in this article I refer to it as Northern Ireland or NI). "Northern Ireland" implies acceptance of the region's UK affiliation and its border with the Republic of Ireland. "The north of Ireland" contests the division of the island into two separate nations and, therefore, the very existence of the border. The complexity of these two perspectives on geography and identity demands this textual mark, ' / ', a forward slash to organize the binary. The northernmost city in the region contains both the Irish and UK naming: Derry/ Londonderry, but this is now jokingly referred to as 'Stroke City'. Garrett Carr sees this line as both textual and cartographic: "As sure as the black line on my map, the slash between Derry and Londonderry represents the frontier" (284). ' / ' in Northern Ireland neatly indexes partition. It is a demarcation on the page and in the landscape that encapsulates the unresolved and complexly bifurcated nature of the region. In navigating the spectral and haunted landscapes of the border, the artworks discussed below each grapple—bodily—with this separatrix between nation and nation, people and people.

These practices can be contextualized against a global field of "border arts" and within the field of critical border studies. Walter Mignolo and Madina

Tlostanova define critical border thinking or theorising as emerging from a response to exploitative colonial violence “of imperial/ territorial epistemology and the rhetoric of modernity”. They suggest that “critical border thinking is necessarily grounded in the experiences of the colonies and subaltern empires” (206); it comes from the margins, in other words. Taking the ideas contained within critical border thinking as a starting point, this article will ask what epistemologies of the border have been and are being produced by this particular contested region. The unresolved postcolonial polarities contained within the island of Ireland resonate readily with the unsettled paradoxes of Beckett’s work. The art practices that I examine here deliberately elicit the unsettled doubleness that shapes life along the border regions. Such a framing will allow this article to consider the role of art in fostering or facilitating critical border thinking.

2 A Haunted Landscape

This border is spectral. It is marked by atrophy and the ghosts of troubled landscapes, as imaged by Michael Patrick’s and Oisín Kearney’s play *The Border Game* (Lyric Theatre, Belfast, 2021). Although ostensibly a comedy, the play references how the blockage of roads by the British Army during the Troubles, as the NI conflict is known, atrophied community and connection. After the roads were closed over, trees grew and beyond them, as the one of the characters, Sinead, says “were houses we didn’t know existed”. This spectrality is only confirmed by the silence of the border that came in the wake of the cessation of violence; it was a silence of peace but a tacit one in which it was agreed that the border, with its violence and its myths, might fade into quiet. That was at least until Britain’s decision to leave the EU.

The border that divides the island of Ireland was created in 1921. Its existence was brought into being through the fear of the Protestant majority in the northern counties of becoming minoritized as Ireland moved first toward Home Rule in the late nineteenth century and then finally toward independence in the twentieth. While its precise contours were confirmed in the 1920s by British, Irish, and Northern Irish governments, with twenty-six counties on the south side and six in the north, over the course of a hundred years the border has gone through processes of bordering and debordering, as Cathal McCall notes. Much of this was to do with the political and military upheavals that took place in the north in these years (McCall, 1–2). As McCall recounts, “wholesale closure did not occur until the Troubles took hold in the early 1970s”, at which point British security forces worked to render roads impassable to limit the movement of Republican (pro-reunification) insurgents; the effect on the cross-border movement of people was predictable (14–15). While "quiet" North-South cooperation was managed by civil servants, such "debordering" was often met with resistance from Unionists (McCall, 15). Since the 1998 Good Friday Agreement brought an end to the conflict, the border has moved from a securitized zone to a place of quiet debordering. The border populations today present the ethnic and cultural mosaic quality that geographer Frederick W. Boal's influential 1987 paper articulates about this region: a "division of a most complex and subtle geographic kind—a mosaic that threatens to fall apart but that has not attained such a condition to date" (40). The border cartographically demarcates one nation from another, yet the lived experience of those that occupy its regions and intermingle across its mosaiced terrain unveils a very different story.

The border's haunting predates the Troubles. If it is a landscape now marked by resistance to the late nineteenth century Irish quest for autonomy, it also bears the trace of earlier land divisions. The vestiges of Iron Age linear earthworks can be found across an area that loosely corresponds with the border and are known variously as the Black Pig's Dyke, the worm cast or Dane's cast. The name comes from folk legends about a schoolmaster with magical powers who turned his pupils into animals for sport; he was caught doing so and to escape from the wrath of these children's families he turned himself into a black pig, tearing great fissures in the landscape as he fled from attack. Local legend met nineteenth-century politics in the figure of William Frances De Vismes Kane, an antiquarian who sought to map these earthworks and hypothesized that the dyke follows an ancient boundary of the province of Ulster (317) as "an originally unbroken whole" (309). Contemporary archaeologists see Kane's and other nineteenth century antiquarians' analyses as "imaginative" (Walsh, 14). Kane was an early member of the Home Rule movement whose thinking was, as Cólín Ó'Drisceoil puts it, "almost certainly inspired by the Gaelic revival, especially the publication of the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*" (24), a legend which centres on the Ulster boundary (Ulster being the name of the Irish province out of which NI was carved). Living in Monaghan during the years leading up to partition, however, he took a more overtly Unionist stance which O'Drisceoil further suggests influenced his thinking on this archaeological feature as "a border defence for the ancient kingdom of Ulster" (26). Recent analyses suggest that, in their diversity, these earthworks "appear to defy any single overarching explanation" (129). Yet Ó'Drisceoil suggests also that some parts of the dyke system might be indicative of Iron Age settlement patterns that characterized central and western Europe: large scale, town-like settlements demarcated by extensive systems of linear earthworks (130). Regardless, the earthworks have made their way into the folkloric and mythic imaginaries that perceive this putative border zone as marked by danger and tragedy, as well as confounding any unifying or singular narratives.

This region appears in Yeats's 1899 poem "The Valley of the Black Pig", where it is associated with uncontrollable violence. A great battle appears in a dream-like vision of "fallen horsemen and the cries/ Of unknown perishing armies beat about my ears", with the Black Pig as a mythological symbol of power and fate. While Joyce includes reference to the myth in *Finnegan's Wake* as a means to satirize Irish revivalist culture, such tragic and violent associations recur in Vincent Woods play *At the Black Pig's Dyke* (produced by Druid Theatre Company in 1992) in which folk legends and practices of the border counties meet sectarian violence. The literary and archaeological records suggest, at the very least, an unresolved and spectral quality to the border region. Even prior to the formal partitioning of Ireland, a semantic, political and geographic instability heralded the violence of the twentieth century and the continued return to the border, as if to a wound, by the arts practices of the twenty-first, as I now discuss.

3 Arts (and Art) Over Borders

"Border worrying", as artist John Byrne calls it (qtd. in Carr, 4–5), did not begin with Brexit. I note that Byrne's playful *Border Interpretive Centre* project created a tourist destination out of a border checkpoint in 2000. Carr cites this project at the outset of his book documenting walking the border—a project he began before Brexit, in order to understand "how the land and its people have reacted to the border and the ways in which the line is made manifest" (2017, 5). Brexit, though, caused the "ground […] to contract under my feet, shrinking to just the line on the map once again" (Carr, 2018). 2018 seems to have been quite a year for border-worrying in general and for new stagings of Beckett's work. As noted, *Walking* took place at the Happy Days Festival that year (and was reformulated as *All Mankind is Us* in the following year). *Fulcrum* was performed at the border in September and *Across and In-Between* was also developed that year. Each of these projects represents embodied attempts to navigate the complex beast that is the border.

To create *Walking*, actors from the Republic of Ireland led by director Annie Ryan performed a rehearsed reading of *Godot* on a weekend in August 2018, while a Northern Irish troupe directed by Jimmy Fay, of Belfast's Lyric Theatre, did the same one week later. The chosen site was a desolate spot on the Cuilcagh Mountain where the border skirts south Co. Fermanagh. In this production the border felt (or was made to feel) somewhat wild; there was an 8am pickup for audiences in Enniskillen and a three-mile hike. Ros Maprayil's review traces the journey beautifully:

> When the bus rumbled to a halt at a crossroads, amid the rolling hills and far from any town or village, we began our walk up a dirt track, muddied and water-logged at times, stones and gravel punctuating our steps. It was a steady climb at first through paths that were narrow and inhospitable. Nettles and briars spilled onto the paths forcing us to concentrate only on the road beneath our feet. Then the road widened into a boggy field, the space opened up and the beauty of the hills around us suddenly became apparent. The view as we climbed was breath-taking but desolate. We paused to look down into the valley below that led us up and up, tracing a border that had no marker. The moment at which one tuft of grass turned from Northern Ireland to the Republic remained invisible to the eye of the traveller.
>
> MAPRAYIL, 2018

Northern Irish Actor Frankie McCafferty comments that the "remote, spectacular landscapes [gave] a sense of the isolation and anxiety that may have inspired the play" (2022). Referencing the potential origins of the play in France during the war, he notes that "there was a view of Lough Erne and the site of the airbase used by the allies to fly missions over Europe in World War II. I had a greater awareness of being near the border because of the recent political developments" (ibid.).

Anthony Gormley's sculpture, *Tree for Waiting for Godot*, marked the borderline. This abstract version of a tree created out of stainless steel with a mirror-like surface seemed at odds with the landscape around it. Maprayil writes of its incongruity:

> Gormley's metal construct however, with its hard edges and nuts and bolts, imitating nature without the possibility of passing as such, encapsulated the madness of what Brexit could represent without a need for words. Its materiality resonat[es] with the absurdity of needless human intervention in a tranquil landscape that has flourished since the end of the Troubles.
>
> MAPRAYIL, 2018

Gormley is best known for his monumental metal sculptures placed within natural landscapes. *The Angel of the North* in Gateshead, England, exemplifies this strand of his work. *Tree for Waiting for Godot*, while at a more modest scale, was a metallic structure that sat uneasily in nature—"an incongruous beast" as Maprayil has it—and added further to the litany of binaries that this production and its border setting invokes: object/ landscape, nature/ artifice, permanence/ decay, sky/ earth. Gormley himself saw it as containing such contradictions, as an artificiality that also evokes place and nature (Gormley, n.d.).

Theatre practices are formed by and further inform "readings" of works; the abstraction, deferral and resistance to resolution that characterizes *Waiting for Godot* resonated in compelling ways with an imagined and arbitrarily imposed border separating two parts of a single island. The border is immaterial, spectral even; there is little along its ways and lengths to demarcate one side from the other, beyond the change from kilometres to miles in the road signs. Along most of its lengths, a person would need a marker to find the thing. In *Walking*, *Godot*'s tree became, somewhat ironically, such a landmark. Declan Kiberd in *Inventing Ireland* remarks that Beckett's setting "up shop in the void" is understandable when one looks at his background, existing between cultures, neither fully Irish nor culturally English (531). This cartographic aspect of *Walking for Waiting* literalized this nowhere-somewhere dialectic and danced in the interstices of the binary: the tree itself becoming the ' / ' in the landscape.

Quinn's *Fulcrum* was inspired by the symbiosis that intersplices the images of power and dominance emergent in Beckett's work, especially the late play *Catastrophe* (Quinn, n.d.). A pair of dancers occupied a platform laid over a river demarcating the border (a secret location in Co. Leitrim to which audiences were bussed). The dancers, Quinn himself and Jenny Ecke, evoked themes of power and dependency, struggle and cooperation. A short clip documenting their preparation for the piece shows their fluid movements counterpointed by moments where they function as a fulcrum for each other's bodies. A fulcrum is a support around which a lever turns and, leaning toward and away from each other, they create this very shape (Quinn, 2018). Their embodiment of interdependence and resistance arguably mirrored the bordering and debordering that McCall discusses. Furthermore, once emplaced in the landscape they, like the tree in *Walking*, literalized and embodied the separatrix, momentarily playing at becoming the ' / ' in the course of their dance-dialogue about dependence. If the border could speak, it would perhaps articulate itself in these terms: a piece that appears to invoke binaries of man/ woman, movement/ stasis, resistance/ dependence, only to undo these in the moment of performance.

Across and In-Between differed significantly from *Walking* and *Fulcrum*. Its aesthetics, as with much of Lacy's work, is community-created and communityfocused. The work shared with *Walking* and *Fulcrum* a commitment to an embodied geographic practice and an interrogation of borders. As Lacy's NI-based collaborator Cian Smyth puts it, "[W]e did not want to commission an artwork that responded to failed leadership, historical interpretation or revisiting establishment narratives. It needed to be an artwork that responded to the everyday experience of living in a landscape intervened by an international borderline" (2022). Lucy Lippard has described Lacy as "an inveterate border-crosser" (qtd. in Irish, 13). Lacy's practice, as Sharon Irish shows, continually crosses "the barriers between herself and her surroundings" (1), or those between self and other, or those that exist between communities. Irish suggests "that the 'spaces between' in her art provide openings that might be transformative for selves that are permeable and multiple" (21). Lacy has been making "new genre public art", as she describes it, since the 1970s (Irish, 2). The work is grounded in collaboration not only with non-professional artists but also communities "not ordinarily attentive to the arts" (Irish, 15). As Lacy herself has remarked:

> The meanings of the in-between spaces are what I am interested in, for example the notion of intimacy in public space. Many of my larger performance pieces have been what I would call multi-vocal, in a public space with moments of great intimacy between many, sometimes hundreds, of people who are talking in unstructured, but often quite personal ways.
>
> qtd. in Irish, 171–172

Because of her practice and the need for the objectivity of an international collaborator, Lacy was an ideal artist (Smyth, 2022). Smyth himself expresses (and indeed lives) the complexity of a bordered existence:

> My experiences as a child south of the border were different to those north of it. The conversations I was privy to by those on one side about life on the other side often contradicted each other, forcing you to take a position on what is true based on your experience of both. As a queer person, the border always constituted a literal construct of binary thinking. [...] *Across and In-Between* for me was very simply an opportunity for the people who live with the daily consequences of it to talk about it, for the experience of it to be documented and their creative expression of it to be formed. I was as much a participant in that process as anyone else of the 300+ residents we had collaborating on it.
>
> 2022

This embodied, participatory project had several phases. Phase one, entitled *The Yellow Line*, had border communities gather for collective, diverse acts of border marking, all using the colour yellow. All the activity was filmed from the ground and from above, with the resulting footage edited into a film which became the final artwork, a "three-screen film projection made with farmers, horse-owners, scouts, hikers and villagers from communities across Fermanagh, Donegal, Leitrim, Cavan and Monaghan" (Lacy). Horses were loosed to gallop across a field where yellow powder marked the border, their hooves gradually blurring out the line. Yellow kayaks paddled by local children lined the centre of a lake, the border rendered as an unstable floating boundary mid-lake. A third element saw yellow hay-bales aligned across a field by tractors. Edited footage of these events was screened publicly on the wall of the Ulster Museum as part of the Belfast Festival in October 2018 and has been exhibited widely since. Phase two of the project was the *Border People's Parliament*. 150 people from the border regions went to Northern Ireland's parliament buildings at Stormont, Belfast, for a participatory performance. Their discussion and opinions were recorded in parliamentary committee rooms, their photographic portraits captured, and over dinner they drafted *The Yellow Manifesto*, a nine-point document that proposes to give a "true account of a border and its people". Foregrounded in this manifesto and central to the art project itself is the significance of the lived experience of the border, as Point One of its text demonstrates: "People who live along the border need a say about the border. Don't just think of the borderline, think of the lives there. Think of the emotional meaning of the border as well as its practical impacts" (Smyth, n.d.).

This illumination of lived experiences of the border emerges as bodies become the material markers of the border line. If comparisons might be drawn between this and the other projects mentioned above, it is evident that Lacy and collaborators' participatory project, through the parliament and public screening, attempted to bring the border in from the margins. As with *Walking* and *Fulcrum*, the border was embodied at its source. Unlike *Walking*, and indeed many of the other border projects mentioned above, *Across and In-Between* went one step further and embodied the border at the (purported) centre as well as at the edges. The margin was given voice, in other words.

4 Bodies on a Spectral Edge

Walking, *Fulcrum* and *Across and In-Between* each question if we can reappropriate the narratives of the border and repurpose this edge instead as a critical tool, to slice through layers of discourse—imperialist and nationalist—so that we might splice together the polarities, the contradictions and disjunctions that make up the border and see them anew. Do they therefore represent acts of critical border thinking? Since Brexit, we have found ourselves once again hunting the border for meaning, attempting to recover and remake the narrative of this geographic entity that shapes the island's geopolitical realities. What is compelling about these border-arts is the seeming imperative to "emplace" bodies, to generate what Gary Backhaus, summarizing Edward S. Casey's reflection on emplacement, calls "the collusion of the lived-body and place" (Backhaus and Murungi, 22). At the moment of crisis, where the threat of re-bordering brings the hitherto softened edge of the border suddenly into sharp focus, bodies seem to be required for a project of sense making.

From an Irish nationalist perspective, the border represents the cutting of a wound into the imagined wholeness of the island and therefore the national psyche too; from a unionist, British-identifying perspective, it is a barrier protecting communities from potential wounds to identity, to community, to unity with Britain. It was preferable for border communities, unionist and nationalist, northerners and southerners, to have it in slumber, spectral and immaterial, rather than awake and *edgy*. There is an irony in the fact that Brexit brought the border back to our consciousness. Even if calls made to rematerialize the thing in a literal sense as a frontier between the UK and Europe are understood as near-impossible, these recent events have brought the spectral border back to haunt us. The people of these islands suddenly find themselves dealing with a newly awakened internal edge, one that can cut. The lived experience of the border had been significantly modified in the wake of the cessation of violence in the 1990s. Crossing the border before peace meant crossing a militarized checkpoint, and the end of violence meant a quieting of the noise of securitization around the border. As the border persisted into the twenty-first century, its edges were blurred by cross-border cooperation as well as an end to armed checkpoints. It is a peculiar fact of this particular boundary that stability brings about fluidity: the more secure this border is (and was), geopolitically, the less it intrudes on peoples' lives and lived experience, in the aforementioned process of "debordering" (McCall). This of course applies only to those who hold British or Irish/ EU passports and for whom ease of travel between the two islands has been a norm since the establishment of the common travel area in 1922; I note that migrants and refugees may have very different experiences of this and other European borders.

The tragedy of the current destabilization is made all the more visible if we refer to commentary on the border in the wake of the end of conflict. John Coakley and Liam O'Dowd, writing in 2007, observed that the border was "much more securely embedded than ever before". Its existence was fully confirmed by the British and Irish governments and that stability led to an increase in the volume of cross-border activities (882).[3] They were optimistic in their assessment, suggesting that "this pattern is likely to intensify further, with even prominent figures from a unionist background extolling the virtues of cross-border cooperation, especially as regards the economy" (ibid.). This was of course roughly ten years before the Brexit referendum.

If the border has been resharpened, it is notable that it is artists who are among those exploring its edge, and using Beckett to do so. The artists and their works analysed above engaged with the geographic illogicality of the border, itself a product of colonial spatial ordering, and argued for the impossibility of stitching its lengths into one coherent narrative. The border as witnessed through the lens of these artworks is multifaceted, constantly defying monochromatic thinking about lines on maps, and demanding embodied engagement with an otherwise abstract separatrix: ' / '. Its unresolved epistemologies are perhaps what makes this site so apt for staging Beckett's work. The cultural dislocations of Beckett's mature work resonate readily with its spectrality. The oblique nature of the politics of the work, its resistance to easy co-option by narratives of nation, home and belonging, prepares it to sit—uneasily and unfinished—on the ' / ' of the border site. Lacy and Smyth took the project one step further, unfolding the lived realities of dwelling in the ' / ', then bodying these lived realities to the political centre stage. It is this aspect of this community-collaborative project that necessarily offers more literal (and political) impact than the Beckett-related aesthetic and theatrical events at the border. What is clear however is that Beckett, with his biographical and artistic affinity for processes of dislocation and disidentification, has presented a compelling resource for attempts to navigate the senselessness of Ireland's internal border.

These projects commit themselves to embodied geographical practices, an epistemology of the border grounded in bodily experience which creates a record, a documentary instance of marking the border's edge, which is at the same time a recognition of the failure to encompass the border in its totality. Indeed, *Across and In-Between* blurred and erased the border even as it marks it. In spite of their differences in aesthetic means, each project, including Carr's walking project and its resultant publication, has invested in "interrogating a line", as Lacy articulates about *Across and In-Between*. These artworks point to the fundamental intangible spectrality of the border when measured against the body but suggest that putting bodies on the edge is one of the ways through which we might come to critical border consciousness, an embodied limology redrawing our cultural and political lines from the margins and in defiance of the binaries wrought by the violence of bordering.

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[3] These include cooperation around the provision of services, amenities and infrastructure for local communities, as well investment in various projects from business and infrastructure to communities and arts-based work. Investment comes from both British and Irish government sources.

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