Recovering: Mapping the Spatial Presence of Ghosts at an Unmarked Burial Site in County Cork, Ireland

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Abstract

This article invites readers to reflect on the unmarked Famine Graveyard on Carr's Hill, County Cork, where around 30,000 famine victims are buried, along – it is likely – with the remains of many children whose mothers were in the Bessborough Mother and Baby Home in Cork. Deep mapping provides the methodological blueprint for the exploration of this site, and the article will draw on the work of Gordon, Till and others, in its consideration of the process of deep mapping as a means of creating "the spaces and times for ghosts" (Till, 2010 p. 7). The article contextualizes the project with reference to key works in culture (visual arts, literature) and it documents the author's own mixed ethnographic and artistic research methods, which include the process of writing live on site. It argues that the inclusion of a creative non-fiction response to the site is a crucial factor in exploring its meaning, and suggests that it is this creative work, underpinned by academic scholarship, which is best-placed to offer examples of the way a present and future society can begin to engage with this liminal and still traumatic territory.

How to map the spatial presence of ghosts? This is a question raised by the liminal space of the unmarked burial site on Carr's Hill, County Cork, where around 30,000 victims from the Irish Famine are buried, along – it appears likely – with the remains of many children whose mothers were in the Bessborough Mother and Baby Home in Cork between 1922 and 1998 (O'Keeffe, 2019; Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes and Certain Related Matters,[1] 2019). This article sets out to demonstrate how and why 'deep mapping' was employed as methodology and aesthetic choice to explore the spectral traces associated with this site. Deep mapping as a practice offers a counterpoint to conventional Western mapping exercises, which have operated out of positions of surveillance, control, and the establishment of borderlines (Loeffler, 2016; Wood, 2010). Deep mapping, by contrast, presents the possibility of orientating ourselves differently across time and space (Loeffler, 2016; Biggs, 2010b; Till,

[1] The report by the Commission of Investigation (COI) into burial practices at Mother and Baby Homes in Ireland was the COI's fifth interim report and it was released in 2019. It will be referenced as COI from here on forward. The COI issued its final report in January 2021 and was dissolved in February 2021. The COI was established in 2015 by the Irish government to investigate mother and baby homes.

2010; Wood, 2010), so as to create map work that comes from a place of openness, from listening, from gentleness and fluidity, and from a commitment to the relationship with a particular place (Loeffler, 2016; Biggs, 2010b; Till, 2010; Wood, 2010). This article suggests that the practice of deep mapping is of particular consequence when it comes to attending to what Till (2010, p. 7) has termed "phantoms, stories, remnants, and submerged ways of knowing". While De Certeau, Girard, and Mayol (1998) contend that all places are haunted by ghosts, this article posits that the unmarked grave at Carr's Hill is especially unsettled, a wounded site marked by trauma and injustice. Deep mapping is thus a way of carefully engaging with such a site, and, in doing so, making space for the spectre (Till, 2010; Davis, 2005; Gordon, 2005; Derrida, 1994), and for what Casey has called the unresolved remainders of memory (Casey, 2000, p. 622).

This article will begin with an overview of the Carr's Hill burial site, which was constructed as such in 1847 during the Famine but which continued to be used as a site for Cork's poor and unclaimed dead until at least the 1940s (Hegarty & Hickey, 1996; Lynch, 2019; Mark-Fitzgerald, 2013, pp. 107–112). It is also the likely burial place of many children whose mothers were in the Bessborough Mother and Baby Home in Cork between 1922 and 1998 (O'Keeffe, 2019; COI, 2019). This overview is to gain an understanding of the site's history as a zone of transition (Till, 2010), as well as to consider its complicated significance for contemporary Irish society.

Next, the concept of deep mapping will be introduced, examining its relevance as well as its limitations as a methodology. This section also sets out to contextualise the project at hand by reference to other works in Irish culture that have engaged in forms of mapping of traumatic space. The article then introduces reflections from the beginnings of the author's own deep mapping engagement with the burial site – an engagement that includes notetaking, image-making, walking, observing, and creative writing both on and off-site.

The article concludes with a brief examination of the possibilities of creative practice-with-research, a definition that encompasses the author's own way of working, with the suggestion it is this approach (the employment of creative mapping practices underpinned by academic scholarship), which is best-placed to encourage a new spatial imaginary of the site (Jonker and Till, 2009), and offer an example of the way a present and future society can begin to engage with this liminal and unhappy territory.

The unmarked burial site at Carr's Hill, Co. Cork

The All Saint's Famine Graveyard, which sits on a hilltop off the busy N28 road, midway between the Cork city suburbs of Douglas and Carrigaline, was constructed as a burial ground in 1847, after it became clear that the nearby gravesite of St Joseph's Cemetery in Ballyphehane, Cork, would soon no longer have room for the thousands who were dying from famine in the Cork workhouse (Hegarty & Hickey, 1996; Lynch, 2019; O'Keeffe, 2019). In late 1846, the Board of Guardians of the workhouse advertised for a new burial ground and George Carr, the storekeeper of the Cork Union, successfully tendered his plot of three acres as a suitable location (Hegarty & Hickey, 1996; Lynch, 2019; Mark-Fitzgerald, 2013, pp. 107–112). The Guardians were relieved to think they had solved the problem of finding a new burial site, noting the new location "contains about 51/2 acres, is well fenced, has an abundance of surface and depth of soil and is very eligibly situated" (Hegarty & Hickey, 1996, pp. 10–11). They agreed to pay Carr a £150 entrance fee and £2.10s a year for each of the three acres on the site as well as the substantial fee of 2s 6d per corpse, with Carr transporting and burying the bodies from the workhouse beginning in February 1847 (Hegarty & Hickey, 1996; Lynch, 2019; Mark-Fitzgerald, 2013, pp. 107–112).

Problems, however, began almost immediately at the location. Residents objected to the manner in which the paupers were buried (Hegarty & Hickey, 1996; Lynch, 2019; Mark-Fitzgerald, 2013, pp. 107–112), with suggestions in local newspapers that the dead were being buried without coffins and that the site was thus a health hazard (Hegarty & Hickey, 1996). Newspaper reports were scathing, criticizing the Guardians for their ineffective management of the site, with complaints of shallow grave burials, starving dogs disinterring corpses and the terrible stench that hung over the area (Hegarty & Hickey, 1996; Mark-Fitzgerald, 2013, pp. 107–112). There were no gravestones, nor were any records maintained for the dead (Lynch, 2019). Carr defended his actions, although he did undertake to build a wall around the site to block it from public view (Hegarty & Hickey, 1996). Eventually, he ended up in court charged with creating a public nuisance (Hegarty & Hickey, 1996), and received a suspended fine of £300 on condition the graveyard be cleaned up within three months. With no other alternative site available, however, the workhouse Guardians had little choice but to continue using the grave at Carr's Hill. In response to a second advertisement for a new cemetery in August 1847, they received only two responses – the cheapest of them being from Carr. He was again awarded the contract and received a 999-year lease for the site (Hegarty & Hickey, 1996; Lynch, 2019; Mark-Fitzgerald, 2013, pp. 107–112).

The graveyard's unhappy reputation as a pauper burial ground continued long after the Famine (Hegarty & Hickey, 1996; Lynch, 2019; Mark-Fitzgerald, 2013, pp. 107–112). While it is estimated around 30,000 were buried there during the Famine years (Lynch, 2019), it was subsequently used as a site for Cork's poor and unclaimed dead – abandoned and stillborn children, and unknown individuals – until the 1940s, possibly even the 1950s (Hegarty & Hickey, 1996; Lynch, 2019; Mark-Fitzgerald, 2013, pp. 107–112), with the bodies allegedly buried only after dissection by Queen's College medical students, and then often without coffins, laid to rest instead in canvas bags (Lynch, 2019; Mark-Fitzgerald, 2013, pp. 107–112, O'Keeffe, 2019). Most Cork residents preferred to pretend the graveyard did not exist, until 1958, when local taxi driver William 'Jack' Sorenson built a 54-foot galvanized steel cross in his back garden and erected it on the site as a memorial to those buried there (Lynch, 2019; Mark-Fitzgerald, 2013, pp. 107–112). Sorenson also illuminated the cross every evening until his death in 1979 (Lynch, 2019; Mark-Fitzgerald, 2013, pp. 107–112), after which the lights were turned off for many years, due to funding problems as well as the cross's proximity to Cork airport (Hogan, 1997; Lynch, 2019). After a 20-year interlude, the cross was lit up again following repairs from the Electricity Supply Board (ESB) and a commitment to use a form of lighting satisfactory to the airport authorities (Hogan, 2000).[2] Meantime, the site was further revived in 1997 when the Cork Civic Trust and the local An Gorta Mór Famine Commemoration Committee erected a memorial stone on the site to mark the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Famine (Hogan, 1997; Lynch, 2019; Mark-Fitzgerald, 2013, pp. 107–112). Today, the An Gorta Mór Memorial Project, formed in 2017, with the aim of seeing a memorial to the Famine placed in the centre of Cork city, holds an annual Memorial Ceremony at the site; this includes prayers and blessings, speeches, poetry recitals, songs and traditional pipe laments (An Gorta Mór Memorial Project, 2020; echolive.ie, 2017).

Despite these initiatives, the Carr's Hill site remains a locus of sadness and controversy. The assumptions it had not been used as a burial site since the 1950s were thrown into doubt in 2019 following the publication of the report by the Commission of Investigation (COI) into burial practices at Mother and Baby Homes in Ireland (COI, 2019; O'Keeffe, 2019). The report, which found that it could not establish the burial place of more than 800 children who died at the Bessborough Mother and Baby Home in Cork between 1922 and 1998, identified documentary evidence indicating at least one Bessborough child, who died in St Finbarr's

[2] Subsequent to this, the lighting once again did not function for many years, but was restored one more time in 2012 by Airtricity as a result of efforts by the Cork and County Famine Group (Mark-Fitzgerald, 2013, pp. 107-112; McMahon, 2011). The Group now goes under the name of the An Gorta Mór Memorial Project.

Hospital in Cork city in 1960, was buried in Carr's Hill (COI, 2019, pp. 26–39), and suggested numerous other Bessborough children – as many as 113 who died in St Finbarr's Hospital – might be buried there also, having been told by a local resident that the site had been used to bury infants and children until at least 1962 (COI, 2019, pp. 26–39; Hennessy, 2019). The absence of the Burial Register associated with the Cemetery, which the Commission searched for but could not locate (COI, 2019, pp. 26–39), means this assertion cannot yet be proven, although the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary, which owned and ran Bessborough from 1922 until its closure in 1998, did agree publicly with the Commission's speculation that many of the babies could have been buried off-site in Carr's Hill (Roche, 2021). It was certainly cheaper to bury them in this site, which is now owned and managed by the State, than in the privately-owned St Joseph's Cemetery on Tory Top Road (Wills, 2021), although, of course, a strong possibility remains that many of the children are buried in unconsecrated ground somewhere on the Bessborough estate (COI, 2019, pp. 26–39; Wills, 2021).

Carmel Cantwell, who found out only from the Commission's report that her baby brother, William, was the identified child buried at the Carr's Hill site (Ó'Fátharta, 2019), has stated she now annually visits both Bessborough and Carr's Hill, along with her mother (Cantwell, 2021) to commemorate the children who died in the Home. An image posted by Cantwell on social media of her elderly mother walking alone amidst the high, unkempt, grass at the burial ground – "A lonely figure looking for any evidence of burials on a huge site" (Cantwell, 2019) – denotes the burial area as a ghostlike, spectral location. The site is tended to once a year in the autumn for the Memorial Ceremony, but the rest of the time it lies largely neglected and forgotten (Mark-Fitzgerald, 2013, pp. 107–112), with only a small sign pointing the way to it from the roadside and then a narrow access route through farmers' fields, alongside brambles and an electric fence, before a visitor must clamber up some stone steps to a gap in the stone wall surrounding the space (see Figure 1). While there were once calls for the site to be turned into a public park, these have never been acted on, with the site instead "restored to just what it was when Carr and his men turned over the final shovels of soil to bury the Famine victims" (Hogan, 1997), resulting in the location remaining an out-of-the-way, still taboo arena on the outskirts of a city busily preoccupied with its modern-day concerns.

Could there be any other way for such a place? Mark-Fitzgerald has drawn attention to the "paradox of commemorating" this particular burial space, suggesting the "unknowable nature of this Famine landscape, the anonymity of its inhabitants and their history of

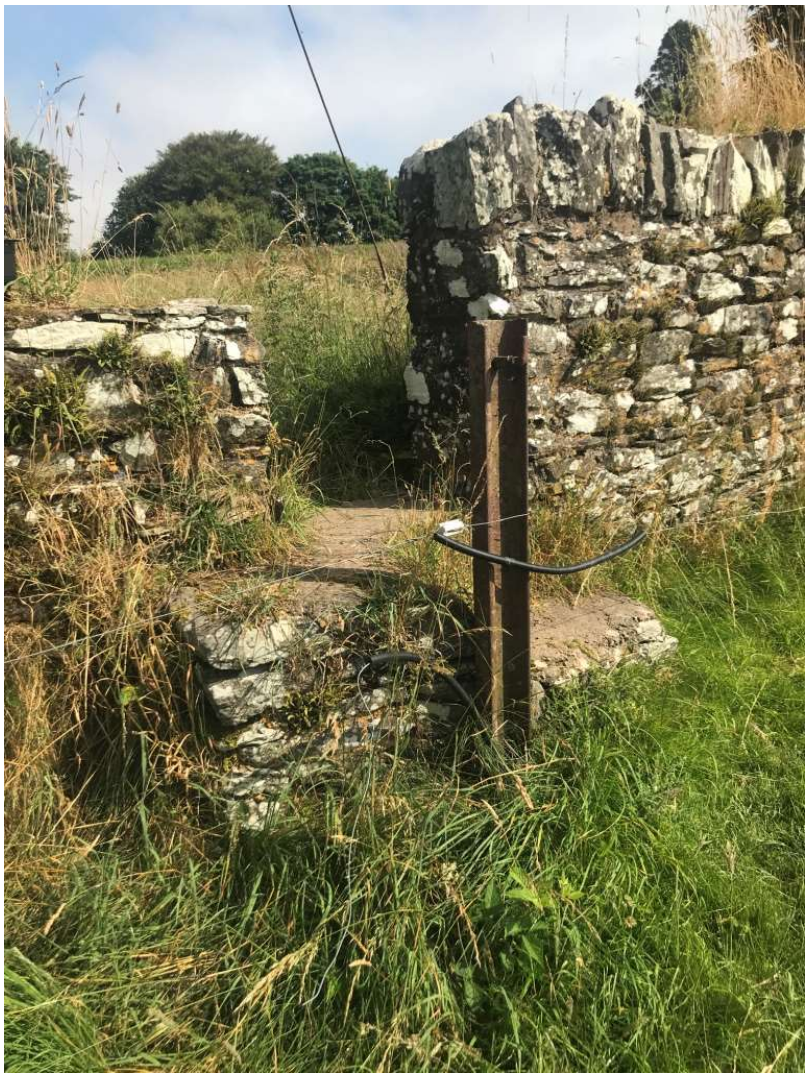

Figure 1: Narrow access to the burial site at Carr's Hill

segregation," along with the site's "peripheral location", serve to "work against preservationist notions and preclude any easy assimilation into the present" (Mark-Fitzgerald, 2013, p. 112). Her argument builds upon Whelan's description of the Irish landscape as a palimpsest, "containing contested narratives of history and culture" whose "monuments and traces reached from the present down into earlier layers from which they derived their power and presence" (Whelan, 2004). Meantime, Jonker and Till (2009), writing about the discovery of the skeletal remains of slaves at a construction site in Cape Town, South Africa, noted that the bones, essentially "spectres" of Cape Town's colonial history, "haunt both the contemporary city and the imagination of transition, as transformational and memorial strategies fail to exorcise pre-apartheid injustices" (Jonker and Till, 2009, p. 305). Till has considered a similar issue in her work on Berlin, which sought to interrogate places of memory in a city that is "haunted with

landscapes that simultaneously embody presences and absences, voids and ruins, intentional forgetting and painful remembering" (Till, 2005, p. 8). In Berlin, Till's focus settled on "why people make places to create meaning about who and where they are in the world," as well as "how they expect places to work emotionally, socially, culturally, and politically" (*ibid*.). In Cape Town, along with Jonker, she sought to describe the city in terms of "a *memorial cartography* anchored by sites of trauma, struggle and popular memory", an approach that tried to "create spaces for both the dead and the living" (Jonker and Till, 2009, p. 306). The Carr's Hill site outside of Cork city, already made liminal and problematic by a history of isolation, anonymity and stigmatization (Mark-Fitzgerald, 2013, pp. 107–112) and now further complicated by the probable presence of the unmarked graves of children from Bessborough Mother and Baby Home (COI, 2019, pp. 26–39; Cantwell, 2019; O'Keeffe, 2019), also suggests itself as a location that can be described in terms of memorial cartographies.

In my approach, I am conscious of engaging with the specific complexities of mapping spectral traces in an Irish context. As choreographer Fearghus Ó'Conchúir has noted, the Irish post-colonial body has had to prove itself "disciplined, worthy of being independent", resulting in bodies that were – and are – "controlled in particular ways" (Ó Conchúir, 2017). Through *The Casement Project*, which invited viewers to dance with the queer body of Roger Casement, Ó Conchúir sought to explore "the possibility of moving bodies from where they were before to new places, and to making visible kinds of bodies or articulations of bodies that didn't exist before" (*ibid*.), a thought process that also informs my own interactions with Irish bodies that were deemed unruly, and thus subject to punishment, to discard, to being hidden, silenced and forgotten.

Deep Mapping

In her account of deep mapping, Springett suggests the term first emerged in relation to the work of American travel writer William Least Heat Moon, who spent nine years documenting Chase County, Kansas, in the Midwest of the United States, and whose subsequent publication, *PrairyErth (a deep map)*, interwove recorded interviews with locals, botanic information, Native American folklore and histories, literary and archival records, weather reports, geological data and cartographic references with travel writing and personal poetic reflections (Springett, 2016, pp. 1–3). While noting the work of Moon as an important milestone, Biggs is also careful to reflect on deep mapping's history as a multi-disciplinary practice (Biggs, 2010b, p. 5). In his introduction to the practice for the *Mapping Spectral Traces 2010* symposium guide, he references the work of visual artist Lewis DeSoto; the site-based performances of

Mike Pearson, Michael Shanks, Clifford McLucas, and the radical Welsh performance group *Brith Gof*; the walking, writing, and mapping projects of Iain Sinclair and Tim Robinson; and the sound, video, and digital artworks of Sue Palmer (Biggs, 2010b). Springett (2016) also pays close attention to the interdisciplinary nature of deep mapping, noting, in particular, that the writings of Pearson & Shanks, regarding a practice-based, *performative* approach to deep mapping, have proved seminal for contemporary understandings of the process. In *Theatre/Archaeology*, performance-creator Pearson and archaeologist Shanks trace their theoretical and practical collaborative encounters with landscape, their "'incorporations'", which they explain as:

> juxtapositions and interpenetrations of the historical and the contemporary, the political and the poetic, the factual and the fictional, the discursive and the sensual…. which leave space for the imagination of the reader….meaning is not monopolised. As such, they may function as an alternative kind of site-report. (Pearson & Shanks, 2001, p. 159)

It is this thinking, or more accurately, this questioning about place, about interacting with place and space, that has proved particularly salient for me in my own approach to the process of deep mapping:

> How can we read a landscape? How do memories attach to places? What is the relationship between landscape, experience and identity? How do we make sense of the multiplicity of meanings that resonate from landscapes and memories? What constitutes a sense of place? What is the relationship between personal and public memory? How does place act as a mnemonic for memory? How do we use the past to help create a sense of identity? How are notions of place operational upon us? Are they still relevant in an era of mobility and notions of shifting identity? (Pearson & Shanks, 2001, p. 146)

These questions are fundamental to my practice. Equally so, however, is what Springett – in her discussion of McLucas' text "There are ten things that I can say about these deep maps" – terms the "openness and humble nature of deep maps", i.e. the idea that "rather than being a declaration or avowal they are to be considered a conversation" (Springett, 2016, p. 7). In their chapter on deep mapping, Biggs & Modeen echo such a sentiment, refusing what they term a "catch-all" definition of the practice, arguing that "deep mapping means different things to different people," with their suggestion being that the emphasis should be on process, rather than result, as deep maps will always and inevitably "exceed our ability to realise them" (Biggs & Modeen, 2021). These considerations, of deep mapping as an activity *not* preoccupied with the arrival at certainty and the elimination of doubt – and thus contravening enlightenment/colonial/modern ideas of the map as a vehicle for sorting and organizing the world (Biggs & Modeen, 2021) – are also reflected in work of artist, researcher and educator

Silvia Loeffler, whose deep mapping project of Dun Laoghaire Harbour, the *Glas Journal* (2014–2016), adopted:

> a rigorous yet poetic approach, informed by visual arts practices, a heartfelt feminism and a carefully developed consideration of a harbor understood both as 'a Chronotopic Threshold Structure' in the tradition of Bakhtin, and a prismatic evocation of those places that are woven into our daily lives – those we name 'home', 'haven' or 'harbour'. (Biggs & Modeen, 2021)

Writing about the project, Loeffler discusses her approach to the mapping of the harbour, suggesting she employed "emotional mapping" which she terms an "engagement of spatial practices with the human condition" (Loeffler, 2016, p. 35), as well as "Liquid Mappings" which allow for a "fluid and performative discourse… a medley of geography, topography and history of a place that is based on a heteroglossic narrative" (*ibid*., p. 39). These approaches, she argues, helped her move towards "an alternative cultural production" of the Dun Laoghaire Harbour, one that allowed for an "exploration of intimacy with public space in a way that I could not have grasped with the objectively structured methods of a scientific analysis" (*ibid*., p. 45). Loeffler's approach, which foregrounds David Seamon's concept of the "place-ballet" (Seamon, 1980, cited in Loeffler, 2016, p. 31), along with Biggs' consideration of the deep mapping process as one that should "strive to remain 'unstable, fragile and temporary… *a conversation and not a statement*'" (McLucas, n.d., cited in Biggs, 2010a), have been thus to the fore of my thinking as I conduct my deep mapping project of the Carr's Hill burial site.

It is, however, important to bear in mind that the open approach to deep mapping can itself become a potential difficulty. As Roberts notes, the

> process of framing an 'open' deep mapping runs the risk of a sort of 'inverse disciplining' on account of the very fact that it *is* an object of discourse, even if it is trying its best not to be. (Roberts, 2016a, p. XI)

Conscious of this risk, Roberts challenges himself to a balancing act: that of, on the one hand, "questioning the coherence and validity of deep mapping …. and maintaining a loose, plural and open application of the term on the other" (*ibid*.). My work seeks to build upon such a thought process, upon the "sense of the fundamental *unmappability* of the world the 'deep map' sets out to map" (*ibid*., p. XII).

Before drawing this review of deep mapping to a conclusion, it is worth mentioning two works in Irish culture that have engaged in forms of mapping of traumatic space, and which I see as providing important context for my own project. The first, Alannah O'Kelly's multi-media trilogy *The Country Blooms, a Garden and a Grave* (1992–1995), was conceived by the artist as a response to unmarked famine graves in the Irish countryside. By means of photos,

video, sound and performance works – which included references to nature, to the landscape, to childbirth, nurture, death, decay and rebirth – O'Kelly's aim was to tell the stories of the mass famine graves, to "uncover them, to let them be known" (O'Kelly, 2005, pp. 141–142). As Marshall writes, the result of the work was to make "visible a festering wound at the centre of Irish life," while also acknowledging "pain and the need for public grieving, creating a space for loss and a model for that grieving" (Marshall, 2016).

The second work, Kimberly Campanello's 'poetry object' *MOTHERBABYHOME* (2019), is an attempt to 'map' the liminal space of the unmarked gravesite of at least 796 children, who were housed at the former Mother and Baby Home in Tuam, County Galway. By means of a project of 796 pages (one page for each of the children), as well as an 'avant object' edition of the work, which entailed a small set of individual copies housed in a hand-made oak box, created because the children were not buried in coffins, *MOTHERBABYHOME* operates as a form of caring for a place (and the lives associated with that space), which had until recently been all but erased from the Irish collective memory and culture.

By situating and considering my own works of deep mapping alongside these artistic projects, I aim to engage in a process that creates an opportunity – for space, for reflection, for breathing, for healing to potentially begin.

Mapping the Spatial Presence of Ghosts at Carr's Hill

It is silent, lonely, here, taken over once again by nature. This is an entry from my notebook, written after my most recent visit to the site in July 2021. I had come equipped for the trip – my third to the location and the first time I had come to the space on my own – with an A4 notebook and a pen for field notes; an iphone for taking photographs, and a bottle of water to mitigate against the sunshine and the heat, which I also documented, writing in my notes about *this week of glorious summer.* My two previous visits to the site were made to coincide with the annual An Gorta Mór Memorial Project, in 2020 and 2019 respectively. On those occasions the grass had been mowed to a flat carpet of yellow ochre, and the tall stalks shrouding the memorial stone erected in 1997 had been pulled away, in order that the gathered audience could read its commemoration with ease. Wreaths had also been placed on either side of the memorial, which has the inscription:

> 150th Anniversary/An Gorta Mór/In Memory of the Thousands/of Cork People who died during/the Great Famine/and are buried here/Go nedeana dia trócaire orthu[3]/Unveiled by/Jean Kennedy Smith US Ambassador/Erected by/The Cork

[3] May God have mercy on them.

Remembrance Committee/2nd June 1997

At the 2020 Memorial event, a second, smaller plaque had also been placed on top of this memorial. It reads:

> 1845–1850/Ar Mhór na Ngeabheal/I gcuimhne
> na Daoine/Bás Reilig Seo[4]

The new plaque, the mown grassland, and the ceremonies, represent significant progress for the Memorial Project, which held its first commemorative event in 2009 at St Joseph's Cemetery on Tory Top Road (celebratingcorkpast.com), but was only able to move to Carr's Hill in 2017, when the condition of the gravesite was improved as a result of efforts by the An Gorta Mór Memorial Project – formerly known as the Cork and County Famine Group (An Gorta Mór Memorial Project, 2017; McMahon, 2011). On those occasions, I listened to speeches, recitals, songs; I looked at the black and white drawings of the Famine horror, which had been pasted to white tableaux placed at the foot of Sorenson's cross for the event. I watched as the small crowd lined up to offer monetary donations to the Memorial Project. However, my engagement with the site in July 2021 was a much different, more melancholy, but potentially more significant experience. My notes from that day in 2021 pay much attention to the nature surrounding me:

> I listen to the crickets. I sit shrouded by high grass listening to the cars pass on the main road. I hear the cattle lowing even though all around me I can only see tall grass. Flowers come up to my chest. I hear birds in the silence. I see a brown admiral butterfly. I am stepping over the long stems of ferns. The only noise is my rustling. (Field note extract)

My notes also record my decision to walk around the perimeter of the site. It is clear this was not a straightforward act: I write that "I am hampered by the long weeds and the sea of ferns" (see Figure 2), and write also that it is only when I reach the foot of the large cross that I find any grass dampened down by the footsteps of others. The walk, however, allowed me to take my time exploring the large site, just as it allowed me to come close to both memorials, pull back the grass to read slowly the words inscribed on them, take note of the bunch of plastic red roses that had been laid atop them. I walked up to and around the base of Sorenson's cross, with the four large spotlights at its base. More unexpected, and poignant, was my discovery, as I walked, of a tree stump, behind and to the right of the cross, which had been festooned with a

[4] 1845-1850//The great slaughter of the Gaelic people/ In memory of the dead people in this graveyard.

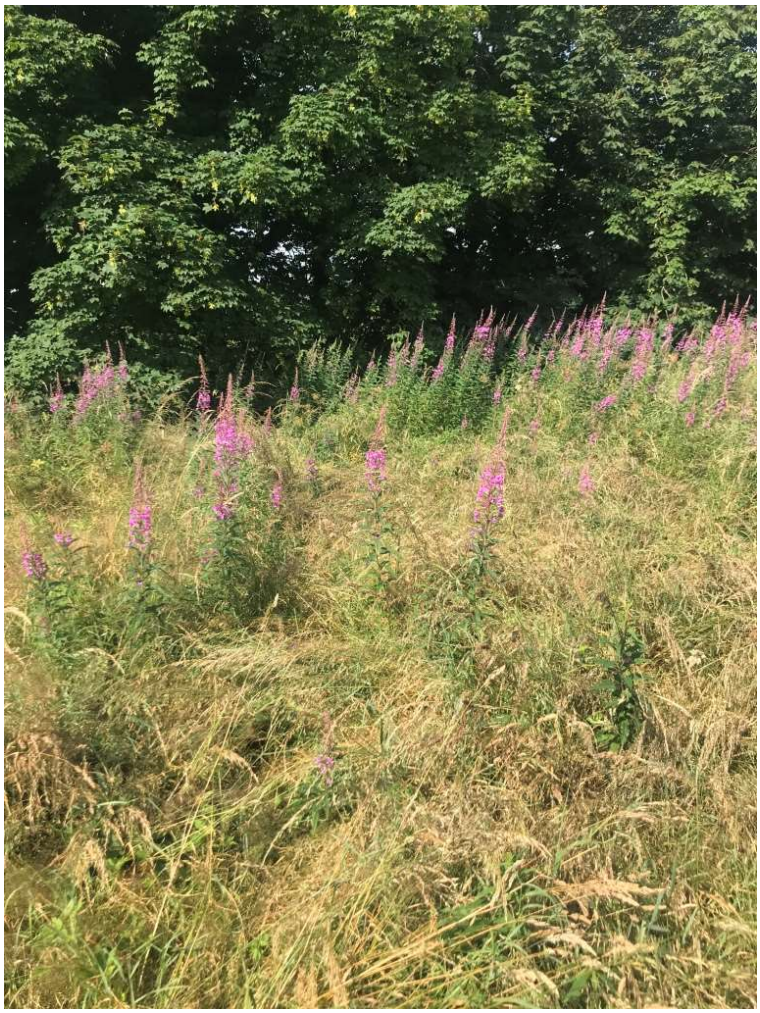

Figure 2: Long weeds at the burial site at Carr's Hill

silver tinsel garland, two small teddy bears, and a bunch of what looked to have been lilies (now withered) (see Figure 3). It is clear that this is a makeshift memorial for the children who may be buried here, but for the moment, my notes only record an observation of what I see, rather than any attempt to make sense of it. In fact, despite the evidence of human presence at the site (the memorials, the cross, the dampened grass), the notes from my visit to the location of July 2021 suggest a burial space that has been almost entirely reclaimed by nature, now with its own ecology and rhythm, contributing towards what Roberts has termed an "interiority of place and experiential dwelling" (2016b, p. 164), separate and distinct from the busy road close by, the noise of the cars, the evidence of contemporary life. My notes reflect this sense of being inside a place apart – I note the sense of calm, the feeling of peace. If I didn't know about the unmarked graves of the dead, would I have felt any sadness during my time there?

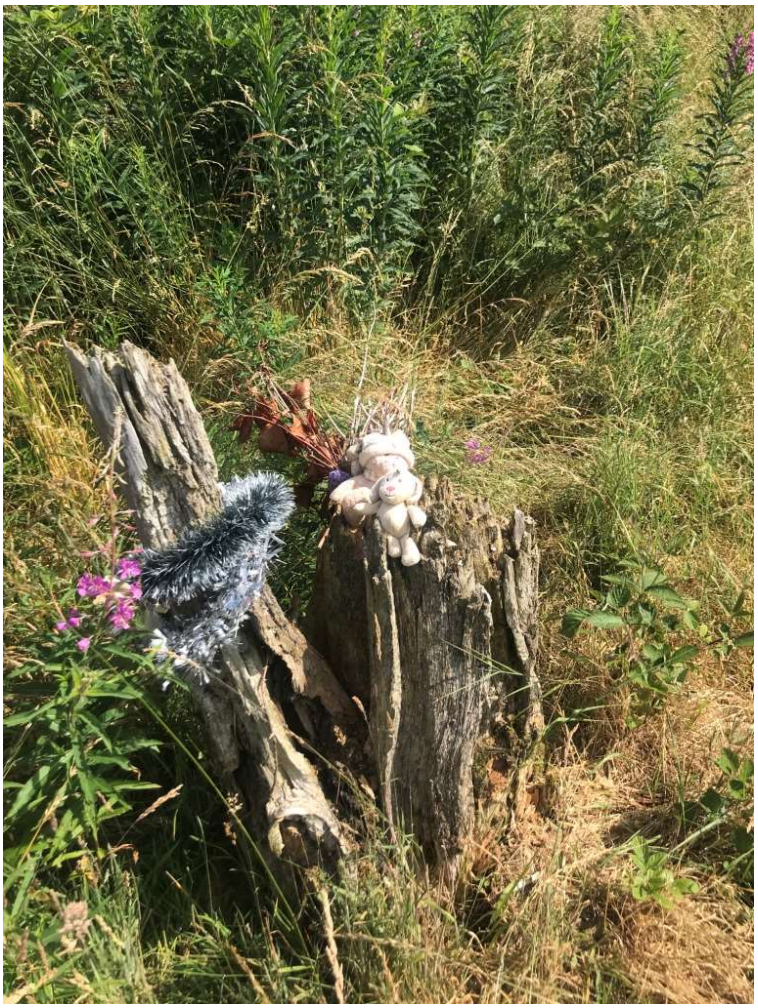

Figure 3: Tree stump with silver tinsel and two small teddy bears

I did, however, know about the presence of the unmarked graves. While it is no doubt the case, as Roberts states, that "in an environment such as this the mind is left to follow its own course: consciousness and geography alike become unmoored" (*ibid.*), my train of thought on the occasion did follow a particular course, related to the specific conditions of the site: "Who gets to be remembered? Who gets to be a ghost? What is the place memory of the site?" (Field note extract) I made these notes after I had finished my walk around the site, as I sat alone amidst the tall grass and was in a position to take stock of what I had seen and what I felt. My reflections at this point largely concern the juxtaposition of the natural world with the sense of the place as a space of the unsettled (human) dead, and thus a location that defies a straightforward response. Towards the end of my visit, I wrote the following thoughts in my notebook:

> I try to bring myself back to the people who died with no name, to the babies who were brought here. We really don't know who is buried here. What am I doing here, here with the birds and the mist in the distance, walking on the lives of others, treading on their memories? (Field note extract)

As these latter field notes attest, the deep mapping exercise I carried out that day appears to have raised more questions than answers. This distinguishes it not only from the "finite and neat chronological narration models" discussed as problematic by Loeffler (2016, p. 45), but also means the exercise possibly allows for a way of moving "beyond *categorical* modes of thinking" (Biggs, 2010a). It thus offers a form of response to a site that is itself neither fixed nor settled, that itself moves beyond categories, that is itself a complex, complicated space. This is not to invalidate the work of the An Gorta Mór Memorial Project, nor to suggest that calls from advocates for the Bessborough mothers and babies to mark the graves of the children buried there (Cantwell, 2021; Hogan, 2020) are not necessary and urgent. It is, however, to remember the difficulty, the danger even, of a past that is

> organised and structured through place to create a chronotope, or time-space formation, through which contemporary narrations and performances of subjectivity and authority are inscribed. (Bhabha, 1990, cited in Till, 2005, p. 10)

Meantime, in her research exploring the position of the author in relation to the site of writing itself, Rendell suggests that "where I am makes a difference to who I can be and what I can know" (Rendell, 2007, p. 179). As evidenced by some of my field notes from the Carr's Hill gravesite, I am attempting similar interrogations, trying to investigate, in both process and outcome, "the spatial and often changing positions we occupy materially, conceptually, emotionally, and ideologically" (Rendell, 2007, p. 180). It is an understanding that is also informed by my reading of black feminist scholar bell hooks, who writes that black people unwilling to play the role of "exotic Other" must "invent spaces of radical openness" (hooks 1989, p. 36). hooks terms these kinds of spaces as "a margin – a profound edge," and acknowledges that while locating oneself there is difficult, it is also necessary (*ibid*.). The deep mapping work I am involved in is informed by an attempt to locate myself within such a margin, while also creating work that becomes of the site, like the site, work that is, as Pearson & Shanks note, "fractured and provisional" because there will "always be tension between what you know, what you can find out and what you can never know." (Pearson & Shanks, 2001, p. 146). By considering who I am in relation to the liminal space of the unmarked gravesite, along with consideration of the Other, my attempt is to create a broader understanding of material and spatial experiences in a complex and complicated site, with the enquiry thus not focused

on “the mastery of a certain historio-geographical discourse” but instead one that stresses the “importance of the bricolage, the fragmentation and the in-between in its production of meanings” (Loeffler, 2016, p. 41).

Conclusions on creative practice-with-research

In considering creative practice-with-research, I argue for the validity of what Loeffler has termed “hybrid explorations of ethnographic space” (Loeffler, 2016, p. 45), in this instance the interweaving of creative practice (prose writing) with research. In other words, “new cultural productions of spatial meanings” (*ibid*.) are necessary to explore the significance of unmarked gravesites in contemporary Ireland.

While I have not yet established the exact manner in which the creative-non-fiction writing will interweave with the academic thinking, the works of artists/thinkers such as Loeffler, Rendell, Pearson & Shanks, and Biggs, along with the artistic considerations of O’Kelly and Campanello, as noted earlier, are key to my approach. Visual artist Fiona Woods, whose project *Walking Silvermines* (2007–2011), a response to abandoned mines around the North Tipperary region in Ireland, included drawings, photographs, documents, writing, as well as a digital presence with text, images, and sound, has also proved formative for my thought process/creative practice. Richard Skelton’s *Landings* (2019), a publication assembled from a diverse array of materials that responds to the moorland landscape of Anglezarke; Marit Kapla’s *Osebol* (2021), a recording of testimonies from a tiny village in northern Sweden, and Rachel Lichtenstein’s *Digital Memory Map of Jewish Manchester* (2021), are also important signposts for my thinking. Jane Rendell, meantime, presents a variety of approaches to site-writing through a series of projects that combine:

> image and text to produce variations in spatial relations; exploring the architectural and spatial qualities of storytelling; blending personal and academic writing styles to create different subject positions; investigating the interaction between material and psychic states; articulating the interactive relationship between writing and art/design practice; and showing how written responses to specific sites can propose innovative urban genres that hover between fact and fiction. (Rendell, 2019–2021)

In other words, the possibilities for site-writing, for writing *of* and *about* site, are vast, while the form such writing can take, both in process and outcome, is equally expansive. On the one hand, this refusal of fixity (Rendell, 2010, p. 2, referencing Braidotti, 1994) is a potentially exhilarating prospect, because all approaches are on the table, and all approaches can be seen as valid. At the same time, as Rendell also notes, the attempt to situate oneself academically

and artistically in the "place-between" (Rendell, 2011, p. xii), can prove problematic, most immediately when it comes to the strictures of providing clarity for funding bodies (in art and academia) and the publishing industry (in terms of disseminating writing and finding readers), but also for me a practitioner as I attempt to feel my way forward without a clear map. Here again, Rendell (2010, p. 242) points a way of advancing in this situation, writing that theory has always informed her responses to the difficulties posed by a specific writing situation, and this is an approach I seek to echo, as I turn to the research for grounding, for balance, for support in finding my way through the long grass and weeds.

The unmarked gravesite at Carr's Hill, County Cork, reflects meanings of shame, confusion, loss, love, silence, abandonment and recovery. The act of mapping the spectral traces at the site presents the possibility of other forms of meaning, which may, as Till and Jonker (2009) suggest, involve disturbing, dispelling, or accommodating ghosts, but always operates as part of an attempt to acknowledge and pay attention to the presence of those who have gone before. The work of deep mapping, of walking, observing, slow residency and of waiting, of taking notes and images at the site, along with a consideration of the history and cultural memory of the location, is all part of the work of care, of holding deeply. It is part of allowing what Edward Casey describes as the "unresolved remainders of memory" which, he suggests, "fall outside of the supposed lucidity of consciousness and exist beyond the formal realms of commemoration and narrative" (Casey, 2000, quoted in Till, 2010, p. 6). This form of mapping, when interwoven with the artistic practice of creative-non-fiction writing, will move towards the making of a work that interlaces the "historical with the contemporary, the political with the lyrical, the factual with the fictional, and the discursive with the embodied" (Till, 2010, p. 7). In doing so, the work attempts to sketch out the complex pathways of "political struggle and social trauma, joy and pain, mourning and memory, and invite us to engage our sense memory" (*ibid*.), so that these liminal and still traumatic territories can be engaged with in a manner that asks for empathy, tender exploration, listening, and, perhaps, points a way forward, to an opportunity "for healing to happen" (Marshall, 2016).

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