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(Un)real City: Spatial and Temporal Ghosting in ANU Productions' *The Party to End All Parties*

https://doi.org/10.1515/jcde-2023-0003

Abstract: As COVID-19-related closures affected theatre and performance venues worldwide, the question of how theatrical practices might be adapted to these new circumstances became particularly pertinent in the context of immersive theatre and site-specific performance, forms which heavily draw on the audience's experiential encounter with site and performers for its process of meaning-making. Focussing on ANU Productions' *The Party to End All Parties* (2020) as a hybrid form of site-specific pandemic theatre set in the cityscape of Dublin, this article investigates how the production translated the "host/ghost" relationship as a central aspect of site-specific theatre to the virtual realm. It demonstrates how this notion is transformed into a thematic thread woven into the performance, arguing that it engages with the host/ghost relationship through spatial as well as temporal "ghosting," which blurs the lines between the contemporary setting of lockdown Dublin and the historical landmark of O'Connell Bridge as a site inextricably connected to the emergence of Ireland as a republic. At the same time, this notion is explored through the connections between presence and absence, visibility and invisibility (or, indeed, spectrality) in the three characters' personal journeys.

Keywords: pandemic theatre, site-specific theatre, digital theatre, audience engagement, host/ghost relationship, ANU Productions, *The Party to End All Parties*

In her memoir *Walk through Walls*, Marina Abramović recollects a performance of *Rhythm 10* (1973), a piece in which she spread out her fingers on a table and proceeded to stab in between them with a sharp knife, increasing the pace until she drew blood:

> The crowd stared, dead silent. And a very strange feeling came over me, something I had never dreamed of: It was as if electricity was running through my body, and the audience and I had become one. A single organism. The sense of danger in the room had united the onlookers and me in that moment: the here and now, and nowhere else. [. . .] There on the gymnasium floor of Melville College in Edinburgh, Scotland, it was as if I had become, at the same time, a receiver and transmitter of huge, Tesla-like energy. (60)

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Abramović's visceral description of the "electricity" and "Tesla-like energy" exchanged between performer and audience as well as her locating the performance in "the here and now [. . .] in Edinburgh, Scotland" implicitly address central aspects of long-standing scholarly debates surrounding the question of liveness and the ontology of theatre and performance (Auslander, "Digital Liveness" and *Liveness*; Phelan; Meyer-Dinkgräfe; Couldry; Dixon, especially chapter 6). As theatremakers attempted to find ever-new ways of translating the energy and connection between performer and audience to the virtual realm in the past three years owing to COVID-19-related closures of theatres and performance spaces, this topic has garnered renewed academic interest (Fuchs; Chatzichristodoulou et al.; Aebischer; Liedke and Pietrzak-Franger; Bay-Cheng). Chatzichristodoulou et al. note that "Digital practices, which used to belong to the fringes of performance experimentation, seeped into the mainstream, informing the very nature of theatre and performance as we know it" (2). As the pandemic affected theatres worldwide, the question of how theatrical practices might be adapted to these new circumstances became particularly relevant in the context of immersive theatre and site-specific performance, which relies on "live(d), *praesent* experience" (Machon, "Spectatorship" 46). Josephine Machon employs the term *praesent* to mean "the interactor's physical body responding within an imaginative environment" (46), stressing the importance of "Embodied attention through sensual interaction" (41) for immersive theatre. At the same time, the term can be read as an implied congruence between temporal as well as spatial co-presence. With the pivoting to digital and hybrid forms of theatre, the non-negotiability of this aspect as a defining feature of immersive or site-specific theatre and performance was increasingly challenged, as alternative forms of audience engagement were developed both out of necessity and out of a renewed sense of innovation. However, calls for a more flexible understanding of presence and liveness have been underway even before this time, especially in connection with questions surrounding technological mediatisation. James Frieze, for example, notes that "Contemporary participatory performance tends [. . .] to trouble this romantic view of the honest, unmediated body because it challenges the boundaries of the body via technological means, so that mediation is impossible to deny" (7). Questions surrounding the ontology of performance gained traction in the context of site-specific theatre and performance developed during the pandemic, of which ANU Productions' *The Party to End All Parties* (2020) – set in the urban space of lockdown Dublin – will serve as a case in point.

With the city becoming a contested – often restricted or altogether forbidden – space during pandemic lockdowns, theatre performances increasingly encroached on the domestic sphere, with both performers and audiences occupying isolated, confined, boxed-in virtual spaces on Zoom. Living rooms, offices, kitchens, bedrooms, and outdoor spaces replaced traditional theatre venues and performance

sites, as cities could only be evoked discursively, in a collective imaginary, when audience members were typically asked where they were "tuning in" from before the start of an online performance. In an interesting twist, the domestic sphere is notably absent in *The Party to End All Parties*, which was originally developed as an in-person site-specific experience at O'Connell Bridge, Dublin, and then transformed into a livestream during the pandemic. With the city of Dublin taking centre stage in this production, it is the domestic which is absent in terms of the setting and which is constructed discursively through the three characters' monologues, while the performance's overall setting is firmly located on and around O'Connell Bridge, with one character also entering an office space in the first scene.

While the central themes of the performance revolve around the protagonists' individual challenges and issues, not all of which are directly related to the pandemic, the realities of lockdown Dublin are acknowledged primarily in its staging. As opposed to the description of O'Connell Street as the fast-beating "HEART OF THE HIBERNIAN METROPOLIS" (96) in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), *The Party to End All Parties* portrays its characters as solitary figures in the city, exemplifying the forced individualization and lack of possibilities for gathering in lockdown Dublin on the one hand and highlighting their personal and intimate journeys on the other. At the same time, their monologues – both implicitly and explicitly – engage with the political aspects of (in)visibility and inequality as well as exclusionary practices and precarity in urban spaces, which were exacerbated by the pandemic (Waldron). In the absence of physical co-presence, Dublin becomes an urban setting that simultaneously seems to portray the "despair *of* an urban space in the time of Covid" (Clarke; emphasis added) and invite a despair *for* the city, a nostalgia for urban crowds and community. Several reviews mention the "sublime environment" and "spectacularly beautiful cityscape" (McCormack) in *The Party to End All Parties*, while social media posts relating to the performance often express a sense of longing to be in the "here and now" of Dublin ("missed Dublin a lot," Barry).

In an interview with Alan O'Riordan in the *Irish Examiner*, Louise Lowe, co-founder and theatre director of ANU Productions – a company well-known for their immersive and site-specific performances in locations that are imbued with historical significance –,[1] discusses the pandemic as an invitation "to consider ourselves again in terms of [. . .] our connection to the city, to ourselves, to the here and now." While Lowe employs the term *here and now* on a more general level than Abra-

1 For a detailed exploration of ANU Productions' award-winning *Monto Cycle* (2010–2014), see Singleton. On the historical contexts of "Magdalene history and Irish social history" (65) in *Laundry* (2011), including a range of production photographs, see Haughton, "From Laundries to Labour Camps" and *Staging Trauma* (117–159). On the post-Celtic Tiger contexts of *The Boys of Foley Street* (2012), see Hill. On ANU Productions in connection with "Ireland's haunted politics of performance" (359), see Little.

mović, as a term that encompasses the pandemic situation in 2020 at large, the critical inquiry of the *here and now* constitutes a central reference point of this production, in which the pr(a)esent moment of lockdown Dublin is infused with reverberations of the past, with Irish history and cultural memory functioning as ghostly presences that seep into the contemporary moment.

The Party to End All Parties was originally developed as an in-person site-specific performance as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival 2020. However, when the festival was forced to move online because of COVID-19-related restrictions to the arts sector and the everyday lives of the country's population, the performance was reconfigured. At first, it was limited to an onsite audience of two members per "journey," and eventually, it was turned into a livestream with no spatially co-present audience. The performance follows three characters, played by actors Nandi Bhebhe, Niamh McCann, and Robbie O'Connor on their "very personal journey[s]" (ANU Productions) around O'Connell Bridge and environs during Level-3 lockdown.[2] Two performances, each about twenty minutes long and differing in terms of specific details but following the same characters, were livestreamed via YouTube and Facebook Live as well as the national broadcaster RTÉ Culture on 8 October 2020, at 5 and 7 pm respectively. Focussing on moments of transformation and of crisis both personal and historical, *The Party to End All Parties* combines the historical setting of O'Connell Bridge, in the heart of Dublin, with the challenges of three twenty-first-century Dubliners living through the pandemic.

Focussing on *The Party to End All Parties* as a hybrid form of site-specific pandemic theatre, this article investigates how the production translated the here and now of lockdown Dublin into the virtual realm. It explores how "the host/ghost relationship" (Tompkins 7), commonly identified as a central aspect of site-specific theatre, is transformed into a thematic thread woven into the performance in the absence of the possibility to physically experience the urban site. In this, it takes up Joanne Tompkins's call to investigate how the notion of host/ghost "can be rethought for twenty-first-century versions of the form" (9). Tompkins notes that the increasing use of "multimedia (whether presented through film/video or other intermedial forms) does not replace 'site,'" but that it "can significantly challenge the ways in which 'site' is configured, including introducing further ways in which the host can itself be echoed, replicated, or 'ghosted.'" While the characters do acknowledge the virtual spectator on several occasions, one of them being O'Connor's character stating, "I can see you up there in the window and I saw you see me" and asking them to meet him at the bridge (*Journey 2* 15:45–16:22), the fact that the per-

2 The implications of the lockdown – which included a ban on "social or family gatherings" and only allowed essential travel within counties – are summarised in McGee, Leahy, and Clarke.

formance is technologically mediated is not thematised explicitly. The actors play to the virtual audience as if they were present in the same space. Nevertheless, *The Party to End All Parties* participates in such further questioning and destabilizing of the boundaries between host and ghost – summarized by Mike Pearson (after Cliff McLucas) as "the coexistence and overlay of two basic sets of architectures: those of the extant building or what he called the *host*, that which is *at* site – and those of the constructed scenography and performance, or the *ghost*, that which is temporarily brought *to* site" (70). Mimicking the troubles of our relationship to both time and space during the pandemic (Holman and Grisham 63), the performance introduces both a spatial and a temporal sense of "ghosting" by blurring the lines between the contemporary setting of Dublin under lockdown and the historical landmark of O'Connell Bridge as a site invariably connected to the emergence of Ireland as a republic. In addition, the host/ghost relationship is explored through the connections between presence and absence, visibility and invisibility (or, indeed, spectrality) in the cityscape of Dublin on a thematic level. In both contexts, "ghosting" occurs on several levels, with the contemporary cityscape metaphorically overlapping – not unlike a palimpsestic trace of text that bleeds through the page – with the historical site of O'Connell Bridge, as the characters' stories, life events, and journeys similarly seep into each other, creating a web of interconnected threads of a ghostly network. The city of Dublin thus becomes, in an aporetic sense, both real and – in the words of T.S. Eliot – "unreal," as present and past are mingled. Not unlike the ghostly "crowd [that] flowed over London Bridge" (65) in *The Waste Land* (1922) (albeit the central theme of "death" is not taken up in the same way), the history of O''Connell Bridge seems to haunt *The Party to End All Parties* as the momentous historical moment of 18 April 1949 leaks into the contemporary performance via broadcasts and soundscapes on several occasions.

The Party to End All Parties was inspired by a photograph of O'Connell Bridge on 18 April 1949 depicting a large crowd gathered on the day of the Republic of Ireland Act ("From the Archives"), when Ireland officially became a republic. The image forms a central part of the performance's promotion materials (ANU Productions; Clarke). However, the restrictions in place in October 2020 (which precluded larger gatherings) made it impossible to stage an elaborate "party" that would replicate the exuberance and crowdedness transported in that image as well as the radio broadcast that the performance recurs to on several occasions.[3] The irony of this situation was not lost on Lowe, who discussed the repercussions of the lock-

3 The broadcast details people in the crowd "faint[ing]" – presumably with excitement – on O'Connell Bridge (*Journey 1* 14:38), as well as "breaking the cordon around the guns" (11:55–11:59).

down specifically for her imagining of the performance's location in the Dublin cityscape:

> You just could not imagine a city now looking like that, and we don't know when we will see that kind of mass gathering again in Dublin. So, we've stood back a little. We're trying to keep the intimacy and communion with our audiences, and we took a lot of inspiration from the city now. The piece is set in contemporary time, but it jumps back to April 1949. (O'Riordan)

In *The Party to End All Parties*, the city of Dublin – in particular, O'Connell Bridge as an historical landmark – thus functions as a contemporary urban setting, showcasing the realities of living under lockdown and, at the same time, as a public site infused with momentous historical significance. The idea of jumping "back to April 1949" in Lowe's interview also alludes to the ghostly overlaying of the present moment with the past. Rather than being a "nightmare" from which Stephen Dedalus is famously "trying to awake" (28) in *Ulysses*, the history of Dublin and the image of a crowded O'Connell Bridge in April 1949 now stand in for a (temporarily) unavailable utopia inscribed on the site. In terms of the staging and mediatisation of the performance, the audience members almost become "ghosts in the machine," as they are invisible to the performers and entirely unable to interact with them during the performance as such, although it was possible to use the chat function on YouTube and Facebook Live to communicate with each other. While the performance thus does contribute to the process of "activating memories, enabling places to tell a variety of stories, and permitting the past to resonate in the present" (McAuley 28), the performance showcases the impossibility of re-enacting or artistically replicating the crowds on O'Connell Bridge in 1949 in a pandemic setting. The "party" in the title gains an ironic poignancy given the circumstances, turning into a (temporary) wake for social gatherings and the "expectant crowds throng[ing] the streets of Dublin," which "gathered tonight on the Bridge O'Connell and lined the quayside" (*Journey 1* 11:19–11:23) evoked in the broadcasts.

Rather than a clearly outlined, linear plot in an Aristotelean sense, the journeys of the three protagonists are presented as fragmentary, impressionistic narratives, intercutting and blending into each other on several occasions. In terms of the overall content, the two journeys are almost identical, differing only in smaller details. Both open with a focus on Bhebhe's character Izzy, contain a brief interlude with O'Connor's character (whose name we do not learn) listening to a missed voicemail, and then move on to a voiceover of McCann's character Annie, who is standing on the quayside. The latter is intercut with a scene in which we follow Izzy along the quays; she is conducting a survey relating to the potential abolishing of Summer Time. During this, she is accosted by a passerby asking her to wear a mask and get off the street, as well as a brief scene in which O'Connor's character is speaking directly to the viewer, asking them to meet him at O'Connell Bridge. Several scenes

are interposed with brief snapshots of Izzy dancing on Ha'penny Bridge, during which a voiceover can be heard. The main difference between the two journeys is that the final part of *Journey 1* focusses on Annie, while the final minutes of *Journey 2* are devoted to O'Connor's character. The last few minutes of *Journey 2* are verbatim repetitions of *Journey 1* (*Journey 2* 30:54–33:26), but the main conflict of the character is quite different from both Annie's and Izzy's.

The first "journey" was livestreamed at 5 pm, with the last rays of sunshine still visible and the first character, Izzy, standing outside an office along the Dublin quays and talking on the phone to an unknown caller. The absence of the interlocutor's voice, with only Izzy's part of the dialogue perceivable (though not always easy to understand because of the noise coming from traffic in the streets) places a strong focus on the individual – even solitary – character. This focus is strengthened through the cinematic technique of close-up, which – together with shallow focus – can be seen as a key aspect of the staging (or, in this hybrid form, of cinematography) throughout the performance.[4] Izzy appears agitated, telling the (invisible) interlocutor that working for the company which she is about to enter – and which we later learn is called "Ballast" – feels to her "like being fucking invisible" (*Journey 1* 03:58–04:26) and that despite the company priding itself on bio-diversity, they did not cast "one half-glance" in her direction or ask for her opinion, implying that she is an expert on the subject but is unsatisfied with her current position at Ballast, which is mainly limited to "fieldwork" (*Journey 2* 04:46–04:48). Telling the interlocutor that she is "sick of smiling" and "about to blow" (*Journey 1* 04:29–04:54), Izzy enters a dark corridor and stairway that lead to an urban, modern-looking office space.

In the interior of the Ballast office, the old and the new collide symbolically from the start, with an old stairway opening up to a modern, clean, almost futuristic office space made of black and white interior and a large desk on which store-bought pastries and coffee can be seen – the epitome of hectic business life in the metropolis, in which beverages and snacks are presumably consumed on the go, between or during other tasks. As the virtual audience, we are led through the site via a point-of-view shot from a spectator's perspective. As we enter the office space, a large flat-screen television can be seen in the corner, on which a loud advertisement reel for the company is playing. The advertisement opens in a crowded shopping street, with consumers milling around the urban space to a soundtrack of upbeat, hopeful background music. The ad subsequently starts taking up an increasing amount of screen space until it eventually features in full screen, stating that the

4 In a seminal publication on pandemic theatre, *Theater of Lockdown*, Barbara Fuchs engages both with the question of "How [. . .] participatory, site-specific, or devised theater transformed under physical distancing requirements" and "how [. . .] digital forms blur the line between theater and film" (2).

company aims to "bring [. . .] together the best and brightest leaders" and promising the consumer that with their help, they will "not just adapt, but thrive" in an implicitly post-pandemic world. The pandemic is thus reframed as an opportunity to reevaluate and potentially jettison old habits and become (even) more productive, emerging "smarter, stronger together" (*Journey 1* 06:21–07:01). The language used ("stronger together," "we will build and shape the next great city"), combined with its heroic, melodramatic soundtrack, highlights (and at the same time, uses as a selling point) a utopian sense of a technologically aided urban community in the envisioned (hyper)modern futuristic cityscape. Establishing a link to Dublin's cultural history, the clip first pans over Samuel Beckett Bridge and a few seconds later repurposes the opening lines of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (1939) as an advertising slogan: "Running past Adam and Eve's Church, from the swerve of shore to the bend of the bay, past Howth Castle and environs, the landscape has certainly changed and will. But the Liffey stays. The lifeblood of our city" (*Journey 1* 07:11–07:26).[5] Joyce's "commodius vicus" (3) is here superseded by commodification and a capitalising on the author's cultural clout. At the same time, the intertextual reference to *Finnegans Wake* introduces a sense of "textual haunting" (Wolfreys 69) as the literary text appears to bleed into the contemporary advertisement, activating thematic connections. One key aspect of Joyce's text that seems to reverberate in this scene is the personification of the river Liffey in the character of "Anna Livia Plurabelle," which Izzy also seems to inhabit in the subsequent dance scene.[6] The Liffey, as a "river" that "runs" through Dublin, acting as a connection between its different parts, is here likened to the metaphorical "lifeblood" of the city, a pulse that keeps the "HEART OF THE HIBERNIAN METROPOLIS" beating and that constitutes a central part of the networked cityscape.[7] The intertextual reference to *Finnegans Wake* is furthermore noteworthy because the text famously ends and begins mid-sentence (3, 626), creating a textual loop that exemplifies the endless flow of the Liffey, symbolising what Lowe in the above-mentioned interview terms "circular temporality" (O'Riordan).[8] The notion that Anna Livia Plurabelle – as a stand-in for the Liffey –

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5 The beginning of *Finnegans Wake*, in turn, reads: "riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs" (3).

6 Joyce as a canonical Irish writer famously appears as a literal ghost (alongside Samuel Beckett and W.B. Yeats) in Kevin Barry's *The Apparitions* (2012).

7 Joyce's likening of the cityscape to the vital body part of the "heart" in the "Aeolus" chapter of *Ulysses* is, in turn, reminiscent of Thomas de Quincey's comparison of the English Mail Coach to "a perfection of harmony like that of heart, veins, and arteries, in a healthy animal organization" (485).

8 In *The Measureless Time of Joyce, Deleuze and Derrida*, Ruben Borg explores the connection between Giambattista Vico's cyclical view of history and the "force of measureless passing" (170) in *Finnegans Wake*.

“dies into a new beginning” (Deane xxxix) as well as the text’s circular temporality have several ramifications for *The Party to End All Parties*: on the one hand, they highlight the performance’s central focus on time and temporality. On the other hand, they can be read as a potentially ironic commentary on the advertisement, which promises a new and better (re-)beginning and implicit rejuvenation and optimisation of the city post-pandemic.

Eventually, Izzy becomes frustrated, turning off the advertisement mid-sentence and starting to dance to a soundtrack that combines (stylized) church bells, the sound of traffic – the loud noise and occasional swearing intruding upon the calm, agreeable office space – and wave-like sounds that symbolize the Liffey (*Journey 1* 07:33–11:30). The soundscape encapsulates the different aspects of city life in this part of Dublin in particular, where nature and the urban intersect in striking ways – the quays constituting bustling streets with a great deal of traffic, and yet being architecturally very close to the river, as a representative of the eternal flow of nature. Izzy dances around the room, increasing the pace, as the office space symbolically merges with the imagined river via the soundtrack. At first, the character seems to be “caught up in the agonised pull and push of the city” (O’Rourke) as well as the Liffey, and moves almost involuntarily across the space – indeed, as if being possessed. However, she then manages to capture its force and use it deliberately, finding her own rhythm and breaking the unwritten rules of office decorum, which comes with a little smile on Izzy’s part. The scene ends with gunshots, Izzy’s dance movements indicating that she has been hit by them, before the shots turn into fireworks that are interlaced with the voiceover of a broadcast describing the crowd gathered expectantly on O’Connell Bridge on 18 April 1949. With the voiceover accompanied by gunshots and then fireworks, the past violently intrudes into the present, perhaps as a comment on the bloody history of the fight for Irish independence that may at the same time be connected to modern-day police brutality. As Chris McCormack notes: “Carl Kennedy’s excellent sound design not only evokes the destructive rise of sea levels, it also allows for the horror of Bhebhe’s black woman getting shot by gunfire, the blasts blurring into the firework recordings of the April 1949 celebrations on the night Ireland became a Republic.” In this sense, the ambivalent history of O’Connell Bridge and environs (the famous General Post Office on O’Connell Street constituting a central location of the Easter Rising in 1916 and the place of surrender to British forces by Pádraig Pearse) ineluctably haunts the present-day performance in several ways.

This opening scene is also noteworthy in terms of the relationship between the performers and the audience, as Izzy speaks directly to the viewer, acknowledging their (invisible) presence and gaze when she apologises for interrupting and, in this way, establishes a bond between them. At the same time, this comment positions the audience as unwitting potential consumers at whom the advertisement is directed,

who may be complicit in its implied capitalist drive towards productivity in times of crisis. In a review of the performance, Chris O'Rourke comments on the (virtual) spectator as an important part of the performance when he describes *The Party to End All Parties* as "An exploration of Dublin and of time, and of Dublin in this time, a cast of three – *four, arguably, if you include the silent spectator*, five if you include the city and its residences, or six if you include a photo bombing seagull" (emphasis added). A similar sentiment is echoed in McCann's comment on "the essential connection with the viewer" and her notion of "the audience [as] the scene partner" (O'Riordan). The spectator's gaze is addressed on several occasions, one of the most important revolving around Izzy's feeling "invisible," with which the performance starts. At a later point, Izzy – now sporting a blue high-visibility vest (which could be seen as an ironic comment on her not feeling seen) and walking first beside and then in front of the camera, along the quays (*Journey 2* 20:10–20:31) – is carrying out a survey on sentiments towards abandoning the distinction between Summer and Winter Time among passersby, looking straight at the camera and mentioning that she "saw [us] upstairs" (*Journey 2* 17:50). The character asks about the audience's "opinion about time, how caught up on time [we] are" (17:50–17:56), staying professional and friendly throughout the interview, but eventually growing frustrated and annoyed with this task. As in the opening scene, Izzy's lack of visibility and the systemic inequality and implied racism that she has likely endured as a Person of Colour lead to a strongly worded statement that highlights the urgency of the matter and her desperation and/or frustration, with her exclaiming: "I'd like not to have to bend to breaking point before I'm fucking noticed, d'you know?" (19:47–19:52). Eventually, Izzy throws the clipboard in the trash, asking us, frustratedly: "But you see me . . . right?" (20:11). At this point, however, the camera starts moving away from Bhebhe (and towards O'Connor), and as the audience, we have no choice but to follow along with it, unable to offer words of support or to acknowledge Izzy's presence, as she indeed starts disappearing and – from our limited point of view of mediatised spectatorship – becomes "invisible" for the remainder of the performance (until we encounter her anew in *Journey 2*). Her plotline and existential angst remain unresolved.[9] The first scene of Izzy's story thus focusses on her work environment and the professional, urban indoor office setting that overlooks the Dublin quayside and in which the city is primarily present virtually, in the advertisement

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9 This final scene with Izzy is one of the few in which the lack of physical co-presence and the limitations of the mediatised performance make themselves felt. As audience members, we are forced to "abandon" her and thus become complicit in her vanishing presence and disappearance from view, even though we might have reacted differently in a face-to-face situation. In a sense, the character, in the end, does become a ghostly presence, leaving a lasting impression of the urgency of representation and visibility of BIPOC in all aspects of life.

which promises a “brighter, smarter” future and a rebuilding of the city after the pandemic. The second time the audience encounters Izzy, we are moving alongside her on the quayside, become part of her fieldwork, and observe her frustration at the lack of visibility that she is experiencing in her professional life (and presumably, beyond) and the verbal abuse that she is subjected to by a (seemingly) random passerby in the city.

In the context of (in)visibility, it does not seem to be a coincidence that Izzy’s scene is interrupted by a beckoning from O’Connor’s character – a white, male (presenting) character wearing a neon-yellow high-visibility vest (in contrast to the rather muted colours of both Izzy’s and Annie’s costumes). At the same time, the scene importantly foregrounds a character whom we can deduce to be a utility worker, a part of the population that is highly visible in the city because of their work clothes, but whose vital work for the development of the city often remains invisible or unacknowledged and who are not seldom employed on particularly contingent and precarious contracts, an issue that was exacerbated during the pandemic in particular. The vest bears the words “DUBLIN CLEAN CO” (*Journey 2* 20:15), the character carrying the city’s signifier on his body and metaphorically being enveloped by it. The character is introduced by way of a voiceover in the form of an interior monologue (perhaps as an homage to the modernist and “neomodernist” strand of Irish literature from Joyce to Eimear McBride). His journey is presented in a particularly fragmentary style through short, often disjointed glimpses into his life that do not add up to an entirely coherent whole. As he is standing on a traffic island in the midst of a busy Dublin street (*Journey 2* 21:42), the audience learns that his struggles appear to revolve around a custody battle at Dolphin House court as well as a sense of being haunted by his past actions that took place on O’Connell Bridge. From a missed phone call and a voice message, it transpires that the character has failed to show up in court (15:43–15:49), which has ruled in his absence (26:00), and that his apprehension with regard to attending the proceedings may be related to a potential prior sentence in the context of a brawl on O’Connell Street. He likens the crowd, which he was a part of during an event that is not described in closer detail, to a “wave” and a “rush” (27:41) that “pushes [him] forward” (28:15). In this context, looking directly at the camera with a regretful expression, the character explicitly evokes the idea of haunting:

> at that moment [. . .] the next happens that’s come back to haunt me: I push and his face meets that fence and . . . I push, he stumbles. Staggers. I use this to land one . . . punch, knowing full well that as it connects, there’s no going back and fate is playing out just like it did in 2006. [*Turns away, looking at the crossing*] (28:21–28:56)

Highlighting the difficulties of arriving at a final interpretation of the story in O’Connor’s storyline in particular, McCormack tentatively suggests a potential his-

torical parallel: "There are references to clashes on O'Connell Street, and of being outraged by what happened to someone named Terence. Could this be the Sinn Féin hunger striker Terence McSwiney? Are these episodes from the revolutionary period 100 years ago? It's difficult to know for sure." This interpretation could further be supported by the character's mentioning of "anger for Orangemen marching down the road" (27:56) but this parallel is then not developed further. While the potential parallel to the revolutionary period would introduce yet another fascinating facet, the simultaneous imaginary overlaying of present-day Dublin and the character's feeling of being trapped by the consequences of his past actions already indicate an intertwining of present and past timelines and a sense of temporal and spatial "ghosting" that can also be observed in other parts of the performance. Throughout the scene, shallow focus is used, which highlights the overall emphasis on solitary characters in the metropolitan cityscape. Additionally, this cinematographic technique demonstrates that the character is so bound up in his own worries and issues that he is not able to take in the city in full or interact with others. In the scenes of O'Connor's character, then, the city of Dublin and the area around O'Connell Street take on an ambivalent quality, functioning both as a relatively neutral space in the sense of being his workplace and as a reminder of a fateful night in the past that has severe consequences for the present and that haunts the character to this day.

In all three monologues, issues of (non)presence and (in)visibility as well as temporal and spatial ghosting are taken up repeatedly. In the scenes involving McCann's character, Annie, a social worker at Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE), the idea is taken up in connection with an asylum seeker who is expected to stay invisible to his neighbours at Staycity apartments.[10] We first encounter Annie standing at the quays, close to O'Connell Bridge, looking at the water. The audience is given an insight into her mind by way of voiceover, close-ups, and shallow focus, which contribute to the intimate atmosphere of the scene (*Journey 1* 12:30–13:18). As opposed to the hectic traffic and noise of the previous scenes, the scene in which we encounter her for the first time is characterized by calmness, underlining her comment that "looking at the water is strangely peaceful" in a moment of personal crisis ("this undoing of my life," 12:43). Much like *Finnegans Wake*, this crisis at the same time seems to lead to a new beginning ("this finding of meself," 12:45). McCann's character notes that she has been "stood stock-still for the past hour" (12:57), caught in a state of "indecision" (13:02) and inaction, which she sees as "the most important decision" she has ever made (13:05). In some contrast to

10 These serviced apartments were sourced as accommodation for the homeless as well as Direct Provision services during the pandemic (Holland).

Izzy, whose costume consists of a mix of formal trousers and a more casual jean jacket, and O'Connor's character, who sports a neon-yellow high-visibility jacket, Annie is wearing muted colours, a light grey coat and business attire, which similarly highlight the atmosphere of stillness and the (alleged) level-headedness of her character. The monologue is soon interspersed with a broadcast announcing the Republic of Ireland Act of 1949, as the camera pans over the water. The enthusiasm of the announcement ("The cheers of the watching thousands break out afresh," *Journey 2* 14:12) creates a stark contrast to Annie's personal situation and once again two temporalities – the past and the present – are fused in a single moment.

We learn that the character has repeatedly been asked to pick up her husband from St Patrick's Hospital (*Journey 1* 14:08–14:16) but has not done so yet. The missed and ignored phone calls and voicemail messages[11] – in some way, a "ghosting" in the contemporary sense of disappearing from a conversation and/or another person's life unexpectedly – highlight the theme of miscommunication and a lack of synchronous connection and physical co-presence, the urgency in the voices of the invisible interlocutors haunting the characters, who are unable or unwilling to confront them.

Looking out onto the water, Annie observes: "The water moves. But I don't" (14:20), as the voiceover is again overlaid by the 1949 broadcast and shouts of "Up the Republic" (14:25–14:43). O'Connell Bridge then comes into focus, acting as a link between the two realities. The history of the site thus once again impinges on the present, creating a discrepancy between the celebrations and cheering of the crowd in historic Dublin and the introspective, solitary, immobile, "stock-still" figure of Annie in contemporary lockdown Dublin. The mentioning of "open-air ceilidhs" (14:39) as part of the celebrations additionally highlights this contrast, alluding to dancing and festivities that constituted an unreachable utopian ideal during the prolonged lockdown at the time the performance was staged. The ceilidhs of the 1949 celebrations are, however, connected to the present moment in yet another way, as Izzy can be seen dancing on Ha'penny Bridge a few seconds later. The dance scenes show that only individual, solitary dancing could take place during the pandemic, and at the same time, they serve as an assertion of presence for Bhebhe's character: in voiceovers that are intercut with the short dance scenes, she states: "I know there is more . . . this city [. . .]. It's getting too much and I just . . . Can I just stretch out, take up space? Not get away, but get in – to meself" (*Journey 2* 15:10). As with Annie, Izzy's journey is both an asserting of presence in the here and now of

11 Miscommunication can similarly be observed in O'Connor's character's scenes (*Journey 1* 15:43–15:49).

Dublin in the present moment, and at the same time an inward journey, a journey of better understanding and finding oneself.

When the audience encounters Annie for the second time, the camera is moving towards her (*Journey 1* 21:22) until the spectator seems to be standing beside her on O'Connell Bridge at a rather intimate proximity that resembles friends meeting up for a chat outside during the pandemic. Through an eye-level shot (21:49), we see Annie's upper body and face as she is looking directly at the camera and, by extension, at us, the audience. We learn about her husband's implied struggle with alcoholism and that she was supposed to pick him up from (presumably) a rehab clinic the afternoon before (22:41–23:15). She was instead called to a "situation" at Staycity involving a "transgression on the balcony" (23:26) in her professional role as social worker. The story picks up on the central issue of invisibility and presence when Annie relates the story of the incident: a young asylum seeker went out onto the balcony because he "needed air" (25:30), which was perceived as an affront by other residents. As Annie notes: "he's not allowed to use the balcony. That's part of the agreement with Staycity – not to be seen. Not to be . . ." (27:39). In this instance, the city of Dublin and its DHRE services serve as "hosts" in the literal sense, offering a temporary place to stay, while, however, demanding that the inhabitants of Staycity remain invisible, ghosts in a legal purgatory. In both this case and in Izzy's scenes, the question of presence and (in)visibility assumes a political dimension, implicitly commenting on exclusionary practices in urban spaces and exposing the "ways in which site-specific performance is tied up with contemporary urban development" (McKinnie 23).

As Annie's monologue continues, it is implied that the social worker may have started an affair with the asylum seeker, while assuring the audience that she has "never done anything like this before, I swear to God" (29:10–29:17). Asking them to "Look at me," Annie stresses her respectability as "a forty-three-year-old professional, upstanding . . . [*nods and smiles slightly, shakes her head*]" (29:25–29:28), implicitly seeking understanding from them. Both the imperative "Look at me" and Annie's tearful statement, "I was still here," after she seems to have been laid off ("20,000 Euro ex gratia to wipe me away," 30:47) and still later, "I am still here. I was still . . . I am. [*Nods while looking directly into the camera*] I . . . [*nods*]" address questions of presence and visibility and implicate the spectator as a witness from whom she is seeking reassurance. Towards the end of Annie's monologue, which in the case of *Journey 1* also constitutes the end of the performance,[12] the character once again turns directly to the camera (and thus to the implied audience), asking:

12 In *Journey 2*, the final character we see is played by O'Connor.

> D'you know . . . d'you know what Joyce says was the most looked-at thing in the city? Hm? [*Nods*] Go on, have a guess. [*Smiles and nods encouragingly at the viewers*] Not now, then. [*Points to the roof of a building close by*] The Ballast ball. [. . .] Up there, holding time. Dropping every day, at 12.35 pm, to let the docks know that it's one o'clock. [*Looks into the distance*] The sun rising and setting. Twenty-five minutes and twenty-one seconds ahead of GMT here in Dublin. [*Nods*] We saw the light first. [*Nods and smiles*] Joyce said it was the . . . it was the most looked-at thing in the city because . . . because we didn't see it any more. I think about that sometimes, you know? This lost . . . twenty-five minutes and twenty-one seconds of time. Up there still, stored, for when we need it. When it matters. [*Shakes head*] I wish I had it now. [*Sighs, then smiles and turns to look at the building*] (31:20–32:51)

Annie's mentioning of the Ballast ball in this passage is particularly noteworthy for a number of reasons: firstly, it reintroduces the historical context of Dublin as a "host" and site into the present-day performance. Secondly, it highlights the discrepancy between different perceptions of time and the overlaying of the past and the present that constitutes a central feature of the performance as a whole. The incongruity between Dublin time (set by the Dunsink Observatory)[13] and Greenwich Mean Time (GMT), a standardization measure introduced in 1880, gains a special significance against the background of the historically fraught relationship between Great Britain and Ireland. Thirdly, this reference constitutes yet another connection between Annie's and Izzy's stories, as the latter works for Ballast, the company that had her conduct surveys relating to EU regulations with regard to Summer and Winter Time earlier. It thus speaks both to the "ghosting" of time in the sense of conjuring up the past in the present and, by invoking Bhebhe's character, whose eventual fate remains unknown to us, establishing a cross-connection to an earlier part of the performance and linking up the stories of two women who struggle to assert their presence and to make themselves heard and seen. Importantly, Annie does not simply call these twenty-five minutes and twenty-one seconds "lost" but also "stored" for a time "when it matters." The notion of "stored time" becomes particularly pertinent in a pandemic context, in which time was seemingly on hold, with theatre performances and events but also everyday life appearing to be suspended in limbo. As a way of reclaiming "lost" time, Annie asks us to take out our phone and "set a timer" (33:15) for twenty-five minutes and twenty-one seconds, while she does the same, once again addressing the spectators directly and strengthening their connection by asking them to participate in an action that goes beyond a passive watching of the livestreamed performance:

13 In *Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom muses on this very topic in one of his interior monologues: "After one. Timeball on the ballastoffice is down. Dunsink time" (126).

> Do what you want with it [*shrugs*] – to call someone you've been meaning to, to do something you've been putting off for yourself, for right or wrong, to do what you want. [*Smiles*] The party to end all parties, whatever! [*Pause*] Right, press go. [*Smiles, walks away, turns back*] Oh, here – make sure you do something big with it. [*Nods, points at the camera, walks away*] (33:15–34:05)

In Annie's journey, the city of Dublin is centrally connected to several aspects of her ruminations: firstly, watching the Liffey flow and run its course evokes a moment of calmness in her turbulent life; secondly, the intercut broadcast of 18 April 1949, detailing the celebrations surrounding the Republic of Ireland Act on the very bridge that Annie is looking at, creates a deliberately jarring discrepancy between her internal worries and the ebullient crowds and fireworks; thirdly, the monologue importantly highlights exclusionary practices and systemic inequalities in urban settings through the story of the unnamed asylum seeker at Staycity who was forced back into invisibility after attempting to come up for air and to temporarily escape from the confined space of his apartment. Lastly, this monologue connects the historical discrepancy between Dunsink Time and GMT to life in the present-day pandemic city, inviting the audience to participate in the performance remotely, from their own homes and time zones, in a final act of virtual – though in some sense, necessarily individualised – community.

While this livestreamed performance cannot replicate the physical co-presence that Machon and other theorists of immersive theatre consider central to the genre,[14] it does achieve a sense of what Machon calls "lasting artworks that physically remain inscribed upon the place as well as affectively within an individual's memory" (*Immersive Theatres* 23) by acknowledging the shared experience of wanting to reclaim "lost" time and engaging the audience both physically and affectively beyond the limits of the performance as such. The idea that the performance of *The Party to End All Parties* reverberates affectively beyond the approximately twenty minutes of its runtime is echoed in reviews and tweets surrounding the performance.[15] O'Rourke finds "visceral, emotional intimacy," while Helen Meany suggests that the "burning intensity" of the actors – and thus, the emotional intensity of the personal stories told – makes up for the lack of physical proximity. User Anne Maree Barry notes: "I felt immersed in the performances – I wasn't bothered that I wasn't viewing in a F2F capacity," while another similarly invokes the idea of being "Immersed through a screen" (Burke).

These individual perceptions and emotional reactions are often directly connected to an admiration of the production's staging of Dublin, with Caitríona Ní

14 See, for instance, Machon, "Spectatorship": "This live, immediate interaction, the spectator's physical body responding within an imaginative environment, is a pivotal element and thus a defining feature of immersive theatre" (36).

15 On the use of social media in the context of livecasting, in particular NT Live, see Liedke.

Mhurchú noting that it "looked just gorgeous," and McCormack even going so far as to call Lowe's "Elevati[on of] the cityscape [. . .] sublime," suggesting that "the main drama here might lie in the scenery" rather than the deliberately disjointed, fragmentary plot lines and scenes. These and similar reviews suggest that while digital forms of theatre, which place the audience "behind the safety of a screen" (O'Rourke), may not be entirely capable of physically transporting the audience into the here and now in Abramović's embodied, visceral sense, they may leave a lasting impact on its viewers on an affective level. In ANU Productions' 2020 performance, this is achieved through the insight into the intimate, personal journeys of the characters and their struggles to be seen, make themselves heard, and understood (both metaphorically and, in some cases, literally) in the urban surroundings of Dublin.

The focus on solitary, individualised characters in *The Party to End All Parties* creates a stark contrast to the repeatedly evoked crowds present on O'Connell Bridge in 1949. Rather than an exuberant festivity celebrating the Republic of Ireland Act, the production stages the isolation of individuals during lockdown in a comparatively empty cityscape with fewer passersby than can usually be encountered in this bustling part of town, an important connection between Dublin's North- and Southside. The effect of inviting the audience to participate in two separate performances, which were – for the most part – thematically similar and only differed in terms of the focus on Annie in *Journey 1* and O'Connor's character in *Journey 2* creates a sense of deliberate repetition as well as a potentially circular temporality evoked through the intertextual references to *Finnegans Wake*. In a sense, it indeed depicts "the seim anew" (*Wake* 215), imitating a pandemic sense of time suspended, with life seemingly on hold for the time being. It also speaks to the temporal and spatial "ghosting" that forms a central aspect of this performance: the host/ghost relationship, which constitutes a mainstay of site-specific theatre and performance, becomes a central theme in *The Party to End All Parties* on several levels, as the lives of contemporary characters in lockdown Dublin are intertwined with historical contexts and the cultural memory of O'Connell Bridge as a landmark. Present and past temporalities are blurred through the use of voiceover broadcasts and frequent evocations of the 18 April 1949 celebrations as the "party" turns into a temporal elegy for urban community and connection.

In *The Party to End All Parties*, the "real," present-day Dublin is transformed into an "unreal" ghost city oscillating between the past and the present, whose networks and connections promise to be rebuilt anew in a post-pandemic future. It functions as a physical, mediated urban site and "host" and, at the same time, as a "ghosted" repository imbued with Ireland's cultural memory, the characters' individual pasts, presents, and ambiguously imagined futures. Moreover, it serves as a space in which different affects – a (temporary) loss of and grief for urban community, frustration with exclusionary practices in urban settings, but also hope for the

future and the call to “do something big” with the time we have left post-pandemic – converge in often uncomfortable, yet productive ways.

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Bionote

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