Seeping into Stones
Material explorations in deep mapping Ireland

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complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

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ABSTRACT

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The goal of this Master of Design thesis is to take a transdisciplinary approach towards fostering a deeper attunement of human individuals of the physical world around them. In particular, my aim is to stimulate a conversation pertaining to contemporary Irish place. Ireland has experienced significant political, social, and physical change over the last two-or-so decades, yet certain stereotypical narratives that have long been perpetuated about the country may still be discerned, even in its own official rhetoric and imagery.

This thesis explores the efficacy of taking design as a point of departure to engage with, and contribute to, an updated conversation about Irish place by visualizing and materializing the variety of narratives that may be teased out of Ireland's topography and built environment. Using the premise of critical, speculative, and dark design *Seeping into Stones*—which consists of a series of research-creation projects as well as this thesis—reimagines and re-engages with selected perceptions and narratives about the Irish built and natural environment, and displaces them by contributing and contemplating a series of "deep maps" of specific locations and environments that I visited during my master's-level research trips. Reaching beyond the discipline of design, the thesis also builds upon my previous academic formation in photography and it moves into the area of literary criticism to focus on the writing of one astute observer of transformations of Irish culture and society, the award-winning author Kevin Barry.

Seeping into Stones contributes additional layers to the collective "deep map" of Ireland as well as another perspective from which to speculate towards a more diverse future.

Keywords: deep mapping, research-creation, critical and dark design, materiality, Irish studies, interdisciplinary, Kevin Barry, photography.

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To my parents and brother, thank you for always cheering me on and for showing me the world through your respective artforms. It feels good to have a homebase where we can gather and eat delicious food—those moments mean a lot. To Dawn and Dan, your enthusiasm and persistent support for my work means so much, thank you.

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Finally, to my partner David. Thank you for your care, laughter, and unwavering belief in my abilities. I am grateful for the countless cups of tea you brewed, your grounding energy, and for your keen eye which always found my wayward commas.

All of you are like the individual strands of baler twine—which when woven together provide an enormous amount of strength, resilience, and support. Thank you.

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INTRODUCTION

Look and you can see the colour first. There, a dash of blue, bright in contrast to the burnt pine needles and mossy soil. As I walk closer, it seems that the blue is a twist of rope, ducking in and out of mounded earth, and entwined around the semi-buried bones of a rib cage. This is the first time I noticed this blue rope—while I was on a research trip in Ireland in 2018—and I found it wrapped around the remains of a calf. After this encounter, I kept noticing the blue rope in my surroundings: small cuttings swept to the edges of country roads or washed up on the shoreline, as a stand-in for a dog's lead, or as a clothesline between houses in the city centre. What about this rope kept grabbing my attention? Was it the vibrant colour? Was it the material tenacity in contrast to the decomposition happening all around it? I wanted to know more.

My search for the rope extended to other people. A friend sent me a snip of the rope found on a beach; the rope is knotted, a reminder of its past functionality, and fraying at the edges. Others sent photos of instances where they came across the twine, in both rural and urban settings alike: snagged on a barbed fence, as a stand-in for a skip rope, or bittersweetly woven into the nest of a bird.

I learned the name for this material: baler twine. I also learned that its intended use is as a farming twine to bind hay or straw bales together. Baler twine is made of multiple plastic polypropylene[1] strands that are first brushed and then twisted together to develop length and width. As with other ropes, the more strands there are the thicker the twine, and the more weight it can carry. Because of baler twine's strength and resilience to decomposition, it tends to be used far beyond its initial farming purpose;[2] my glimpses of multiple applications in multiple places therefore make sense.

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[1] Originally baler twine was made out of sisal, a plant-derived and biodegradable product. Now, it is more commonly made out of polypropylene, a plastic byproduct chosen specifically for its non-biodegradable properties. It is also known as binder twine, because sisal twine was most often used when hand bailing hay. Polypropylene twine was created with the onset of industrial machines used to bale hay. See: "History of Baler Twine," Asia Dragon Cordage, accessed July 11, 2019, http://asiadragoncordage.com/en/history-of-baler-twine-198.html.

[2] "#balertwine" is a hashtag used on Instagram. Users upload photographs of the variety of ways they use baler twine, examples include a belt, hair ties, and a chain link fence repaired with baler twine (see following link for more detail https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/balertwine/).

At first, the blue twine was an enigmatic focal point, grabbing my attention as I kept stumbling upon it while on research. But during subsequent months, it became a kind of mapping tool as it continued to signal associations between the places, narratives, and questions that would guide my research and creation. The twine's multitude of uses, which flit between the different spaces that I visited in Ireland, became even more important as a manifestation of the inherent links it created, for example, between the urban and rural worlds of the island. The ambiguity and vibrancy of this twine, which contributed to my attunement and attentiveness to the environment, was the catalyst towards nurturing a practice that would guide my research-creation thesis over the next two or so years. As Chapter Three will reveal, baler twine, agentially, eventually made its way into my final project, entangled in the emerging narrative that this research has stimulated.

My intention, in this thesis project, is twofold. On the one hand, I am committed to fostering a deeper awareness and attunement with regards to my relationship with the environment of Ireland, and to offering a multitude of entry points—for my own benefit as well as for others interested in this kind of exploration—towards collectively strengthening land literacy.[3] This desire to gain a more holistic relationship between humans and their environments stems from a quote that I read by contemporary Irish author Kevin Barry, whose incisive fictional writings about Ireland figure prominently as drivers of my master's research. In an interview with *The Paris Review,* Barry discusses the emotional impact the landscape of Ireland has on him, and articulates his suspicion "that feeling escapes from people and seeps into the stones of a place."[4] He elaborates: "... as you go through all the different towns you pick up such different senses and reverbs from each place. It isn't to do with how it looks ... but each place give of its own very distinct feeling and sometimes it's light and sometimes it's really fucking dark."[5] This quote is so important to me because it places emphasis on the potential for exchange between the human and nonhuman with regard to emotions, feelings, and memory, as well as the ability to perceive *something* from the topography other than a passive and removed visual experience.

Barry's sentiment also calls to attention the need to dig deep into the layered geological and material composition of the environment, a commitment which requires an acutely-nuanced perception in order to extract a multitude of perspectives, stories, experiences, and tensions that have in turn been absorbed and preserved within that environment. The rationale for such an exercise, in terms of the goals of social or design justice, is as a call for better practices regarding

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[3] The authors of "We Cannot Call Back Colonial Stories: Storytelling and Critical Land Literacy" define "land literacy" as a critical consciousness and understanding of land that centres Indigenous knowledge and presence, while recognizing the ways in which the past and present co-constitute each other. This differs from the potential use of the term which describes the ability to study the land in order to determine the health of the agricultural environment. See: Rosalind Hampton and Ashley DeMartini, "We Cannot Call Back Colonial Stories: Storytelling and Critical Land Literacy," *Canadian Journal of Education* 40, no. 3 (2017): 253–254.

[4] Jonathan Lee, "Jumping Off a Cliff: An Interview with Kevin Barry," *The Paris Review,* last modified November 12, 2013. https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2013/11/12/jumping-off-a-cliff-an-interview-with-kevin-barry/.

[5] Lee, interview.

land literacy. And from this idea spring the questions that guided my initial research in the field: what is the emotional and, through those emotions, social and cultural connection between person and place? How do design and art help us decode, interpret, and perpetuate that information? How does this process and information guide us towards actively engaging with our own land, environment, and topography? How does an active engagement with the materiality of the terrain help identify and expand on the narratives that are attributed to place?

It is also my intent, with this thesis, to bring attention *to the complexities and nuances of present-day Ireland*. Ireland has undergone massive cultural shifts in recent history, while certain overarching narratives (about the landscape, the people, the place) continue to be perpetuated. For example, Ireland is promoted simplistically as a tourist destination—to both its Diaspora and to others—as the iconic and pastoral, romanticized "Emerald Isle,"[6] whereas a more accurate perception of the country acknowledges it as a dynamically layered place, much of it urban, with multiple stories and, indeed, underlying tensions.[7] My project offers a means to explore aspects of Irish culture over approximately the last two decades through its built and natural environments, by means of the stories and narratives that are encapsulated in those environments.

The changes that have swept over Ireland are ubiquitous, and can be observed in social settings, physical locations, and cultural shifts alike. Diarmaid Ferriter, author of *The Transformation of Ireland,* delineates the complex realities that the Irish population have been navigating since before the turn of the century:

> cycles of boom and bust economically, and a politics that was at times exciting and productive but sometimes corrupt, bland and indifferent as the century grew to a close. Other issues too could now be added to ... the list: the troubled health system, serious traffic problems, the high cost of living, the Euro, child abuse, the environment, racism, drink-induced violence, the fortunes of the Irish football team in world cups, military neutrality, ...[8]

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[6] Tourism Ireland collaborated with travel film company *Passport to the World*, to highlight the island of Ireland to Canadian travelers. The resulting film entitled *Ireland: Emerald Island* was screened in 24 cinemas across Canada in April 2019.
See: "New Ireland travel documentary to screen in Canada," Tourism Ireland, 15 April 2019, https://www.tourismireland.com/Press-Releases/2019/April/New-Ireland-travel-documentary-to-screen-in-Canada. See: *Ireland: Emerald Island* by Passport to the World (2019), Video on demand. https://filmpttw.com/films/ireland-emerald-isle-april-2019/.
[7] The idea that Ireland is a place of contradictions, or tensions as I choose to call it, is corroborated by Ann Wilson in her text "Constructions of Irishness in a Collection of Early Twentieth-Century Picture Postcards" where she discusses how Dublin was "a city of extreme contrasts" at the turn of the 20th century. This suggests that what Ireland is experiencing is not unique to our current time period but an issue that has been present in Ireland for over 100 years, which reinforces the need to readjust the ways in which Ireland is represented. See: Ann Wilson, "Constructions of Irishness in a Collection of Early Twentieth-Century Picture Postcards," *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 39, no.1 (2015): 95.
[8] Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland* (New York: Overlook, 2005), 662.

Since *The Transformation of Ireland* was published in 2004, what is missing from that list is the continued and sustained growth of immigration to the island[9] (despite the fluctuating economy and unchecked racism), the 2016 and 2018 referenda and legislation supporting marriage equality[10] and abortion rights,[11] and a further dismantling of the institution of religion in Ireland (after significant events such as the discovery of a mass grave which held the remains of babies and children at an orphanage in Tuam).[12] Yet, despite such changes, the consistency of what have become stereotypic representations of Irish place, identity, and narratives—long ingrained—is intentionally crafted. *The Transformation of Ireland* notes the sustained nostalgic and mythical tropes in commercially-successful films in the 1980s, for example, which "tended to marry history with nostalgia"[13] (most notably in the 1990 film *The Field).* This trend continued into the next decade, as "films of the 1990's tended to eschew modernity and focus on the small rural community, and depict traditional gender roles and resourceful children,"[14] tropes which are still being perpetuated today in films like *Leap Year* (2010) or *P.S I Love You* (2007)*.*

The use of iconic and somewhat trite narratives and imagery to represent Ireland is evident, not only in the country's cinematic output, but also in its literature, art, and other forms of cultural expression.[15] Moreover, it is discernible in some of Ireland's recent official governmental documentation, which maintains a remarkably consistent utilization of sweeping vistas of uninhabited (or sparsely-inhabited) pastoral landscape as its primary visual trope. The use of one particular body of stereotypic iconography employed in the early years of the twentieth century in the construction of Irish identity is studied by Ann Wilson in her 2015 article "Constructions of Irishness in a Collection of Early Twentieth-Century Picture Postcards." In the article, Wilson discusses the imagery on postcards circulated between 1903 and 1908 and explores how those representations uphold specific ideals about Irish people and place. She argues that, at that time, "Popular postcard imagery … tended to reinforce the Yeatsian vision of Celtic Ireland, a romantic premodern landscape inhabited mostly by wholesome peasants whose lifestyles are uncontaminated by industrialization."[16] Wilson specifically discusses a series of postcards in the

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[9] Statistics in *Immigration in Ireland Annual Review 2018,* a Government of Ireland publication, shows an 11% increase in immigration and a 12% increase in Visa applications from 2017. See: Ireland, Department of Justice and Equality, *Immigration in Ireland Annual Review 2018* (Dublin: Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service, 2019), 7. http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Immigration-in-Ireland-Annual-Review-2018.pdf/Files/Immigration-in-Ireland-Annual-Review-2018.pdf.

[10] Donnacha Ó Beacháin, "Ireland Foreign Relations in 2015," *Irish Studies in International Affairs* vol. 127 (2016): 236, https://doi.org/10.3318/isia.2016.27.16.

[11] Fiona De Londras and Máiréad Enright, *Repealing the 8th: Reforming Irish abortion Law* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2018). https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv47w44r.

[12] For more insight into the Tuam Babies, see: Paul Jude Redmond, *The Adoption Machine: The Dark History of Ireland's mother and baby homes and the inside story of how Tuam 800 became a global scandal* (Newbridge: Merrion Press, 2018).

[13] Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland,* 756.

[14] Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland,* 756.

[15] Ruth Barton, "The Ballykissangelization of Ireland," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* vol. 20, no.3 (2000), doi: 10.1080/01439680050127851.

[16] Ann Wilson, "Constructions of Irishness in a Collection of Early Twentieth-Century Picture Postcards," *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 39, no.1 (2015): 100. William Butler Yeats

collection that depict a "wild, and mostly unpopulated countryside punctuated by picturesque ruins" like the monastic sites at Glendalough (County Wicklow) or the ruins of Killarney castle in an effort to uphold such a representation wherein even populated areas of Ireland are portrayed as a "natural unspoilt [*sic*] paradise marked only by mysterious cultural markers from a distant past."[17]

Over 100 years later, the Irish government released the "National Development Plan 2018–2027," a document which concerns itself with "Ireland's long term economic, environmental and social progress across all parts of the country."[18] When comparing the cover image of the National Development Plan with W. B. Yeats' ideals for Ireland, it becomes evident that the notions associated with this Yeatsian view—despite being from the early 1900's—perpetuate such tropes about Ireland, even today. The National Development Plan's cover image (see Figure 0.1) features a lone, red-haired female figure, outfitted, albeit not in "peasant clothes" but in active lifestyle clothing (offering a nod toward current image trends), standing on a rocky shore and gazing out over a body of water and a deserted headland beyond.[19] Vibrant green grass consumes the foreground of the image, reinforcing the perception of Ireland as a predominantly rural-based country. The framing of the photograph suggests that this pastoral scene remains "uncontaminated" by industrialization or even the trace of another human being (suggesting, perhaps, that the landscape is hers alone to discover).

(1865–1939) was a renowned Irish poet who was heavily involved in Irish cultural revival movements and in establishing Ireland as a free state. Yeats was inspired by Irish mythology and occultism and, in 1923, was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. See: Lester I Conner, *A Yeats dictionary: persons and places in the poetry of William Butler Yeats* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999).

[17] Wilson, "Constructions of Irishness," 100.

[18] "National Development Plan 2018–2027," Government of Ireland (gov.ie), accessed September 19, 2020, https://assets.gov.ie/19240/62af938dce404ed68380e268d7e9a5bb.pdf.

[19] Shutterstock, a stock photography company, reported that "wild journey," "outdoor adventure," and "hiking" are rising trends in stock imaging and social media sharing. The goal is to inspire feelings of wanderlust, "authenticity," and "emotional realness" in the viewer. See: Jordan Dyck, "Wild Life Trend Report: Real Outdoor Adventure Imagery on the Rise," The Shutterstock Blog, February 12, 2020, www.shutterstock.com/blog/wild-life-trend-real-outdoor-adventure.
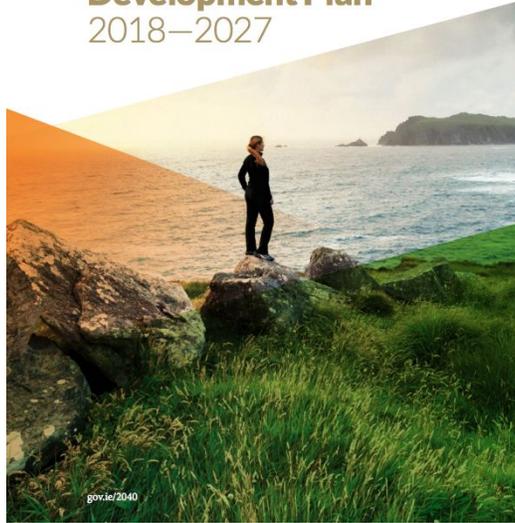
Figure 0.1—Cover of the *National Development Plan 2018–2027*.
https://assets.gov.ie/19240/62af938dce404ed68380e268d7e9a5bb.pdf.
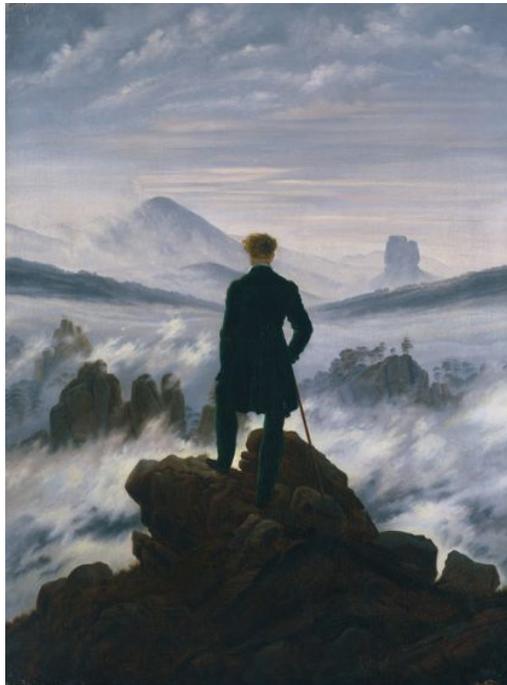
Fig. 0.2—*Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* by Caspar David Friedrich. Photo by Elke Walford.
Permanent collection Kunsthalle, Hamburg.

Further to that point, the chosen composition of the National Development Plan's cover image seems to pay homage to the famous romantic painting "Wanderer above the Sea of Fog" by Caspar David Friedrich (approx. 1817) (see Figure 0.2). The character in Friedrich's painting is iconic,[20] portrayed from behind, leaning on one leg, alert but still, in awe of the scenery and the moment. The figure on the cover image of the National Development Plan embodies much of Friedrich's iconic wanderer as she too is unidentifiable and is paused in the moment, arrested by the sublimity of the landscape. The resemblances between the two images solidifies the deliberate romanticism of Ireland and its geography and demonstrates that the chosen cover image of the National Development Plan 2018–2027, though updated to fit the current era, still seems to depict Ireland as a place that conforms to an idealized, simplistic, and preconceived narrative. Indeed, that the subject matter of this document is a development plan seems, somehow, ironic given this setting and composition.

How, then, is it possible to push back against preconceived notions of place, of long ingrained narratives, and stereotypical ideologies? The goal of my research-creation project undertaken for this Master of Design degree, entitled *Seeping into Stones*, is to stimulate a conversation with regard to Irish place and geography by exploring, translating, and materializing certain tensions that I perceived to have settled into the Irish topography. These tensions that I will explore in my thesis, which became apparent to me through exercises of deep mapping practice (to be discussed in Chapter Two), can be discerned as a push-and-pull between the rural and the urban localities of the island, in the dissonance between the human and the physical environment, and between the contemporary (roughly the year 2000 until present-day Ireland) and what I will call the conventional sentiments of Ireland (namely the stereotypical way that Ireland presents itself to uphold its reputation as a tourist destination and the "land of the thousand welcomes").[21] My goal, then, is to reimagine and re-engage with the perceptions and narratives that are perpetuated about the Irish environment and topography, and displace them by contributing to the deep map of the locations and environments that I am engaging with for this project.

Further, as a research-creation project, *Seeping into Stones* has been an opportunity to go beyond my own personal interaction with Irish topography and environment. I, myself, am not a newcomer to the Irish landscape. It is a place that I have continuously returned to, for my studies, for work, for artist residencies, and to visit family. Therefore, I am approaching this thesis from the point of view of an artist and designer who has been consistently engaging with the Irish environment, especially through my photography. As a first-generation Canadian, I employ photography as a means to derive and hone my own narratives in a landscape that I sought not to

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[20] The "halted traveller" also known as "ruckenfigur" is a compositional technique by which the figure, who is usually looking out towards a sublime or picturesque vista, is depicted from behind. It was popularized by Friedrich with "Wanderer above the Sea of Fog" and the technique is still being used today. See: Damien Rayuela, "The Halted Traveller," accessed November 21, 2020, https://www.damienrayuela.com/the-halted-traveller as an example of a contemporary artist using the technique. See: "Caspar David Friedrich 'Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog' (1818) Mens Hoodie Sweater," Yizzam.com, accessed November 21, 2020, https://yizzam.com/products/caspar-david-friedrich-wanderer-above-the-sea-of-fog-1818-mens-hoodie-sweater?variant=454894354457 as an example of commoditization of such an iconic image.

[21] Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland*, 726.

forget and that I hoped would not forget me. It was also a measure to deepen my engagement with my surroundings, as I learned how I fit in with them. This thesis will demonstrate how I transformed my practice from that of artist and photographer to include the profile and ambitions of a designer as well. Through what I call transformative gestures[22]—which I enacted on and through my images, and which engaged with the materiality of the images for the purposes of the thesis exhibition—I pushed my practice and investigation. Whereas that practice initially focused solely on image making, I have, during the course of my master's research, also incorporated into that practice the exercise of deep mapping through my images, as well as an exploration of critical and material practices inspired by scholarly discourse that I have been exposed to during the last three years.

This thesis will unfold as follows. In Chapter One, I will present my underlying methodologies of research-creation and deep mapping, and discuss how these have been instrumental in supporting the theoretical infrastructure of my research. Whereas others might write a paper to pose and think through a particular concept, I will use research-creation as a way to assimilate, in my case, design, photography, critical materiality, and literature in order that I might synthesize a coherent argument. Hence the final body of research-creation work that I created for *Seeping into Stones* encapsulates and makes material my research questions, processes, theories, and findings. Specifically, I will discuss how research-creation and deep mapping prompted me to understand the complexities of present-day Ireland through creative research. I will be returning to these two concepts, of deep mapping and research-creation, throughout this thesis, in order to better understand and rationalize my creative interventions.

In Chapter Two, I will discuss the foundational idea of "seeping into stones" and its importance to this thesis. I will address overarching theories concerning Kevin Barry's fictional writing, specifically how he anthropomorphizes the physical environment of Ireland, and teases out the emotional relationships between human and place in that environment, for the reader. Finally, I will elaborate on the tensions that I discovered as encompassed in present-day Irish topography, which I became aware of through a combination of my deep-mapping practice, research-creation practices, and Barry's short stories. These tensions, already mentioned above, are between the urban and rural, the human and the environment, and the contemporary and conventional.

Lastly, Chapter Three will explore how all of these important pillars of my thesis come together and manifest as creative work. I will make clear how *Seeping into Stones* operates as a project under the umbrella of design—specifically critical, speculative, and dark design. Then, I will demonstrate how I use the methods established in Chapter One, and the tensions discussed in Chapter Two to fulfill the "creation" aspect of my research-creation thesis with the hopes of offering insight into my process. In doing so I will provide an in-depth analysis of the evolution of my research-creation practice, namely from two-dimensional photography to the materialization and manipulation of my images as three-dimensional works, and finally, to a multimedia installation which was my contribution to the final Master of Design thesis exhibition *We Ask More Questions Than We Can Answer*.

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[22] Heather Rigg, "Curatorial Processes and Artist Submissions" (workshop, Gallery 44: Centre for Contemporary Photography, Toronto, ON, November 11, 2020).

SEEPING INTO STONES: CLARIFICATION OF TERMINOLOGY

I call this entire project *Seeping into Stones,* which comprises this written portion as well as my creative work. However, *Seeping into Stones* has several iterations, some of which are directly related whereas others are tangential and came into being as part of the process for this thesis. There are four iterations of *Seeping into Stones* that I will refer to: *Seeping into Stones (thesis)* is, as stated, the written and creative work of this thesis, namely, this document itself. *Seeping into Stones (installation)* is the installation of my final thesis show in May 2019. *Seeping into Stones (ACIS)* is the earliest iteration of this project, presented at the American Conference of Irish Studies in October 2018 and *Seeping into Stones (CJIS)* is an iteration of this thesis that was published in the *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* in June 2019. In Chapter Two, I will discuss the concept of seeping into stones, which I first came across while reading an interview with author Kevin Barry in the *Paris Review*, and I will refer to this section as "Seeping into Stones (Barry)."

Here is a timeline of my work to help clarify what I am discussing.

2015
June & July 2015: Undergraduate research trip to Ireland. Creation of '*Notes from the Field*,' a research-creation project that investigated the relationship between food practices and the unique geological makeup of the Burren, County Clare.

2017
June 2017: First research trip to Ireland as a master's student. Conducted foundational research for *Seeping into Stones* and created many of the images that would later appear in *Seeping into Stones (thesis)*.

2018
March 2018: Presentation of *Meeting of the Ways* as part of the Third Annual North American Graduate Conference in Irish Studies. This event consisted of a salon-style discussion, where I presented some images from my 2017 research trip, with fellow graduate students Kelly Norah Drukker and John Cairns. Our discussion focused on process, artistic commonalities and divergences, and interdisciplinary practices.

April 2018: Presentation of *House Organ* as part of my master's coursework. The presentation, which was in collaboration with fellow graduate student Ivette Nunez, consisted of several projected video and sound installations.

April 2018: Second research trip to Ireland as master's student. Participated in *How to Flatten a Mountain* & *PhotoIreland Festival* and continued researching and creating images for *Seeping into Stones (thesis)* as well as created the image for *Sale Agreed.*

October 2018: Presentation of *Seeping into Stones (ACIS)* at the American Conference of Irish Studies, Western Chapter in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. This event consisted of a paper presentation and prototype of an artist book.

2019
May 2019: Presentation of *Seeping into Stones (installation)* in the Master of Design Graduate show "*We Ask More Questions Than We Can Answer*," at the 4ᵗʰSpace, Concordia University. My exhibit consisted of twelve artist books, an installation piece, and a projected video entitled *Grotto in Motion*.

June 2019: Publication of *Seeping into Stone (CJIS)* in the *Treasury of Resources* of the *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies,* vol. 42. The publication consisted of a sequence of sixteen of my images, with text excerpts from Kevin Barry's short stories. My images also appeared as the front and back cover images of the journal.

June 2019: Presentation of *Echoes of Presence* at the Canadian Association of Irish Studies Conference at Concordia University. This event consisted of salon-style discussion, again with fellow graduate students Kelly Norah Drukker and John Cairns. Presentation consisted of images from *Seeping into Stones (thesis)* and *Sale Agreed,* and a screening of the video *Grotto in Motion* from the thesis exhibition.

June 2019: Presentation of *Sale Agreed* as part of a three-person panel at the Third Galway Conference of Irish Studies at the National University of Ireland, Galway. This event consisted of a paper presentation and discussion of the images for *Sale Agreed* which were created during my research trip in 2018.

2020
January 2020: Presentation of *Seeping into Stones (thesis)* at the Fourth Annual Concordia Graduate Student Conference. Presentation consisted of Paper presentation, discussion of images/theories, and a screening of *Grotto in Motion.*

CHAPTER ONE: UNDERLYING METHODOLOGIES

Seeping into Stones is a cross-disciplinary project that clusters, under one umbrella, research-creation, Irish studies, and design. The intent of this thesis is to bring attention to the complexities of present-day Ireland as identified in my introduction, a country which has undergone massive cultural shifts in recent history—and yet, certain narratives continue to be perpetuated. As mentioned in my Introduction, my project offers a means to explore some of these complex interrelationships between people, and between people and their physical environment over the last two-or-so decades.

Throughout this chapter I will identify and delineate the two specific pillars of the underlying methodologies of *Seeping into Stones*. The first is research-creation, and the second is deep mapping. As I will argue, both methodologies provide the flexibility that is necessary to fully engage with the layering and complexity of present-day Ireland as discussed in the Introduction, which have been the stimulus for this project.

Research-Creation

Research-creation is a recently-recognized field in the academic landscape. It is an approach to research whose goal is to create critically-informed work that "supports the development of knowledge and innovation through artistic expression, scholarly investigation, and experimentation."[23] In their 2012 article "Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis and 'Family Resemblances,'" Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuck define research-creation as a method and practice in which creative or experimental process is integral to the study.[24] Research-creation

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[23] "Definition of Terms," Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, last modified June 27, 2019, https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/programs-programmes/definitions-eng.aspx.

[24] Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuck, "Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis and "Family Resemblances,"" *Canadian Journal of Communication* 37, no. 1 (2012): 6.

advocates for the development of opportunities for creative questioning and research by thinking through making, for example, through artistic and design practices that give a context of critical materiality to a particular thought process or theory. Consequently, it allows for an engagement with scholarly discourse through mediums other than, or in conjunction with, academic and analytical writing. As Chris Salter states in *Alien Agency: Experimental Encounters with Art in the Making*, "thinking [about] issues of materiality, agency, and vibrancy through words is important, but we also need to be thrown into a lived, bodily, experiential encounter with the material world."[25] In the same vein, the things that I have made through the research-creation exercises at the heart of my master's research, (specifically photographs, artist books, videos, and an installation) are a manifestation of my own thinking process that I have made available for others to engage with as experiential encounters in the material world.

Seeping into Stones falls primarily under one of the four determined subcategories of research-creation as discussed by Chapman and Sawchuck, namely creation-as-research.[26] In creation-as-research the goal is for understanding and insight to be revealed through the design of visual and/or material deliverables.[27] Chapman and Sawchuck stress that one cannot truly engage with their medium, questions, and/or the phenomena they wish to explore unless they actively contrive to push creative boundaries in terms of visual communication or experimentation with materiality. This is done through experimentation, analysis, critique, and a deep exploration of theory and methods,[28] wherein "creation is required in order for research to emerge."[29] As such, only through an active and continuous engagement with the physical spaces at the heart of my thesis, including those depicted in the narratives by author Kevin Barry and the mediums that I have chosen through which to conduct this research, principally, design and photography, could I reframe and identify any questions which attracted my attention when I first began my master's research, and which evolved through its culmination. Throughout this evolution, there was a constant re-evaluation of the means of investigation and goals of my research, prompted by the process of research-creation which pushed me to go beyond my first set of concerns. Indeed, research creation seeks, not definitive answers, but rather, new questions to consider, and new ways of understanding the information that has been gathered.

In my previous experience and education as a photographer, my interests lay in investigating my surrounding natural and built environment through photography. With the introduction of research-creation into my practice, I was able to refine and add degrees of complexity to the questions that now comprise the backbone of my work. It is also through research-creation that I came to engage in a cross-disciplinary approach, one which now includes working in artistic practices outside photography, exploring the materiality of the photograph, juxtaposing and exploring literary fiction as another kind of creation, and working through design discourse and practice. Now, as I approach my practice as a photographer as well as a designer, artist, and researcher, these methods of engaging with my topic are inherent in the process of creating the work. Simply put, without an active participation in my practice, my research would cease to

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[25] Chris Salter and Andrew Pickering. *Alien Agency: Experimental Encounters with Art in the Making.* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2015), 5.
[26] Chapman and Sawchuck, "Research-Creation," 19.
[27] Chapman and Sawchuck, "Research-Creation," 19.
[28] Chapman and Sawchuck, "Research-Creation," 19.
[29] Chapman and Sawchuck, "Research-Creation," 19.

exist. Further, engaging in research-creation for this project required me to intuitively trust my experience and expertise and above all to trust the process.

Research-creation also constitutes a welcome opportunity for exploration through means other than logic or science-based knowledge systems. For example, intuition as a facet of research-creation is directly addressed in the article by Chapman and Sawchuck. They validate intuition's role in research-creation:

> The role of intuition and "feeling" presents itself as one of the strongest reasons why those who pursue research-creation are committed to the methods they promote, as it is only through working theoretically and artistically, or creatively, with their research topics that they become invested and engaged in a process that is right for them.[30]

When intuition is validated in this way, it allows for a unique, thorough, and personalized theoretical and creative process; it is an approach that is tailored to each researcher and their practice. Moreover, since my thesis topic explores the engagement between humans and their physical environment in terms of individuals' visceral response to that space, relying on intuition is imperative in my work and is also why research-creation is a fundamental pillar in the approach to my thesis.

The process of understanding through the act of doing and making is also discussed in anthropologist and professor Tim Ingold's book entitled *Making: Anthropology, Archeology, Art and Architecture,* published in 2013. This study is important because in *Making,* Ingold concisely demonstrates the integration of art, research and understanding through doing. Ingold highlights the importance of embodied knowledge arising through making, as well as the importance of learning something through investigation directly by the self, rather than being taught it. As he asserts, "the only way one can really know things – that is, from the very inside of one's being – is through a process of self-discovery."[31]

Ingold underscores the importance of understanding through doing and making by recounting experiments he undertook with his students, namely by guiding his undergraduate anthropology class through several exercises undertaken along the coast in Scotland. One such exercise was to create willow baskets, and students participating in the project soon learned how a direct engagement with materiality fundamentally shifts an understanding of its form and meaning.[32] The students thereby came to experience, in an active and insightful way, how willow baskets were literally created directly through exchanges of agency between the person, the willow, and the environment in which they were made. For example, the baskets they made had a defined tilt to them which, the students realized, was due to the heavy coastal winds pushing against the willow bows as they came together; the wind, by that means, was recognized as an active and defining player in the making process. Moreover, the students came to understand that the

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[30] Chapman and Sawchuck, "Research-Creation," 12.
[31] Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 1.
[32] "The Disappearing House: Inventing, Recording, Remembering the 'Irish Home,'" Molly-Claire Gillett, Shaney Herrmann, Alexandra Kenefick, Panel Presentation at National University of Ireland Galway, June 7th 2019.

maker's body, mood and temperament are forever reflected in the material of each basket. For example, the size of the baskets was intrinsically linked to the maker's own bodily dimensions of "arm-reach and shoulder-height."[33] Even the decision of when to finish a basket was prompted by the environment, determined, for example, by the fading light, cooling temperatures and imminent rain.[34] To highlight the importance of making in the learning process, Ingold relays, in the text, students' observations on this making process: "later they would tell me they had learned more from that one afternoon that from any number of lectures and readings: above all about what it means to make things, about how form arises through movement, and about the dynamic properties of materials."[35] Ingold's students were left with two main takeaways from their experiment: in addition to the physical baskets themselves, the students gained an incomparable understanding of why the baskets became what they were.

The deliverables arising from my research-creation in *Seeping Into Stones* manifest in two main deliverables. One is the tangible creative and material output of the work—the images, videos, narratives, artist books, and installation. Also emerging, through this material engagement—and this will become evident in Chapter 3—are new ways of seeing, questioning, and understanding the place and theories that I am working with. Through both its tangible *and* conceptual aspects, my research-creation work contributes additional layers of knowledge, like a build-up of sediment on an ever-evolving, deep representation of a place, indeed, a "deep map" of that place (an idea which will be explained in the next section), one that is collectively and continually being created and recreated.

Deep Mapping and the "lore of place"

"Both urban and rural places are saturated with stories."[36] This is the assertion with which Selina Springett starts her paper entitled *Going Deeper or Flatter: Connecting Deep Mapping, Flat Ontologies and the Democratization of Knowledge.*[37] But how do we unlock those stories? In this section I will discuss how an active engagement with a given place—whether a natural or built environment—through a practice called deep mapping, gives value and weight to the narratives that are embedded in that environment. Understanding how to unlock these stories through this practice is an important question in my work since, as we will see below, I consider my research-creation to be a means of deep mapping Ireland in order to understand some of its present-day complexities.

Deep mapping acknowledges that, as humans, we leave traces and imprints on the spaces we occupy. Deep mapping as a methodology arises from a desire to understand a given physical

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[33] Ingold, *Making,* 23.

[34] Ingold, *Making,* 23.

[35] Ingold, *Making,* 24.

[36] Selina Springett, "Going Deeper or Flatter: Connecting Deep Mapping, Flat Ontologies and the Democratizing of Knowledge," *Humanities* 4, no. 4 (October 2015): 623. doi: 10.3390/h4040623.

[37] Springett, "Going Deeper or Flatter," 623.

environment in a "deep" or profound way, through narrative built on spatialized experiences.[38] The term deep mapping comes from the active rejection of "thin" maps which only put forth a minimum, basic or singular amount of information about a locale, for example, a top-down delineation of national borders, or of rivers, roads or green spaces, etc. as if they were topographically flat. Deep mapping, however, constitutes a practice that offers the opportunity to learn alternative narratives from a given environment, thereby serving as a counterpoint to conventional maps.[39] Deep mapping seeks to follow the threads of and listen to the narratives entwined in a given space, and to provide a layered, multifarious, and evolving understanding of it.

Because deep mapping is so tailored to the specific needs of each individual who undertakes the exercise, and to the particular place being mapped, the term is actually quite difficult to define. Indeed, those who have advocated deep mapping as a strategy, have used various terms to describe their practice. For example, Karen Till and Julian Jonker, professors at the National University of Ireland Maynooth and the University of Pennsylvania, respectively, and both involved with the Mapping Spectral Traces international network, use the terms "spectral traces."[40] The grassroots group Common Ground from the United Kingdom use the term "local distinctiveness"[41] to describe their efforts. Author Kevin Barry, whose writing is at the heart of this thesis, names it "senses and reverbs."[42] When considering these variations of words that cluster around a similar method, we begin to understand the elusive qualities of the practice, one that deals in emotions and senses, in remnants, and in the in-between. Similarly, deep mapping is challenging to define in a visual or material way, inasmuch as it is hard to provide parameters for what a (physical) deep map might look like, or what it needs to fulfil visually.

It can additionally be argued that deep mapping comes into its own, both in the process that a practitioner engages in, and in the various outcomes that arise from that exercise. In an attempt to give some shape to the use and practice of deep mapping, I will provide a brief survey of several artistic projects that engage in deep mapping. First, I will focus on some deep mapping exercises that primarily use words and writing as the main method, and then follow with some bodies of work that use deep mapping in a variety of visual and material mediums.

Important to note, given that this thesis unpacks the fictional writings of Kevin Barry, is that deep mapping often uses literature as its main medium. Dr. Ian Biggs, artist and researcher at the National University of Ireland Galway, and active in the Mapping Spectral Traces international network, defines deep mapping as "an intensive topographical exploration of a particular (often small, rural) place, using engaged documentary writing of literary quality, sometimes combined

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[38] Brett Bloom and Nuno Sacramento, *Deep Mapping* (Auburn: Breakdown Break Down Press, 2017): 8.

[39] Bloom and Sacramento, *Deep Mapping*, 88.

[40] Karen E. Till and Julian Jonker, "Mapping and excavating spectral traces in post-apartheid Cape Town," *Memory Studies* 2, no.3 (September 2009): 305, doi: 10.1177/1750698008337561.

[41] "What We Do," Common Ground, accessed April 28, 2020, https://www.commonground.org.uk/what-we-do/.

[42] Lee, interview.

with photography and illustration."[43] With this definition in mind, many researchers consider William Least Heat-Moon's literary non-fiction book *PrairyErth (A Deep Map)* from 1991 as the seminal publication in deep mapping. Throughout *PrairyErth* is a thorough intermingling of landscape and personal narrative which provides a multi-layered investigation into a life lived in relation to place. Least Heat-Moon questions what it means to understand place, not just on a surface level, but also its grain and patina, saying that "facts carry a traveler only so far: at last he [sic] must penetrate the land by a different means, for to know a place in any real and lasting way is sooner or later to dream it. That's how we come to belong to it in the deepest sense." While *PrairyErth* is one of the most well-known publications in deep mapping, the survey of work in my chapter will show that many artists and authors had long-standing practices that also align with deep mapping which predate *PrairyErth*.[44]

One departure from the strategy of creating a literary work as the final output of a deep mapping exercise is Brett Bloom and Nuno Sacramento's 2017 booklet called *Deep Mapping.*[45] Consisting of short essays on the authors' own deep mapping experiences it ostensibly serves as a guide or manifesto towards the creation of one's own deep map, however such an exercise might finally manifest itself. For example, Sacramento completed and wrote about Lumsden's method of deep mapping, which includes instructions like "talking to elders," "placing your body in the landscape" to traverse that space at different speeds like walking and then by car, and "discuss[ing] your findings with those who helped you in the process."[46] Through Sacramento's writing, readers are able to experience his own thought process as one conceptual layer, while he was engaged in Lumsden's method, as well as the challenges he faced. In 2015, Bloom ran a deep mapping workshop in Scotland called Camp Breakdown Break Down, in collaboration with the Scottish Sculpture Workshop. Over eleven days, thirty participants spent their time dissecting and creating a collaborative deep map with a specific eco-critical lens[47] through guided workshops and artistic play.[48] Bloom and Sacramento's booklet is important, because whereas they are still using literature and publication as means of communication and discovery, theirs is

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[43] Ian Biggs, "Deep Mapping: A Brief Introduction," in *Mapping Spectral Traces*, ed. Karen E. Till (London: CMK, 2010): 5.

[44] Other examples of word-based deep mapping outcomes are: Susan Naramore Maher, *Deep Map Country: Literary Cartography of the Great Plains* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2014). Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Press, 2013). Paul Kingsnorth, *Confessions of a Recovering Environmentalist and Other Essays* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2017).

[45] I mentioned previously that deep maps are constantly changing, that they are unstable and not final. Bloom and Sacramento's publication *Deep Mapping* does a good job at embracing the fluidity of this practice and acknowledges the ever-changing nature of deep maps at the outset: "After reading this book you might realize that you are already doing something similar to Deep Mapping, even if you don't call it this. If you have feedback on this book or would like to share your form of Deep Mapping, feel free to contact us."

[46] Bloom and Sacramento, *Deep Mapping*, 43.

[47] Interestingly, but outside the scope of this thesis, ecocriticism and material ecocriticism appears as a common theme in deep mapping works.

[48] "Camp Breakdown Break Down - SSW" Breakdown Break Down, accessed May 1, 2020, https://breakdownbreakdown.net/camp-breakdown-break-down/.

a different dissemination goal. The literary examples in the *Deep Mapping* booklet are meant to be read and consumed as an invitation toward some future output by its readers, a step towards further creation.

While it is true that many deep maps focus their investigation on rural environments, and through writing and images, I would like to demonstrate that deep maps can be much more varied, multimodal and experiential. For example, the charity group Common Ground, founded in Dorset, England in 1983, is a grassroots initiative whose mandate is to connect people with their locale through a variety of mediums. These include music, art, community gatherings, publications, films, etc.[49] They spearhead projects like "Tree Dressing Days" which prompt communities to reflect on the social and cultural history of their locale, and the role trees play in shaping those stories,[50] or Field Days, which explore the diverse stories that a field might tell and is concerned with the conservation and celebration of fields as distinctive cultural and historical forms.[51]

In continuing the survey of deep mapping, I would like to demonstrate how deep mapping methods are also undertaken at an individual level of artistic practice. Artist Lewis deSoto, from the Cahuilla First Nation in California, is a multimedia artist working primarily in photography and installation art. DeSoto's *Tahualtapa Project (1983-1988)* focuses on the leveling and renaming of the mountain Tahualtapa (translates to "Hill of the Ravens") once it had been extensively mined for its resources. He uncovered many pseudonyms[52] for Tahualtapa—which is central to the lore of the Cahuilla people and which stood originally as the tallest mountain in the region. The installation for *Tahualtapa Project* combined photographs, maps, and sculptures made out of marble and cement to evoke the forgotten narratives that make up this landscape and to destabilize the claims with which the exploitation of the land was legitimized.[53] In the journal *American Indian,* Anya Montiel discusses how deSoto uses the act of renaming Tahualtapa in his project as a means to re-examine the narrative of the mountain through deep mapping:

> Through looking at one location over time, deSoto uncovered its changing history. As [deSoto] explains, "the names illustrate how cosmology signified what the earth was used for and how it is regarded by different peoples." Existing [originally] as a nesting place for ravens, Tahualtapa became a commodity to be conquered and consumed. Settlers renamed it for their purposes, and it no longer resembles itself.[54]

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[49] "What We Do," Common Ground, accessed April 28, 2020, https://www.commonground.org.uk/what-we-do/.

[50] "Tree Dressing Day," Common Ground, accessed June 10, 2020, https://www.commonground.org.uk/tree-dressing-day/.

[51] "Field Days," Common Ground, accessed June 10, 2020, https://www.commonground.org.uk/field-days/.

[52] The pseudonyms include "Cerrito Solo/Little Lonely Hill" (from Spanish colonizers), "Marble Mountain" (from American settlers circa 1850s), and its current moniker "Mt. Slover" (renamed after a fur trader died by bear attack in the area circa 1890s).

[53] Biggs, "Deep Mapping," 7.

[54] Anya Montiel, "Reclaiming the Landscape: The Art of Lewis deSoto," *National Museum of the American Indian (Smithsonian)* 13, no.3 (2012): 30. https://www.americanindianmagazine.org/sites/default/files/2018-01/NMAI-FALL-2012.pdf

In this manner, deSoto is exposing buried narratives that are a significant part of the contested history of the area. Montiel goes on to discuss how deSoto's art awakens viewers to look differently at one's own narratives, landscape, and even one's world by uncovering the ancient stories the Cahuilla have about their land.[55] For example, in Figure 1.1 deSoto creates a two-dimensional image that features the multitude of names used for Tahualtapa, which are being visually represented alongside the ghostly presence of the mountain's pre-leveling shape. Figure 1.2 takes this exploration into three dimensions, revealing a clean sawed-in-half block of concrete (which is one of the materials for which Tahualtapa was mined) whose interior pattern invites an audience to move in to investigate its complexity. In this way what first appears to be an innocuous mass of ubiquitous building material serves as a powerful next iteration of the layered, or striated, narratives that contribute to the deep mapping of Tahualtapa. As such, a project like *Tahualtapa Project* highlights the need to understand and to continue uncovering and generating conversation about the different narratives that are entangled in a given physical space, especially in contested landscapes like this one.

Fig 1.1—*Slover Codex sites historical names of Mt.Slover.* Lewis deSoto.
http://lewisdesoto.net/Wallworks/Tahualtapa_Project.html#1.

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[55] Montiel, "Reclaiming the Landscape," 30.
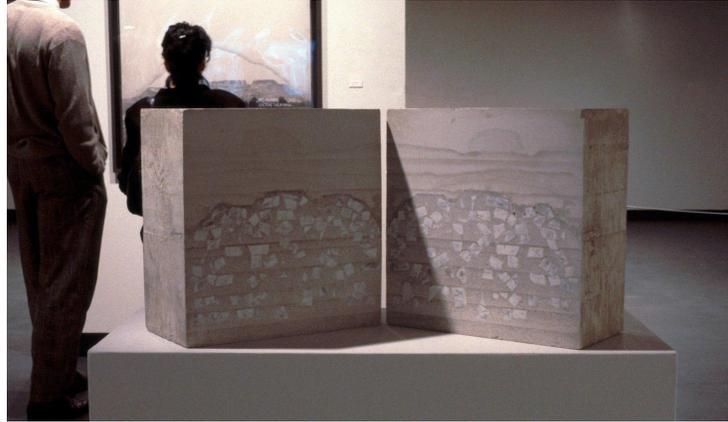
Fig 1.2—*Inside Story: sawn block of concrete.* Lewis deSoto.
http://lewisdesoto.net/Wallworks/Tahualtapa_Project.html#15.

As I have argued, given the various practices alluded to above,[56] in order to gain the greatest degree of insight through deep mapping exercises, it is essential to understand the *process*, that is, the intention and attention behind the method, rather than see it merely as a means to put forth some definitive, fixed-and-final deliverable. *Deep Maps and Spatial Narratives*, a compilation of diverse essays from 2015, seems to reinforce this idea. The editors demonstrate that one main quality of deep maps is that they are mutable and subject to the vicissitudes of multiple narratives, including future ones. Deep maps do not strive to be the overarching story of a place, but one of countless strands that contribute to the fabric of a place. They invite contemplation of the juxtapositions and contradictions that deep mapping is so apt at highlighting:

> Deep maps do not explicitly seek out authority or objectivity but provoke negotiations between insiders and outsiders, experts and contributors, over what is represented and how. Framed as a conversation and not a statement, they are inherently unstable, continually unfolding and changing in response to new data, new perspectives, and new insights.[57]

This quality of drawing attention to juxtaposition is also echoed by the artist Clifford McLucas in his paper *There are ten things I can say about deep maps.* McLucas explores how deep maps inherently challenge the belief that knowledge lies only in the domain of the specialist (like a mapmaker, or a geographer for example). McLucas argues that, instead, important insight from deep maps appears in the *interactions between* stakeholders, namely between the amateur and the

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[56] Examples of other creative projects that utilize deep mapping practices include: *The Hollywood Forest* by Cathy Fitzgerald and Martin Lyttle, see: www.hollywoodforest.com. *Shot at Dawn* (2014) and *In Search of Frankenstein* (2018) by Chloe Dewe Mathews, see: www.chloedewemathews.com. *Forest Law* (2014) by Ursula Biemann and Paulo Tavares, see: https://www.geobodies.org/art-and-videos/forest-law. *The Living Mountain* by Awoiska van der Molen (artist book in conversation with musical composition and poetry), see: https://www.awoiska.nl/books.

[57] *Deep Maps and Spatial Narratives*, edited by David J. Bodehamer, John Corrigan, and Trevor M. Harris. (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2015): 4.

professional, the artist and the scientist, the national and the local, etc.[58] This recognition highlights the point that deep mapping, a method that is itself focused on an investigation of the in-between, is an apt method to uncover and to strive to understand any existing tensions in the built or natural environment, and between any of their stakeholders, human and nonhuman. Deep mapping is all the more interesting in an Irish context, in which a conflicted history with conventional maps and mapping exists. On the one hand, an organic mapping system had been in place in Ireland since as early as the sixth century.[59] "Dinnseanchas,"[60] an Irish word which translates to "lore of place,"[61] is a blend of both pagan and Christian beliefs and signals that a place or landscape is brimming with stories. Eamonn Wall, author, poet, and professor at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, writes about dinnseanchas in the literary magazine *Terrain*'s website: "[dinnseanchas] encompasses the whole story of place. The individual is formed by an interaction with his/her place, is part of a large story, and is not privileged by virtue of being human. Central to *dinnseanchas* is story and how story engages the whole story/history of a place. Place is a wonder in its own right to behold, and it is also a teacher."[62] Wall claims that dinnseanchas remains intertwined in the Irish psyche,[63] which seems all the more to support the argument that exploring Ireland through processes of deep mapping is not only a natural fit but a practice that already has had demonstrable weight and value in this environment.

Equally important to note is that whereas *dinnseanchas* has a crucial resonance in Irish culture, what may be considered as the first more generically-conventional type of mapping of Ireland is associated with settler-colonial strategies undertaken by the British government. The Ordnance Survey Ireland was established by the United Kingdom in 1824. Its goal was to create a "survey of the entire island of Ireland to update land valuations for land taxation purposes."[64] Consequently, out of the necessity for regimentation of documentation by its oppressors (for both military and tax purposes), Ireland became the first country in history to be mapped at such a detailed scale, namely six inches to one mile.[65] This act brings to the forefront the pressing need for practices like deep mapping and *dinnseanchas* to assert themselves over the imposed narratives and boundaries in a country like Ireland.

I would now like to highlight some work that utilizes deep mapping in a specifically Irish context, and thereby adds further complexity to an understanding of the Irish landscape—beyond

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[58] Biggs, "Deep Mapping," 7.
[59] John O'Hart, *Irish Pedigrees; Or, The Origin and Stem of the Irish Nation Vol. II* (Dublin: James Duffy And Co.): 598.
[60] "The *Book of Dinnseancha*s was originally composed in the sixth century by Amergin, chief bard to the monarch Dermod, at Tarah; but many additions have been made to it by later writers." The *Book of Dinnseanchas* gives an account of important places (like fortresses, cities, mountains, rivers, etc.) and of the origin of their names, as well as information on ancient Irish history and topography. See: O'Hart, *Irish Pedigrees, 598.*
[61] Eamon Wall, "Deep Maps: Reading Tim Robinson's Maps of Arans," *Terrain,* last modified May 3, 2012, https://www.terrain.org/articles/29/wall.htm.
[62] Wall, "Deep Maps."
[63] Wall, "Deep Maps."
[64] "History," Ordnance Survey Ireland, accessed May 15, 2020, https://www.osi.ie/about/history/.
[65] Ordnance Survey Ireland, "History."

both traditional *dinnseanchas* practices, as well as those undertaken by the British colonizers of that land.[66] Cartographer, writer, and artist Tim Robinson was known for his rich visual and literary studies on the landscape of the Aran islands off Ireland's west coast (to which he moved in 1972), studies that have been described as being able to "portray the inner and outer life of a landscape and its inhabitants."[67] Actively produced from the mid 1970s to early 2010s, his work is an excellent example of the enrichment deep mapping can bring to a body of work.

Before Robinson started producing books, he had published (through his own imprint, *Folding Landscapes*) many hand-drawn maps of the Aran islands and the surrounding coastline of Ireland, which were used by islanders and tourists alike.[68] However, it was Robinson's deep and continued curiosity and engagement with the cultural geography of Ireland that propelled his best-known deep-mapping works, namely *The Stones of Aran* series. Eamonn Wall discusses the trajectory of Robinson's practice in *Walking: Tim Robinson's Stones of Aran.* Robinson was known for walking the island of Inishmore, and, the more Robinson walked "the more the complexity of the island grew—and the more he doubted the simple tropes that underlined the functional maps he had drawn."[69] Robinson's enlightenment and realization of the need for a deeper engagement with the physical environment is echoed in this quote, where he argues that "[c]learly, there was more to a place than its roads, buildings, hills, and so on. Each road, for example, was more nuanced and detailed than a mere line drawn between settlements. [...] For the minimal language of maps, not to mention the problematic nature of language, are never quite pliable enough to convey the ineffable spirit of place."[70] Robinson's observation is an indication of the unfurling nature of deep mapping, as a practice that is mutable and continuously expanding. When experienced together, Robinson's visual maps along with his literary publications provide many access points into a layered and nuanced representation of Ireland as place.

Most recently, and on a purely auditory basis, the community radio station Clare FM, which broadcasts from that county of Ireland, aired a series of deep mapping episodes with local educator and walking guide Pius Murray, on its program "Beyond Belief."[71] The audio files narrate and guide the listener through walks to sites of importance in the Burren,[72] a geologically

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[66] I would also argue that folklorist Henry Glassie's book *Passing the Time in Ballymenone* from 1982 is a robust example of the kind of inquiring and perception a deep map requires, even if Glassie himself does not explicitly name it so.

[67] "Stones of Aran: Labyrinth," The Lilliput Press, accessed June 29, 2020, https://www.lilliputpress.ie/product/stones-of-aran-labyrinth.

[68] Eamonn Wall, "Walking: Tim Robinson's Stones of Aran," *New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua* 12, no. 3 (Autumn 2008): 67. doi:10.1353/nhr.0.0032.

[69] Wall, "Walking," 67.

[70] Tim Robinson, *Stones of Aran: Pilgrimage* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1986): 11.

[71] "Walk in the Burren with Pius," Anchor, last modified May 18, 2020, https://anchor.fm/beyond-belief/episodes/Walk-in-the-Burren-with-Pius---Episode-02-17MAY20-ee7med.

[72] The Burren is a region on the West Coast of Ireland that is known for its karst (limestone) geology. The region possesses extraordinary geological qualities compared to the rest of Ireland and has unique plant and animal life, a pertinent farming history, as well as several towns such as

unique area of County Clare. Murray starts the first episode with two quotes that set the intention for his daily walks. The first quote, by American monk Thomas Merton, is as follows: "It is essential to experience all the things, and moods, of one good place."[73] The second quote is by Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh: "to know fully even one field or one land is a lifetime's experience. In the world of poetic experience, it is the depth that counts not width."[74] With these quotes we have insight into Murray's way of thinking about, and interacting with, the physical world around him. The quotes also demonstrate how Murray's approach falls directly in line with deep mapping's attunement into multiple narrative threads of a place and with deep rather than thin investigations into such an environment. Toward that end, Murray's goal, as stated on his website, is to provide an "exploration of the flora, fauna, geology, history, archaeology, mythology and farming practices of the Burren."[75]

In summarizing all of deep mapping's complex outcomes demonstrated here—from years-long dedication like that of Common Ground to a single radio broadcast series that can be heard worldwide—one can discern that, when paired down, engaging in the practice of deep mapping can really be as simple as a walk through the landscape with deliberate and heightened attention. This is one of the biggest strengths of deep mapping, that it can be both a lifelong dedication and practice or a thought process during a walk on an afternoon. What attracts me to deep mapping is precisely its ability to uncover alternative ways of engaging with, interpreting, and understanding the material world. Like research-creation, deep mapping is tailored by its practitioner, morphing to each individual's needs and situations, and it requires the use and exploration of theory and practice in tandem. Also in line with research-creation, to use deep mapping as a method is to seek renewed, and possibly unconventional, ways of knowing.

Deep mapping, therefore, is an appropriately complex tool to employ in teasing out stories of the land of Ireland. That very ability to accommodate complexity is advantageous as a constant reminder that such stories are layered, ambiguous, sometimes contradictory, and ultimately indeterminate. No one story will ever sufficiently characterize one geographical or cultural place or moment. In this sense, taking on deep mapping as one of my methods for *Seeping into Stones* is a natural fit for the research-creation-type investigation in which I am working. Likewise, I chose deep mapping because it valorizes the numerous stories entangled in the country's cultural geography and provides a framework to unpack a given environment from a new perspective while taking into account how we shape our physical world and how we are, in turn, shaped by it. This is important because, as Chapter Two will reveal, the very crux of *Seeping into Stones* is to unearth tensions in the Irish material landscape—between the rural/urban, the human/environment, and the contemporary/conventional. And, as we will also see in Chapter Two, there is evidence that Kevin Barry is sensitive to, and manifests overt consciousness of, the complexity of deep mapping in his writing.

Corofin, Ballyvaughan, and Ennistymon. Parts of the Burren are UNESCO protected sites. See: www.burrengeopark.ie.

[73] Pius Murray, "Walk With Pius" May 3, 2020, Clare, Ireland, Beyond Belief Clare FM Podcast, 11:42, https://anchor.fm/beyond-belief/episodes/Clare-FM-Beyond-Belief-03MAY20-Pius-Murray---Walk-With-Pius-edjijd.

[74] Murray, "Walk With Pius."

[75] "Home," Walk With Pius, accessed June 29, 2020, https://walkwithpius.com/.

CHAPTER TWO: KEVIN BARRY

As demonstrated in Chapter One, *Seeping into Stones* uses research-creation and deep mapping in an effort to understand some of the complexities of present-day Ireland. In this chapter, I will discuss how an Irish fiction writer—Kevin Barry—who writes about contemporary Ireland, contributed the foundational idea of "seeping into stones" to my research-creation project. In fact, Barry's notion that human emotions can become imbricated in, or "seep" into the landscape, became the pervasive theme that drove my work. To unpack this, I will first describe Kevin Barry's representation and understanding of contemporary Ireland as represented in his writing. I will then explain the idea of "seeping into stones" as the prevalent concept in my thesis. Finally, I will elaborate on the tensions that I discovered are present in the Irish physical landscape as a result of this "seeping" process, as well as on how these tensions reveal themselves in my research-creation project.

Kevin Barry is an award winning contemporary Irish author who is known for his novels— *Night Boat to Tangier* (2019), *Beatlebone* (2015), and *City of Bohane* (2011)—his short story collections—*There are Little Kingdoms* (2007) and *Dark Lies the Island* (2012)—as well as his scriptwriting. Consistently in these works, when Barry writes about Ireland (its natural landscape, built environment, people, and daily life) he does so in a very individualized and evocative manner. For example, as we will see below, he anthropomorphizes his local environment, that of rural County Sligo, as a means of exploring its effects on its inhabitants. I found Barry's writing inspirational because it was through his short stories that I first began to

perceive the nuanced layers of contradictions—between how Ireland is conventionally represented and how it actually is—that make up present-day Ireland.

Barry's overall writing undermines any sense of predictability about Irish people and the geography or built environment that derives from the stereotypic and superficial consideration of Ireland as the "Emerald Isle;" in many ways it features the very antithesis of benign lush green fields full of contented animals, and of a homogeneously friendly and spiritual population.

Especially in his short story collections, Barry overlays multiple discrete depictions of Ireland, in contradistinction to more typical images of that country (for example, as found in its travel literature, or nostalgic depictions by emigrants), which very often tend to place heavy emphasis on the pastoral aspects of an idyllic, lush, and green island. Instead, Barry provides his readers with an eroded, dark, tangled and sometimes menacing landscape, one which sometimes seems more in keeping with a gothic novel like *Frankenstein* rather than with the stereotypes upheld in the iconic Irish-American films *The Quiet Man* or *Ryan's Daughter*. Through this way of writing Barry creates an emotional contrapuntal resonance that is rooted directly in the landscape and in distinct representations of place. Instead of playing into such stereotypes in his writing, Barry offers a counter narrative. This counter narrative is important for my own research purposes, because the perspective from which Barry writes consequently serves as a useful ideological platform for *Seeping into Stones*, one on which to build alternative narratives about Ireland. Such a change in perceptions is long overdue: as I argued in my introduction, Ireland (more-so today than ever) is a complex and multivalenced place but its narratives have, especially until quite recently, tended to default toward homogeneity in terms of religion, ethnicity, heteronormativity, among other forces.

Indeed, this need for varied and updated representations of Ireland has been echoed in other cultural initiatives. These include several that focus, not only on text-based analysis, but on material or visual explorations. One example of the latter is "100 Views of Contemporary Ireland"[76] by The Library Project (an organization that champions visual culture, contemporary photography and critical thinking in Ireland). One hundred photographers were asked to contribute to a collection of images that create present-day narratives of Ireland through a series of postcards. The mandate for the project is precisely to "represent the complexities and charm of a *growingly [sic] diverse country* that has changed beyond recognition in the last decades"[77] (emphasis added).

The material form of these images (that they are presented as physical postcards) adds to their meaning. Postcards are made to be shared, to be written on, and are publicly visible inasmuch as they are posted without an envelope, and are often displayed by the purchaser or recipient.[78] As Ann Wilson discusses in her article "Constructions of Irishness in a Collection of Early

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[76] "100 Views Of Contemporary Ireland," The Library Project, accessed March 27, 2020, https://tlp.photoireland.org/search?type=product&q=100+views+of+contemporary+Ireland.

[77] "Blog: 100 Views Of Contemporary Ireland," The Library Project, March 11, 2020, https://tlp.photoireland.org/blogs/news/100-views-of-contemporary-ireland.

[78] Indeed, when approached from a deep mapping perspective, the designated space, on the back of the postcard, for a message written by its sender adds another potential layer of narrative and experience.

Twentieth-Century Picture Postcards," postcards (in and outside of an Irish context) have a history of using stereotypical and sometimes problematic imagery to perpetuate certain overly-simplistic and pastoral ideas and representations about a place.[79] The "100 Views of Contemporary Ireland" series uses the form of the postcard to help disrupt and readjust, in a collective manner, the narratives of contemporary Ireland. One begins to see how "100 Views of Contemporary Ireland" serves to undermine the conventional imagery of Ireland when comparing a postcard contributed to the series by artist Róisín White (see Figure 2.1) with a postcard by popular mid-twentieth century photographer John Hinde (see Figure 2.2).[80] The visual similarities are striking: a white building nestled in the landscape with the Wicklow mountains as a backdrop. However, White's image, photographed in the evening rather than during the day, depicts the idyllic countryside aflame. The urgency of the fire, which glows bright in the dimness of the evening, seems to symbolize the disruption of the stereotypical Irish narrative in this shifting and unstable landscape. It is hard to tell whether the fire is due to human causes but its mere presence here, right in the centre of the image, emphasizes a dissonance between human and nonhuman forces in this locale, and the harsh reality of enduring in this environment.

Figure 2.1—*The Fairy Fort is Burning, Wicklow 2018*. Róisín White.
https://thelibraryproject.ie/products/roisin-white-100-views-of-contemporary-ireland?_pos=3&_sid=39ce27d30&_ss=r.

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[79] Wilson, "Constructions of Irishness," 93.

[80] Hinde, an English-born photographer (1916-1997), is well known for his extensive photographic work in England and the republic of Ireland.

Figure 2.2—*Vale of Clara, Co. Wicklow, Ireland.* John Hinde.
https://www.ebay.com/itm/Irish-Postcard-VALE-OF-CLARA-Co-Wicklow-Ireland-Church-Bridge-John-Hinde-2-47-/40142907
0478. Accessed December 18, 2020.

As such, "100 Views of Contemporary Ireland" offers a multitude of countervailing perspectives from artists and image makers (all of whom have relationships with Ireland, but are not necessarily Irish born) who are not trying to sell an idea of Ireland for tourism and economic growth but are, instead, speculating on difference and celebrating the diversity of present-day Ireland.

As already mentioned, and for reasons to be delved into in a nuanced way below, Barry's short stories and his approach to narrating Ireland served as a jumping off point for my creative investigations. The stories allowed me to see past my own assumptions and expectations of Ireland, which are a blend of personal and professional experiences derived from family affiliation as well as numerous visits to that country. It was through the framework of Barry's stories that I was able to recognize and respond to some underlying tensions that I have found to be present in the Irish built and natural environment—which are, as stated in my introduction, tensions between rural/urban, between the human and that physical environment, and the contemporary/conventional. This chapter will help shed light on how Barry uses such tensions to add narrative layers to his depiction of Irish place and the shifting engagement of his characters with place, by conceptualizing his engagement with the phenomenon that he calls "seeping into stones" as its own kind of deep mapping tool. I will discuss how both seeping into stones and tensions perceived within the Irish physical environment shaped my creative process and interventions in my research-creation project. For the purposes of this thesis, I will focus on select stories from Barry's short story collections as well as his debut play *Autumn Royal* (2017).

Seeping into Stones (Barry)

In this section, I will examine Barry's own use of "seeping into stones" as a concept which relates to the practice of deep mapping, as well as investigate how this phenomenon affects Barry's representation and understanding of contemporary Ireland. That will include a discussion about how Barry seems to have integrated the idea of deep mapping into his work, something

that appears evident in some of his literary decisions and strategies. This is important for the purposes of my thesis project, since I undertake a similar process of deep mapping through photographic and material mediums in order to understand certain tensions that are discernible in present-day Ireland.

Perhaps the most pivotal moment of my research came as a result of reading an interview that Barry gave to *The Paris Review* in 2013. In that interview, Barry discusses the emotional impact the material environment of Ireland has had on him, and, in particular, his impression that human emotions have the ability to settle into a particular landscape. Although I have already included his remarks in my introduction, they bear repeating here: "[m]y suspicion is that feeling escapes from people and seeps into the stones of a place... as you go through all the different towns, you pick up such different senses and reverbs from each place. It isn't to do with how a place looks... but each place gives off its own very distinct feeling and sometimes it's light and sometimes it's really fucking dark."[81] Reading this quote was so important because it led me to make the connection between Barry's writing and thought process and the practice of deep mapping. This quote was also pivotal because it called attention to the ability to experience a distinct physical as well as visceral interaction with a particular landscape, rather than simply to react passively to its visual aspects. It was my realization of the full impact of Barry's assertion that shifted my perception towards a new way of feeling entangled with, and by, a given Irish place.

Barry chose the words "seeping into stones" and "senses and reverbs" to describe a multi-directional emotional relationship between person and place. The quote above suggests the degree to which he himself has been emotionally affected by "feelings" that he picks up from a particular landscape, ones that are sometimes "light," and other times "dark."[82] Through his writing Barry is communicating the complex emotional histories of his environment to his readers, by projecting such reactions as profound shaping influences on the lives of his characters, men and women who are struggling to confront and define their identity in a mostly unaccommodating, if not actively hostile and alienating, environment.

As Chapter One argued, part of the process of deep mapping is the acknowledgement of, and active engagement with, the multiple layers that collectively make up a place. Literary critics have identified such intentionality in operation in Barry's work as well. Martyn Colebrook, author of "Putting the 'Urban' into 'Disturbance': Kevin Barry's City of Bohane and the Irish Urban Gothic" suggests that Barry was actively using layering strategies when he wrote his 2011 novel *City of Bohane*. Colebrook explains that Barry built the fictional city of Bohane to "constitute a multi-layered entity composed of the past, the present and the future potential."[83] The layers of time in *City of Bohane* fall in line with the layering of different histories, narratives, emotions, etc. that is indicative of the practice of deep mapping. Colebrook elaborates:

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[81] Lee, interview.

[82] Lee, interview.

[83] Martyn Colebrook, "Putting the 'Urban' into 'Disturbance': Kevin Barry's *City of Bohane* and the Irish Urban Gothic," in *Irish Urban Fictions,* ed. Maria Beville and Deirdre Flynn (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018): 151. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-98322-6.

The novel is a weird retro-fitted future-Western, with lots of gratuitous swearing, hideous violence, perverse sex and powerful opiates, but above all it's a projection of what the street talk might sound like among hipster hoodlums in such city in the 2050s. Language in Bohane functions not only as a tool for communication but also for preservation, recording and documenting the city's evolutions and revolutions.[84]

Colebrook also refers to Barry's narration of space and its connection to the different characters in the novel. Colebrook suggests that Barry's use of space "functions as a mechanism by which 'human experience' or 'mood' can be commented on, whether that be the terror of what lies hidden or that which is lurking just beyond the limits of human perception."[85] In this way, Barry's description of place is a means to explore the deep connection between it and its inhabitants, through both that place's effect on its inhabitants (both human and nonhuman) and the inhabitants' effect on the place. This interdependency is intensified by a section of prose from *City of Bohane* which claims that "Whatever's wrong with us is coming in off that river. No argument: the taint of badness on the city's air is a taint off that river."[86] Barry's understanding of the shaping influence on humans that such a landscape can have is further reinforced in a quote from an interview in 2019, in which Barry describes his hometown of Sligo[87] as: "kind of spacey and weird and you discover how affected you are, mood-wise, by weather and atmospheric pressure and presences in the landscape."[88] Colebrook confirms this symbiotic relationship between person and place: "It is as though there is a tension between the question of whether the inhabitants shape the ... characteristics of the urban or the urban environment shapes the ... tendencies of its inhabitants."[89]

At the same time as Barry is experimenting with layering different times and places,[90] he also blurs the distinctions between people and place. His characterizations of place frequently portray those environments as possessing human-like qualities: they are often moody, vengeful, full of a turmoil of emotions. Readers will often encounter phrases such as "melancholy hills,"[91] or "there is a white and nervous sky,"[92] or even "[a]n indisputable fact: our towns are sexed."[93] Conversely, Barry will use words that would usually pertain to the environment to describe his

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[84] Colebrook, "Putting the 'Urban' into 'Disturbance,'" 151.

[85] Colebrook, "Putting the 'Urban' into 'Disturbance,'" 152.

[86] Kevin Barry, *City of Bohane,* (London: Random House, 2011), 14, Kobo edition.

[87] County Sligo and the surrounding areas are also, coincidentally, the setting for many of Barry's stories.

[88] John Jeremiah Sullivan, "Failing the Driving Test with Kevin Barry," *The Paris Review,* last modified September 19, 2019, https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2019/09/19/failing-the-driving-test-with-kevin-barry/.

[89] Colebrook, "Putting the 'Urban' into 'Disturbance,'" 150.

[90] The fictional area of Bohane is believed to be an amalgamation of the cities of Limerick and Cork.

[91] Kevin Barry, "See The Tree, How Big It's Grown," *There are Little Kingdoms* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press 2013), 26.

[92] Kevin Barry, "Animal Needs," *There are Little Kingdoms* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press 2013), 39.

[93] Kevin Barry, "Last Days Of The Buffalo," *There are Little Kingdoms* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press 2013), 52.

human characters, for example: "She was a pretty but dour woman, with eyes full of dread and rain."[94] In "Putting the 'Urban' in 'Disturbance,'" Colebrook also notices Barry's anthropomorphization of place. When discussing the chaos that envelops the *City of Bohane,* Colebrook points to a passage from Barry's text which suggests that a "balance" may be thrown off because of how the people of the city of Bohane treated the bog "[t]he bog's occult nature had been interfered with, its body left scarred, its wounds open."[95] Colebrook continues: "That the source of Bohane's woes may be due to the corruption of a bog is steeped in Irish culture. The 'occult nature' of the bog suggests the supernatural, the ghostly, but Barry goes further and locates the bog as a scarred body, violated and wounded." [96] In this way, Barry is demonstrating to the reader the entanglement between person and place, and moreover, the mutability of exchanges of human and nonhuman identity.

Also evident in Colebrook's last quote is how Barry's narration of everyday life teeters on the edge of the real—and at times hyperreal—and then sometimes diverts abruptly into the surreal. Some of his short stories are so tack-sharp and gritty that the characters' anxieties are palpable. Other stories create a reality that has the quality of floating, just above our sphere, in a world similar to ours but with something slightly off about it. Barry himself addresses this idea in an interview with Michael Kenneally in the *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*:

> Very often, the stories will open broadly within the realm of realism and then will seem to start moving out, to a place that's just kind of hyper real, where things are just stretched a little. It's still very obviously an Irish-type place—with Irish-type accents Irish talk going on, Irish characters, but ... you're going, "where exactly are we here? Where is this going?[97]

This relationship to space is in part created by the manner in which Barry renders setting in his literature and the dialogue his characters maintain. Barry will often oscillate between dissociation and specificity in his descriptions of Ireland, to create a patchwork relationship with a given place for the reader. This patchwork view, akin to a fluctuating camera angle (for example from a tightly cropped shot to a wide-angle view) provides the reader with a heightened sense of spatiality in the texts. This writing style creates tension between what Barry is choosing to reveal and deliberately leaving unsaid. By bringing the reader to the "edge of believability,"[98] Barry is creating space for these surreal moments to occur, as if there were a very real and concrete counterweight to the unusual moments that Barry wants the reader to experience.

The juxtaposition between vagueness and sharpness when describing place—and the tension that arises from that juxtaposition—is evident, for example, in "Animal Needs," a story from *There are Little Kingdoms.* "Animal Needs" recounts a story of adultery among a group of inhabitants of the West of Ireland. In the text, Barry completely removes place names from his pages,

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[94] Kevin Barry, "To The Hills," *There are Little Kingdoms* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press 2013), 17.
[95] Colebrook, "Putting the 'Urban' into 'Disturbance,'" 162.
[96] Colebrook, "Putting the 'Urban' into 'Disturbance,'" 162.
[97] Michael Kenneally, "An Interview with Author Kevin Barry," *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies,* no. 42 (2019): 32.
[98] Kenneally, "An Interview with Author Kevin Barry," 32.

leaving the reader with sentences like: "This is a scatter of acres outside the town of B_____."[99] or "He pulls onto the bare, desolate stretch of the L_____ Road."[100] While Barry choses to situate the activity sufficiently for the reader to understand that the story takes place in County Clare, he reinforces the duality between concrete place and ambiguous setting by using these indeterminate names. Unlike wholly fictional names which would remove setting from the accuracy of a particular geographical reference, these names simultaneously suggest both specificity and indeterminacy. Moreover, the vagueness and ambiguity of place leaves the reader with the impression that what plagues the characters, and by extension the landscape, in "Animal Needs" can be applied to any of the towns in Ireland. This rendering of such unappealing and harsh landscapes simultaneously suggests the challenges facing their inhabitants and the disconnection, even alienation, from what normally might be a source of nurture, even pleasure for them. By deliberately creating an ambiguous relationship to these aspects of small towns, Barry is undermining the habitual or conventional associations of life to be found in romanticized narratives, in this case, of the West of Ireland.

Tensions

When a reader begins one of Barry's short stories, they can never be quite sure which Ireland will appear. Might it be the languid and clammy summer nights of a coastal town in "Atlantic City"? Or, the schizophrenic and threatening bog featured in *"Dark Lies the Island"*? Or perhaps, will the story take place in transit, as the countryside blurs and Barry's characters are ushered from place to place? Such ambiguity, in and of itself, contributes to the sensation of tension that emerges from Barry's writing.

Whichever depiction of Ireland does appear, the reader can expect that Barry will build a landscape full of emotion (as demonstrated above) and tension. As mentioned in my introduction, the tensions that have arisen through Barry's writing fester in the disconnect between how Ireland is stereotypically thought of, and how Ireland actually is. Whereas Barry sometimes employs the stereotypical storyline of Ireland in his writing, he seems to do so with the intention of highlighting the negative fallout as a result of keeping up such appearances. In these scenarios, Barry is starting to reveal that when a whole country lives suspended between such competing forces and inherent contradictions, it is inevitable that some tension and disconnect arise for its inhabitants. The following subsections will elaborate on such tensions; useful, for that purpose, is the categorization of these tensions – rural/urban, human/environment, and contemporary/conventional. My decision to characterize these tensions as binary is not to suggest that these tensions are discrete (indeed, they are relational, inevitably entangled with each other), but rather as a means to help understand, visualize, and materialize the contradictions under which present-day Ireland exists.

Tension: Rural/Urban

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[99] Barry, "Animal Needs," 36.
[100] Barry, "Animal Needs," 42.

The majority of Barry's short stories are set in the rural countryside of the West of Ireland, an area often stereotypically associated with the pastoral imagery and values projected by Irish tourism material, for example. By situating his stories—which rarely have happy endings—in counter versions of such settings, Barry is actively dispelling myths and stereotypes about the Irish countryside, and the people who live there and must contend with its varying and complex realities.

"Fjord of Killary," from *Dark Lies the Island*, is one exemplary instance when Barry chooses to acknowledge the stereotypes of Ireland, only to dismantle them. The main character, Caoimhin (a forty-year-old poet from Dublin suffering from writer's block), is enamoured with the Irish West and believes that going there will inspire him to be as productive as he once had been. However, by the end of the story, the features of, and events wrought by, that landscape actually force Caoimhin to come to terms with a new understanding of his own limited capabilities, his world and even his mortality.

Caoimhin decides to buy an inn perched on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean, and sets out on a feverish "westward flight"[101] to Ireland's Atlantic coast. Struggling to find poetic inspiration, he is desperate for the "cleansing air"[102] and the change that he believes the idyllic West of Ireland is going to provide. He arrives in the West full of assumptions and demands, and soon finds that neither the locals nor the landscape impresses or stimulates his creativity. Instead, he perceives a muted and lacklustre place. He feels disillusioned when the place does not live up to his expectations, and is in fact, inhospitable. He finds himself merely falling into step with many before him, saying: "there had never been a shortage of poets out there. Every last crooked rock of the place had at some point seated the bony arse of some hypochondriacal epiphany-seeker."[103]

During his time in the West of Ireland, Caoimhin slowly assumes the position of an outsider looking in,[104] as someone looking at the environment he inhabits with preconceived expectations. He has not yet cultivated the attention, knowledge, or understanding to read what he needs from this place. As a result, he ends up disappointed and turns instead to belittling the "hill country"[105] way of life and criticizing the habits of those who live there. He refutes both the place and the people, and relishes his perceived superiority: "... of course, I was fucking superior. I ate at least five portions of fruit and veg daily. I had omega-3 from oily fish coming out of my ears. I limited myself to twenty-one units of alcohol a week. I hadn't written two consecutive lines of a poem in eight months."[106]

On the particular night of the story, a powerful and menacing flood threatens to dislodge the hotel from its foundation, a flood so intense that even the locals are stopped mid-sentence as Caoimhin ushers them upstairs, away from the approaching water. There they resume their

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[101] Kevin Barry, "Fjord of Killary," in *Dark Lies the Island* (London: Vintage, 2013), 29.

[102] Barry, "Fjord of Killary," 30.

[103] Barry, "Fjord of Killary," 35.

[104] Caoimhin's stance is reminiscent of the colonial point of view, the memory of which would be deeply embedded by inhabitants of this region of Ireland.

[105] Barry, "Fjord of Killary," 31.

[106] Barry, "Fjord of Killary," 31.

regular activities—having a few beers—and get started on an end-of-the-world disco as they ended up in the inn's function room. All the while Caoimhin is pushed to a psychological brink by the swelling waters which force him to reckon, not only with his new-found care for his inn and small town, but also with his collapse as a poet. Coaimhin's fear of death, especially at the mercy of these nonhuman forces, leads him to learn something that he might not have been able to learn by any other means, namely radical acceptance. He accepts his own limitations and expectations for himself, and most importantly, he comes to recognize his own assumptions about and romanticization of this landscape. Derek Gladwin sums up Coaimhin's realization brilliantly:

> The dark irony in the story is that Caoimhin, mirroring the urban Dublin population who seek relaxing refuge in the west of Ireland, thought he would be safe and cozy because of his own romanticized constructions of the place. However, the flood waters in "Fjord of Killary" are real and brutal, and will only increase as global temperatures rise. Part of Caoimhin's "acceptance" is the realization that he glorified this life—idyllic writer's getaway by the sea—which is a social construction of nature as an imagined place.[107]

Caoimhin's character arc in "Fjord of Killary" is one of the few times when Barry actually resolves a tension for the reader. Caoimhin's realization and acceptance dissolves the dissonance between what is expected of a place and what it actually is, what it is perceived as being capable of nurturing and what it actually delivers, and as a result, the story consequently dismantles the tension between the rural and the urban at the same time.

It is also evident that Barry creates tension between the rural and the urban in their mis-representation in a number of his stories. On the occasions when Barry presents readers with an urban setting, these places usually prove to be the most surreal (or, one might even say magical) that find their way into his writing. Protagonists confront genies in charity shops, or climb ladders that lead them into another realm. It is the urban setting for his stories that tends to be where Barry uses the amalgamation of time and place to its greatest extent. In this manner is a stereotype broken open: when one thinks of the magic and myth of Ireland, habitually called to mind are untouched fields, green rolling hills, ancient stones, and, perhaps most ubiquitous, mysterious spirits lurking just out of sight. Unconventionally, however, Barry narrates the rural West of Ireland as real, gritty, and often malevolent, whereas he situates most of the narratives that encompass surrealism and enchantment in the city centre. By playing with the expectations of place assumed by a reader familiar with stereotypic perceptions of Ireland, Barry uses this deliberate switch to disrupt and re-adjust the collective narratives of Ireland. He takes the typical mysticism associated with the rural Irish landscape and brings it, instead, into his representation of contemporary urban settings.

It is worth noting, as well, that a common setting for Barry's short stories also moves beyond the binary of rural/urban. Many of his stories feature his characters in spaces of transit—on a city bus, a commuter train, or walking from one place to another. Indeed, Barry builds on the tension between the rural and urban by situating some of his stories in these purposefully liminal places. This suggests that his characters are to be understood in dynamic transition, and therefore

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[107] Derek Gladwin, "Ecological and Social Awareness in Place-Based Stories," *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies,* no. 42 (2019): 153.

vulnerable to happenstance, unpredictability and the attendant emotional vulnerability that can come with moving from place to place. Additionally, in these moments, the characters are usually in conversation, either with themselves or with another character in the story.

One possible reason for Barry choosing to deliberately move his characters through the landscape is addressed in an interview between Barry and Will Chancellor, found on the website *Literary Hub*. In tandem with his own exploration of deep mapping, Barry speaks of his experience walking through a given landscape. He suggests that emotions can be understood as agents (or spectral traces to use Karen Till's term) hanging around a place, waiting for someone to walk into them. He says:

> That patch of happiness could be floating around the field for the last ten years. Or for the last three hundred and fifty years. Out of love that was had there or a child that was playing or an old friend that was found again after a long time lost. Whatever it was, it caused a great happy feeling and it was left there in the field. You're after walking into it. And for a half minute you're lifted and soaring but then you're out the far side again and back into your own poor stride and woes.[108]

The seemingly overheard conversations between characters that the reader bears witness to mirrors the quality of the emotions hanging in the air that Barry discusses in the *Literary Hub* interview. It appears then, that Barry's use of transition between spaces—or the liminality with which he presents his characters—is important because he believes that an individual is more attuned to deep mapping practices as they actively engage with the landscape by ambulation or other means. This gives credence to the importance of threshold or interstitial spaces to Barry, and also serves as a reminder that although the urban/rural binary is a useful way to tease out, in this thesis, the intentional anomalies in such environments as depicted by this writer, it is nevertheless important to investigate beyond that binary to appreciate the full measure of the distortions that he activates.

Tension: Human/Environment

Far from being in harmony with their environment, Barry's characters are consistently at a disconnect from their surroundings. They are stuck in repetitive cycles, and they do not have the agency to change it. This detachment creates inevitable tensions between the human characters and their environment in his stories.

This agential disharmony between individuals and the built environment they inhabit may be observed in Kevin Barry's debut play from 2017, entitled *Autumn Royal.* For much of their adult lives, siblings May and Timothy have had to sacrifice their own wishes and agency by having to care for their ailing father. While the audience learns that the play takes place just outside the

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[108] Will Chancellor, "Kevin Barry: Portrait of the Young Artist in a Poncho," *Literary Hub,* last modified December 14, 2015, https://lithub.com/kevin-barry-portrait-of-the-young-artist-in-a-poncho/.

town of Cork—a tangible geographical place with which they would be expected to be familiar—the scenes of the play unfold in a surreal domestic space, namely, a makeshift kitchen that has been created by boundary walls of washing machines (see Figure 2.3).

Within this absurdist set, created by designer Deirdre Dwyer,[109] May and Timothy are forced to reckon with the direction of their lives. As is evident in Figure 2.3, the familiar domestic environment of a kitchen is rendered, in *Autumn Royal*, surreal and impersonal. And yet, the walls of washing machines create a dedicated safety net around the siblings, allowing them a space in which they can air their grievances and articulate their darkest desires about their father's health and future. One washing machine in particular serves as a means of communication between the children and their patriarch, making a cacophony of sounds as a stand-in for their father's disgruntled words. The washing machines go far beyond their intended use as appliances: they form part of a make-believe setting—including a microwave, some cupboard space, an ironing board, and a countertop—in which the pair daydream about what their lives could have been if they had moved to Australia.
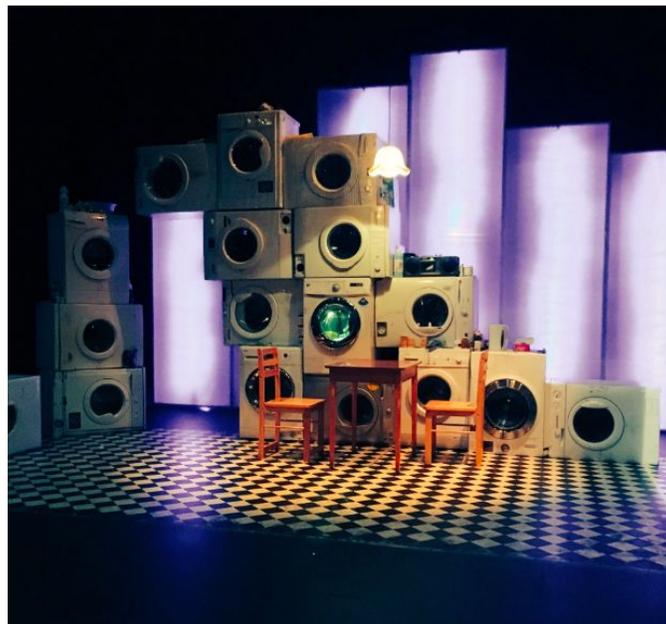
Figure 2.3—*Set Design for Autumn Royal.* May 2018. Photo by author.

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[109] "Autumn Royal," Deirdre Dwyer, accessed January 11, 2020, http://www.deirdredwyer.com/autumn-royal.html.

Figure 2.4—Image from *Autumn Royal* which demonstrates the actors' continued interaction with the washing machines. Photograph by Miki Barlock. http://www.deirdredwyer.com/autumn-royal.html.

Those walls of washing machines, and the degree to which the characters are forced to interact with them (see Figure 2.4), reflect the cycles that these individuals are stuck in and that they are never going to break, and, in this way, tension builds in the play. The repetition that encapsulates May and Timothy's lives thereby extends beyond just the optics of the surreal set. Their ever-consistent mornings are driven by a schedule so monotonous and over-executed that it becomes a performed choreography across the kitchen, a repetitive loop that also characterizes the verbal exercise they undertake, of asking themselves the same question, every day, without ever reaching a satisfying answer (Should they place their father in a long-term care home? Should they leave everything behind and move to Australia?). Nor does any part of *Autumn Royal* ever take the viewer outside this domestic space. While May and Timothy do look out the window, there is always a physical barrier between the viewer and the outside world. In these ways, the disconnect between the human and the environment is heightened by the mediums through which the sibling perceive the world.

Barry further creates tension between his characters, emotions, and the landscape by employing a technique which T. S. Eliot termed the "objective correlative."[110] According to Elliot, the objective correlative is a way of expressing emotion in art and literature by which the author signifies objects, a scenario, or a chain of events as the formula by which to trigger certain emotions in the reader. In other words, it is an indirect way of communicating something by instead making reference to or dealing with something else. In Barry's case, the way he depicts a given landscape as inhospitable, unobliging and not in the least bit nurturing, and the fact that his

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[110] T. S. Eliot, "Hamlet and His Problems," *The Sacred Wood* (New York: Dover Publications, 1998), 58.
https://books.google.ca/books?id=SCfHnLwWg2MC&pg=PA9&dq=The+Sacred+Wood&source=gbs_selected_pages&cad=3#v=onepage&q=objective%20correlative&f=false.

characters need to contend with it, becomes a means through which the reader may begin to understand the tension-filled lives his characters lead.

The tension between the person and the environment, or between the indoor and outdoor worlds, grows but is never resolved. In that manner, Barry's characters demonstrate who they are by how they react to a particular place, and even that relationship becomes an unbreakable cycle: a given landscape acts as a catalyst (by being inhospitable, unconforming, etc.), the human character emotes or reacts to that landscape which, reciprocally impacts that place, which, in turn, absorbs that emotion and once again influences the human inhabitants of it.

Tension: Contemporary/Conventional

Not only are Kevin Barry's characters struggling in their environment, but they are caught in a push-and-pull between the contemporary and what I have called the "conventional"—namely the stereotypical way that Ireland presents itself as an attractive commodity to uphold its reputation as the "land of the thousand welcomes."[111] In the distance between these two forces—forces that have become increasingly apparent in present-day cultural activity in Ireland—may be found a disconnect between the common stereotypes of Ireland and what the reality of Ireland is for many. The short story "Ideal Homes" from *There are Little Kingdoms* (2007) exemplifies this tension between the contemporary and the conventional.

In "Ideal Homes" the reader is introduced to a small village that is "an unimpressive tangle of a dozen streets ... one as drab as the other ...."[112] The corner shop in the village is owned and run by Delahunty, a senior-aged blind man who places too much trust in his fellow villagers, by allowing them to inform him about what they are purchasing, rather than find some other means of ensuring that he receives full payment for any purchases. Delahunty's trust, so unwavering, is described as bucolic.[113] Enter teenage twins, Donna and Dee, who are out causing trouble and looking for mischief. On the evening of the story the twins, after their whirlwind visit to Delahunty's shop—taking much more than they paid for—pause to gaze into the display window of the town's butcher shop: "They stopped by the window of Daly the butcher. Daly had skinned rabbits hanging there; the display was lit by a pink sacred heart bulb."[114] *The Sacred Heart of Jesus* is a religious illustration which usually depicts Jesus with a flaming and pierced heart on his chest (see Figure 2.5A). It is supposed to bring blessing to any area in which the illustration is displayed. It was common, especially in Ireland, to find *The Sacred Heart of Jesus* hung in kitchens and living rooms of devout Catholic families.[115] It was also customary to light a small red electric lightbulb under the illustration (see Figure 2.5B), to signify one's devotion and,

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[111] Ferriter, The Transformation of Ireland, 726.

[112] Kevin Barry, "Ideal Homes" in *There are Little Kingdoms* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2013), 62.

[113] Barry "Ideal Homes," 62.

[114] Barry "Ideal Homes," 70.

[115] Cara Delay, "Holy Water and a Twig: Catholic Households and Women's Religious Authority in Modern Ireland," *Journal of Family History,* no. 43(3) (2018): 304, doi: 10.1177/0363199018763831.

eventually, the red lightbulb became synonymous with the symbolism of *The Sacred Heart of Jesus* itself (see Figure 2.5C).[116] The illumination of the butcher's display with a Sacred Heart lightbulb literally casts this scene in a light that invokes tradition, belief, and nostalgia. Not only does the presence of the bulb[117] allude to the stereotypic, or bucolic, aspects of the story, but it can also be read to suggest Daly-the-butcher's hope for a blessing, or a saviour, to rescue his livelihood.

A.   B.   C.
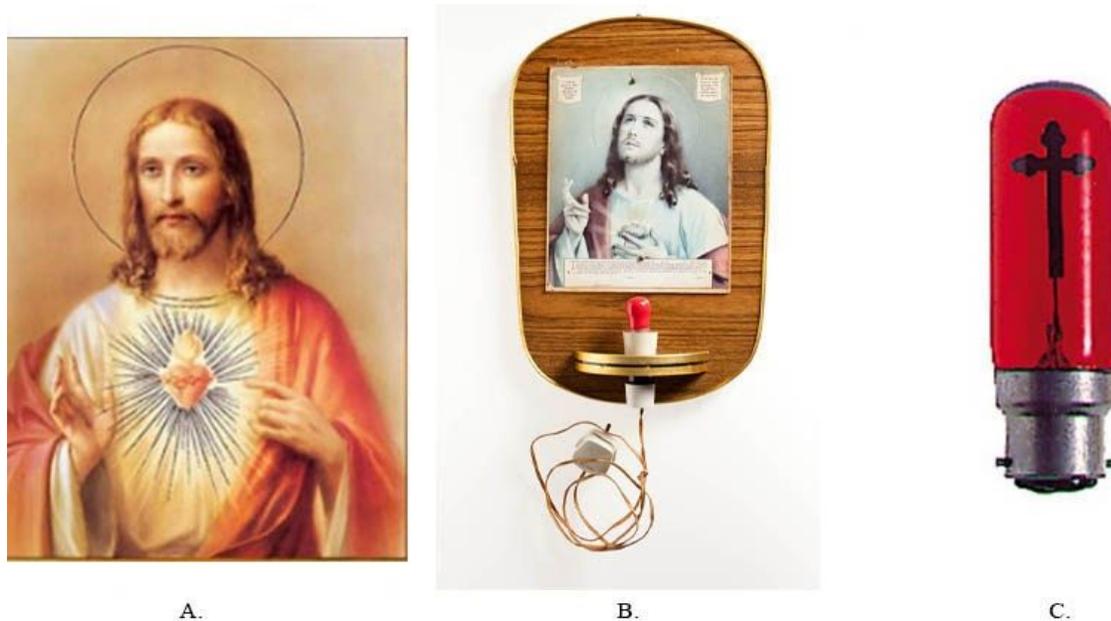
Figure 2.5—A. "*The Sacred Heart* Picture Framed".
https://www.veritasbooksonline.com/sacred-heart-picture-framed-45-x-35cm-p11094-4585/http://lordcalls.com/dailyprayer/aspirations-to-the-sacred-heart-of-jesus. *B.* "Sacred Heart Lamp, 1960s,"
https://www.museum.ie/en-IE/Collections-Research/Folklife-Collections/Kitchen-Power/Kitchen-Power-Online/Impact-on-the-kitchen/Sacred-Heart-lamp,-1960s.
C. "Sacred Heart Bulb," https://www.veritasbooksonline.com/sacred-heart-bulb-8880006193-35307/.

The story continues: "A fantasy of the village maintained by Daly was that his people were hearty, hill country eaters, as they had been in the days of his father's butchering. He shot and killed the rabbits himself and hung them for weeks until they were all but maggoty."[118] The imagery of the butcher, keeping the carcasses of the rabbits for as long as possible in accordance with practice from a generation ago and hoping that the villagers will not have deviated from

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[116] "Sacred Heart lamp, 1960s," accessed January 4, 2021, https://www.museum.ie/en-IE/Collections-Research/Folklife-Collections/Kitchen-Power/Kitchen-Power-Online/Impact-on-the-kitchen/Sacred-Heart-lamp,-1960s.

[117] When researching Sacred Heart lightbulbs, I discovered that they are now sold as popular pub or bar lighting. This commoditization of spirituality and nostalgia for the sake of creating a kind of ambiance or mood reinforces the tension between conventional and contemporary. See: "Sacred Heart Wall Light," Irish Pub Lighting, last modified November 24, 2014, https://www.irishpublighting.com/sacred-heart-wall-light/.

[118] Barry "Ideal Homes," 70.

their old ways, heightens the tension in this scene. It speaks of the transformation in eating habits that the people of this town may have adopted instead, and the attendant consequences for those whose livelihoods depend on that trade. There is a push-and-pull, here, between the skills of hunting and butchering, passed down through generations and focused on small-scale production, and the actual product of those skills that, in this case, is left to rot due to the disinterest of the villagers now used to other things. Such miscalculation and misunderstanding seem to signal that the unease between the contemporary and the conventional is not just present in the larger cities of Ireland, for example Dublin and Cork, but extends (or is perhaps even heightened) in the supposedly idyllic—according to conventional ideals—villages in the Irish countryside.

And then Barry continues: "The cruel fact was that all Daly ever managed to sell these days was chicken nuggets."[119] Barry hits the reader with the stark reality of the matter by underscoring both how the eating habits of the country are not as they once were, and how Ireland is struggling with the same commoditization of food and way of life that so much of the rest of the world is facing. This single sentence about processed meats manages once more to dispel the conventional myths and traditional rural and small-town practices associated with Ireland and, instead, opens up the possibilities of narratives of an overwhelmed and perhaps financially-limited population who are opting to purchase packaged and frozen goods rather than the local and wild-caught meat of yesteryear.

The final paragraph of "Ideal Homes" ends as follows:

> The change that had come was mostly unseen. It took place behind closed doors, in front rooms and back kitchens, in bedrooms, in the heart. But if it was unseen, it was not unheard. Mr. Delahunty, as he pulled the shutters and felt for the padlock, oh Delahunty could hear it well enough. It was a gear change, a low rumbling, a faint groaning beneath the skin of the earth. The ground was readying itself for new life.[120]

Within this closing statement that brings attention specifically to the relationship between the physical landscape of this Irish place and its inhabitants, Barry is echoing the concept of deep mapping and of "senses and reverbs." Delahunty, a character who has no choice but to rely on his senses other than sight (as well as on other individuals) to navigate the world, is nevertheless one of the first to register an upcoming change. Delahunty's ability to "hear" that change can be read as the same kind of perception or attention that an individual who is engaged in deep mapping needs to learn how to hone. This idea is consistent with the interpretation of Barry's work by Colebrook, who suggests that the author creates "depictions of cityscapes and townscapes which appear to exist as living entities alongside the inhabitants of these environments."[121] If Delahunty is capable of tapping into the "senses and reverbs" in order to perceive an upcoming change, Colebrook's suggestion of the city being a "living entity alongside the inhabitants" seems to confirm that there is, in fact, *something* for Delahunty to tap into.

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[119] Barry "Ideal Homes," 70.
[120] Barry "Ideal Homes," 71.
[121] Colebrook, "Putting the 'Urban' into 'Disturbance,'" 150.

Finally, there is an overarching tension in "Ideal Homes" between the older male characters, Delahunty and Daly, who are clinging onto a way of life that they know and understand, while the younger female characters of Donna and Dee arrive on the scene to "... open us a can o'whupass."[122] The dynamic between the twins and the men is further upheld when the twins encounter a character named Pa Hurley in his garage—the village mechanic, a forty-year-old who maintains a "desperate lust for his own youth."[123] Donna and Dee tease and tempt Pa with the "hum of their animal vitality"[124] leaving Pa to feel even more unfulfilled with the direction of his life. Ultimately, this again substantiates the lack of nourishment and support that the landscape was incapable of providing to Pa (and all the adult characters in *Ideal Homes* for that matter). To that end, some of the uneasiness that Delahunty can tap into, or the unfulfilled life that Pa and Daly lead, stand in contrast to the new generation who are gaining consciousness and awareness and forcing change and realization upon the village.

Concluding Thoughts

The process of research-creation enabled through this master's degree is an opportunity to take up the challenge of deep mapping that Barry illustrates in his writing through my own creation of visual and material narratives. In Chapter Three, I will explore the processes and transformative gestures that are integral to my overarching *Seeping into Stones* project. Through the processes of research-creation, deep mapping, and speculative and critical design, inspired by the tensions that Barry features, I will demonstrate how ideas and theories became tangible material objects. I will further discuss how Barry's writing has influenced my work, the decisions I made in materializing and visualizing some of the tension and emotions that are examined in this chapter, as well as underscore the role of design as a discipline in this research-creation project.

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[122] Barry "Ideal Homes," 71.

[123] Barry "Ideal Homes," 68.

[124] Barry "Ideal Homes," 68..

CHAPTER THREE: CREATION & DESIGN

In Chapter One, I discussed my methods, namely, how research-creation and deep mapping prompted me to understand both the complexities of present-day Ireland, and my desire—as well as what I perceive to be a collective need—to strive to encounter alternative narratives arising out of the geography and built environment of Ireland. In Chapter Two, I addressed certain overarching theories concerning Kevin Barry's writing, specifically how he anthropomorphizes the landscape, and establishes an emotional connection to place for the reader. I subsequently discussed the foundational idea of "seeping into stones" and its value to my research. Finally, I elaborated on the tensions that I discovered are encompassed in present-day Ireland, which I became aware of through a combination of my own deep mapping practice, and Barry's short stories.

This chapter will explore how all of these important pillars of my research have come together and manifested as creative work. First, I will justify how *Seeping into Stones* operates as an exploration undertaken under the umbrella of design. Then, I will demonstrate how I use the

methods established in Chapter One and the theories discussed in Chapter Two to fulfill the "creation" aspect of my research-creation project.

I will begin this chapter with a short introduction of relevant design discourse—specifically critical, speculative, and dark design. This design discourse was the catalyst for my exploration of the materiality of the various elements of this research-creation project, with the goal of recalibrating the aforementioned conventional, normative assumptions of what Ireland is like. I will then proceed to expand upon and analyze my creative decisions and transformative gestures towards the culmination of this project. This will include insight into how I created the photographs as a first-stage response to Kevin Barry's writing, my subsequent exploration into what I will call the materialization of the photographs, and, finally, the culmination of these processes as an installation for my final thesis exhibition.

Critical, Speculative, and Dark Design

As discussed in Chapter One, *Seeping into Stones* is situated at the intersection of deep mapping, research-creation, and design discourse. In this section, I will elaborate on the design ideologies that *Seeping into Stones* is built on—particularly speculative design, critical design, and dark design. This is important because much like deep mapping and research-creation, thinking through these facets of design discourse prompted me to continue developing my research questions while also providing a framework for my explorations. Exploring how this process and project can promote and facilitate a deeper land literacy and strengthen the different narrative experiences embedded in the landscape through the additional lens of design helped me contemplate how these research questions could serve a broader context outside of my practice. Thinking through this design discourse was essential, not only because they inspired my motivation and method to facilitate the attunement of an individual's emotional, sensorial, and cognitive response to place—imperative as a strategy to enable a deeper engagement with land literacy—but also because this discourse made me receptive, in a more sensitive and attuned way, both to non-normative, uncommon narratives about Ireland as a dynamic physical environment and to alternative story arcs inherent in Irish places.

Fiona Raby and Anthony Dunne are the principals of a collaborative design firm, as well as professors, researchers, and the authors of *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction and Social Dreaming* published in 2013. *Speculative Everything* is the text that brought me to a greater awareness of the possibilities of design as a means to challenge and disrupt the conventional. *Speculative Everything* acts as a manifesto against what the authors refer to as "affirmative design," which is when design is used to perpetuate consumerist values and reinforce the status quo.[125] Instead, Dunne and Raby suggest employing what they call critical and speculative design, to create space for discussion and debate about alternative ways of being and understanding, and to inspire and encourage people's imagination to flow freely.[126] It is through critical and speculative design that I can invite others to be more attuned to the interactions

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[125] Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2013), 34.
[126] Dune and Raby, *Speculative Everything,* 2.

between humans and nonhumans (stimulated by the physical environment) and between humans and the physical environment, in order to better grasp the complexities of Ireland today with the hopes of building a future that embraces all realities of our collective experiences and narratives.

Critical design uses speculative design to challenge the narrow assumptions and preconceptions that stereotypically govern normative interpretations of landscape and identity.[127] It is the practice of engaging in critical thinking through design, and continually questioning one's environment. Critical design stands in opposition to affirmative design, as a radical shift in perspective compared to the iterative manner of the affirmative design. Dunne and Raby speak of critical design more as an "attitude" or stance towards design rather than a methodology. I want to highlight their notion of "continuously questioning" as it is very relevant to this thesis. As mentioned in Chapter One, the deliverable aim of the *Seeping into Stones* overall project is not to produce definitive answers to my research questions but rather to continue harnessing new ways of seeing, questioning, and coming to terms with the environments and theories that I am working with.

Speculative design "thrives on imagination."[128] Its aim is to "open up new perspectives" and to generate space for conversation and debate. Speculative design aims to "[speculate] about how things could be"[129] and to actively anticipate the course of the future through design interventions and speculation, rather than wait passively for the future to unfold. This strategy is pivotal to me, in that it centres on the hopes of building a future that celebrates multiculturalism and the multitude of narratives that make up all of our collective realities. Dunne and Raby suggest that inspiration for speculative design should come not only from the discipline of design, but also from mediums other than design, such as "cinema, literature, science, ethics, politics, and art; to explore, hybridize, borrow, and embrace the many tools available for crafting not only things but ideas like fictional worlds, cautionary tales, counterfactuals, ... prefigurative futures, and so on."[130] They also explain that speculative design is not intended as a means to predict the future but rather to use design to "open up all sorts of possibilities that can be discussed, debated, and used to collectively define a preferable future."[131] This idea is supported by Lubomir Dolezel who writes in *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds* about how "our actual world is surrounded by an infinity of other possible worlds."[132] By embracing this idea, designers can profitably begin to get lost in those other possible worlds: doing so opens up potential moments of "reflection, critique, provocation, and inspiration"[133] towards building a world that celebrates, rather than buries, the breadth of narratives, experiences, and tensions in each individual's collective deep maps.

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[127] Dune and Raby, *Speculative Everything,* 34.
[128] Dune and Raby, *Speculative Everything,* 2.
[129] Dune and Raby, *Speculative Everything,* 2.
[130] Dune and Raby, *Speculative Everything,* 3.
[131] Dune and Raby, *Speculative Everything,* 6.
[132] Dune and Raby, *Speculative Everything,* 70.
[133] Dune and Raby, *Speculative Everything,* 70.

The idea of "preferable future[s]" or "other possible worlds" is very relevant to *Seeping into Stones*, in that my project is concerned with enabling alternate ways of understanding and interacting with elements of the Irish landscape and environment through photography and design, to move past an assumption of social, religious and cultural homogeneity, toward embracing and celebrating multiculturalism and plurality in Ireland. Toward that end, designers have their unique expertise and perspective on which to build their own responses—in collaboration with other stakeholders—to the invitation to speculate beyond the here-and-now and with the hopes of creating a better future. It is also advantageous that Dunne and Raby's assertion of the benefits of collaboration between design and other disciplines includes an acknowledgement that seeking to uncover possible other worlds is not unique to a design practice. Many mediums model an imaginative and fictitious other world in their work: Kevin Barry's short stories stand as an excellent example of that. Thinking through speculative design, then, is particularly useful for *Seeping into Stones* since my goal is to listen to and promote the many narratives about Irish place; to understand and represent the 'other worlds'; and to contribute in the building of better possible future worlds.

Finally, dark design is a third facet of design discourse as presented in *Speculative Everything* that has proven useful as a lens through which I understand my actions and subsequent creative work for *Seeping into Stones*. Dark design is a component of critical design, which employs dark themes and emotions to communicate the desired message. Its deliberate negativity is not employed purely for reasons of cynicism or pessimism but rather to jolt the viewer out of complacency or create a "frisson that excites and challenges."[134] A good example of the complexities of dark design as a practice can be found in the set of "Huggable Atomic Mushrooms" designed by Dunne and Raby in collaboration with Michael Anastassiades as part of *Designs for Fragile Personalities in Anxious Times* in 2005 (see Figure 3.1).

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[134] Dune and Raby, *Speculative Everything,* 38.

Figure 3.1—"Huggable Atomic Mushrooms: Priscilla (37 Kilotons, Nevada 1957)" from *Designs for Fragile Personalities in Anxious Times Project* 2007–2008 by Dunne & Raby and Michael Anastassiades. Photograph by Francis Ware.

The concept behind the design is rooted in therapy intended for those dealing with phobias. In this instance, a person who is nervous of atomic annihilation can slowly confront their fears by becoming comfortable with plush, colourful atomic mushrooms that were made to cuddle up with. Once the individual grows comfortable with the initial small-sized mushroom which, as seen in Figure 3.1 is entitled *Priscilla (37 Kilotons)*, they can then move on to the medium, and then later the large. The juxtaposition of hugger and soft and cuddly atomic clouds, achieved through processes of materialization, is intended to bring up complex emotions on the part of the former, towards their fears and the seriousness of the topic. Dunne and Raby stipulate that however "dark" dark design can get, the practice is really driven by idealism and optimism and through the belief that it is possible to "think our way out of a mess"[135] by virtue of the strategies inherent in critical and speculative design.[136]

Dark design is an important stimulus that I have been able to perceive in my work. In contrast with the sunny, vibrant, green, and lush images one is accustomed to seeing of the Irish landscape, the images and experience that I am presenting could well seem dark, depressing, or pessimistic. However, when understood in the context of dark design strategies, the tensions that I am striving to illustrate and the complex cocktail of emotions and realizations I hope to evoke in the viewer with *Seeping into Stones* function as the "jolt" needed to shift the perspectives of

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[135] Dune and Raby, *Speculative Everything,* 43.
[136] Dune and Raby, *Speculative Everything,* 43.

those who engage with it from the usual representation of Ireland as an idyllic yet benign environment to place that encompasses the tensions that I discovered.

To summarize, these facets of design all have the common goal of "thinking through design rather than through words,"[137] and, indeed, of research-creation as conceived by Chapman and Sawchuck. Inspired by these ideas, *Seeping into Stones* utilizes speculative, critical, and dark design to break down the stereotypical, conventional narratives of Ireland, with the ultimate goal of recognizing the nuanced and entangled complexities of place and striving to represent place in a deeper, more holistic, and flexible way.

Understanding and Creating

In this section I will first discuss how my own reflection on my process and on my creative work—informed by the concepts of research-creation and deep mapping and in light of the aspirations and strategies of speculative, critical, and dark design discourse—helped me discover, process, and respond to the unconventional narratives that I have perceived in and about Ireland and with which I engage in my project. I will then proceed to discuss some of the creative decisions that I made while in the field, actively photographing the images at the heart of this project, namely, what characteristics of certain locations stood out to me, why I made certain decisions, and how Barry's writing was affecting my photographic process.

Part I: Understanding Through Reflection: Photography inspired by a design approach

In this thesis, I have previously identified two important forces that guided my photography for this Master's project, namely research-creation-based intuition, and Kevin Barry's writing. In Chapter One, I highlighted the importance of intuition, which is a key facet of research-creation. In Chapter Two, I argued that the seamless blending of concrete places and surreal scenarios in Kevin Barry's short stories was instrumental in enabling me to imagine what magnificent narratives I myself might tease out of the spaces that Barry writes about, and that I visited. Barry's writing gave me the necessary tools to pick apart the details of those spaces that resonated with me, while letting the rest fall out of focus. In this section, I would like to explore some of the mechanisms that enabled this greater attunement to the landscape and its narrative possibilities, by elaborating on how intuition and reflection led to such understanding.

In 2018, while presenting an early version of my project at a conference,[138] an audience member asked me about the effectiveness of my process and how I could judge if the project was validly achieving my goals of attunement with the environment. This was a very important question to be asked at that point in my research-creation. One way that I suspect that I *was* experiencing the

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[137] Dune and Raby, *Speculative Everything,* 35.

[138] I presented an early version of *Seeping into Stones* at the 34th annual American Conference for Irish Studies, Western Regional (ACIS-West) held in Jackson Hole, Wyoming in October 2018.

dynamic emotional tensions present in both the places that I visited and recalled, and in Barry's writing, is through a process of reflection. Having, by then, already made site-specific work in Ireland inspired by the tenets of research-creation I did have distinct experiences to compare to. Through both my personal and professional life I have built a long-standing connection to Ireland. In 2015, I worked on a research-creation project that explored the site specificity of a region of County Clare known as The Burren.[139] Previous to that 2015 visit, I had been going to Ireland every few years for the entirety of my life, as my mother is from Dublin. Therefore, much of my experience of Ireland (leading up to my first research trip) had an emotional dimension built on the narratives of family and familiarity—of affection, nostalgia, and the feeling of being on summer holidays.

However, one noticeable difference I picked up on during my master-related visits to Ireland was in my more nuanced, granular, and visceral response to the landscape than I had in the past, in feeling more strongly implicated in and by that physical environment.[140] Moreover, there was a notable accretive element: through the diverse facets of my artistic practice (at that stage, creating images and writing), I was able to reflect on my previous Irish experiences, and use that reflection as a means of gaining greater attunement with the land and its narrative possibilities. Theorist Donald Schön discusses the importance of reflection in his book *The Reflective Practitioner.* He highlights three important elements of reflection: reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and knowing-in-action. Reflection-in-action is the ability to contemplate one's intuitive actions while the event is happening so as to engage in continuous learning and developmental insight, whereas reflection-on-action is reflection after the event has occurred. Knowing-in-action is the act of trusting in your practice to perform your role[141]—an act in keeping with what I have been referring to as intuition, that fundamental aspect of research-creation. Furthermore, much like research-creation, an important aspect of active reflection underscores the insight that the practitioner gains through when reflecting in a cumulative way on their own practice or professional experiences. Colin Paterson and Judith Chapman, authors of the article "Enhancing Skills of Critical Reflection to Evidence Learning in Professional Practice," describe reflection as an exercise in consciously looking and thinking about experiences, actions, emotions, feelings and responses, and then striving to interpret them in order to learn from them.[142] With these two definitions in mind, reflection became a very important tool as I sought to gain insight into my work and, by extension, into the Irish terrain and its social and cultural context. More specifically, through a continuous cycle of (intuitive)

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[139] This project, which I named *Notes from the Field*, explored the relationship between people and their environment through local foods and foodways. When creating *Notes from the Field* I was particularly interested in how the unique geography of the Burren (which is predominantly an area of exposed limestone, and part of which has a microclimate unique in Ireland) affects the food culture and way of living in the Burren area. The final project can be viewed at https://www.shaneyherrmann.com/notesfromthefield.
[140] I keep a field journal while working on these projects, so I have a record of my written thoughts in addition to the images I take to help me reflect on my work.
[141] Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action,* (New York: Basic Books Press, 1983), 50.
[142] Colin Paterson and Judith Chapman, "Enhancing Skills of Critical Reflection to Evidence Learning in Professional Practice," *Physical Therapy in Sport* 14, no. 3 (2013): 133, accessed September 16, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ptsp.2013.03.004.

creation and reflective action I was able to gain awareness into how much Barry's writing was having a palpable effect on me.

For example, my image *All the Lonely People* (see Figure 3.2), photographed in the city of Sligo in 2017 as part of my initial research trip for *Seeping into Stones,* encapsulates that process of insight and realization through reflection, and visually communicates the palpable effect I experienced.

This meditative photo has, as its narrative focus, the solitude that I was feeling while on this project and while reading Barry's work. The morning that I shot this photo was after a restless sleep due to noise drifting through my open window. The laneway outside, dotted with bars, was the scene of late-night revellers and a loud and drawn-out fight. But then, the next morning, I woke to someone's singing floating through my window "*...all the lonely people, where do they all come from....*" I jumped out of bed and quickly set up my camera; in that moment it all made sense. It felt imperative that I photograph this scene while the busker was singing. Through reflection I realized that there was a connection in the song's lyrics about isolation from The Beatles "Eleanor Rigby," and the recurring slices of dialogue from the posse of Barry's eccentric characters that had weaselled their way into my head. I was, in a way, experiencing a real-life narration as if it had been my own Barry-like story. From the bar fight the night before to the busker in the laneway whose song stimulated my loneliness and prompted me to reach for my camera I was able to narrate my own emotion-driven act of expression, of deep mapping, anchored to that space, to that experience, to that room, and later to that image.

Figure 3.2—*All the Lonely People.* June 2017. Photograph by the author.

Only afterwards, when I had received my developed negatives and was scanning this image, did I realize how much intuition and reflection-in-action played a role in this instance. As is evident in Figure 3.2, the visual greyness of the environment of Ireland is a tangible depiction of space that Barry often refers to. In his writing, he often speaks of grey rooftops surrounded by grey skies; in fact, as Barry puts it "the people were terraced in neat rows and roofed in with grey slates and were themselves forlorn, but they wouldn't easily have said why."[143] The circumstances of creating this photograph are a good example of the different types of reflection working in cohesion. In the moment, I gained insight from being directly engaged in the scenario and then, with some distance from the subject matter and through reflection, I could see the full force of how much I had in fact internalized Barry's writing.

Another example of the internalizing force of Barry's writing has to do with the orality that Barry infuses in his texts. As previously mentioned in Chapter Two, Barry is known for the way he anthropomorphizes the landscape, thereby offering up means through which the reader might engage in an intimate way with that environment. Further to that point, Barry is well known for the distinct oral cadence and likeness to Irish vernacular speech in his storytelling. He admits to eavesdropping on public conversations as inspiration for his writing,[144] and has mentioned that the act of listening is one of his most important tools. He says "I work primarily from the ear...If you can get the speech, I believe you can get the soul."[145] In preparation for this research trip, I intuitively[146] read and reread Barry's short stories out loud to myself. The outcome, much like with a song, was that many lines from his texts became stuck in my head, so much so that when I was walking through towns, cities, or countrysides during my research trip in Ireland, I could hear snippets of his prose describing what I was seeing. This led me to experience my surroundings through a blend of both my *and* Barry's perceptions. In some instances, certain areas would evoke a very specific line of text for me, urging me to photograph it.

This phenomenon is evident in my creation of the photograph *Atlantic City* (see Figure 3.3). In *There are Little Kingdoms,* the short story entitled "Atlantic City" speaks of a sleepy coastal West-of-Ireland town on a summer's night.

There is a phrase that is repeated over and over in the story: "Atlantic City. Feel the Force!"[147] Throughout the story the sentence embodies many different meanings: initially it is the catch phrase from a pinball machine (the pinball game is from Atlantic City, New Jersey), then it symbolizes the police presence in the small Irish town, later it refers to the struggling relevance and significance of the town itself, and finally, it speaks of the heartbreaking death of the main character by drowning in the Atlantic Ocean.

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[143] Barry, "Ideal Homes," 62.

[144] Chancellor, interview.

[145] Francine Prose, "Their Chaotic Mouths," *The New York Review of Books,* last modified April 9, 2020, https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2020/04/09/kevin-barry-night-boat-tangiers-chaotic-mouths/.

[146] I say intuitively here because I did not yet know about the importance of *hearing* Barry's writing. There was something intuitive about the text that made me want to read it aloud.

[147] Kevin Barry, "Atlantic City," *There are Little Kingdoms* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2013), 2.

Figure 3.3—*Atlantic City*. June 2017. Photograph by the author.

Not only does the subject matter of my rendition of *Atlantic City* echo that of the story, but the process in which I came to photograph this place is also relevant. The repetitive, cyclical nature of the repeated phrase mirrors my own previous fascination with these structures. I have demonstrated, below (see Figure 3.4), all the times that I have returned to photograph this location or structures that are similar to the one in *Atlantic City*. That is the case despite the fact that, per the essential parameters of this research trip[148]—during which I had decided not to work with a previously-determined itinerary—most of the locations that I photographed were not planned in advance. But the resonance with this place, and Barry's story, were too strong for me to ignore and it turned out, nevertheless, to be one of the few places that I knew I wanted to photograph while in Ireland. With regards to the creation of this image, my engagement with intuition and reflection was successful in guiding me towards these subjects.

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[148] It is worthwhile, here, to take a moment to provide some information on how I structure a research trip. I mentioned that I spend much time before the trip researching, and in the case of the *Seeping into Stones* project, reading. Once I have established a general geographical area that would be of interest to my research, I plan a few research activities (which may include going to any relevant artistic shows, collections, libraries, or meeting any relevant people). But, most importantly, I schedule an abundance of free time to walk. On a typical day I will spend most of my time walking, observing, and exploring, and taking photographs if the moment is right. Often, I meet people by chance who might inform or change the course of my trip, and it is very important to me to have the flexibility to accommodate that. At the core, these photographs are created by walking and noticing. Trusting that this process will yield results is the beauty of dedication to one's practice and of research-creation.

Figure 3.4—Example of sustained interest in this structure and proof of process. Images photographed between 2015 and 2019. Photographed in A. Bray (County Wicklow) B. Inisheer (Aran Islands, County Galway) C. Galway City (County Galway). All photographs by the author.

Reflections: Cycles

As discussed in Chapter Two, the unbreakable cycles in which Barry's characters often find themselves is a dominant trope that surfaces in his short story collections. Captured by the impact of narrative in his work, I considered it important that my research-creation work be able to communicate a similar feeling and a similar tension. Hence, the theme of repetition and cyclicality became an element that I was drawn to photograph. The repetitive nature of certain domestic tasks like laundry, or tending to land or a garden, show up in my image *Washing* (see Figure 3.5).[149]

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[149] I would like to note that I photographed *Washing* before viewing the play *Autumn Royal* and its washing machine theme. I was pleased by this coincidence and I felt justified in my reading of Barry's short stories in seeing that another artist was drawing similar conclusions to my own.

Figure 3.5—*Washing.* April 2018. Photography by the author.

For example, the representations of ever-evolving and yet never-ending labour in the image are a reflection of the unrelenting cycles in which Barry's characters are stuck. The still and slightly-forlorn atmosphere in the photograph provides a glimpse into one of those moments. The placement of the laundry, with a solitary peg on the line, gives the impression that a human subject has just walked outside the scope of the camera for a brief moment, and amplifies the undertone of unfinished work. Even the kind of laundry that figures in the photograph—rags and clothes, used perhaps for wiping a counter or cleaning—hints at domestic tasks. The backdrop of bales of hay situates the scene in a rural context and pulls its narratives into the composition, specifically, the cyclical nature of a farm's upkeep. Additionally, that blue baler twine that plays such an important role in *Seeping into Stones* as a whole, visibly enters and exits the scene, tying this image to the whole narrative series through its repetition, but also through its ambiguity. In *The Photograph as Contemporary Art,* Charlotte Cotton discusses the act of photographing everyday actions and locations as a means towards understanding human nature. She specifically points to Nigel Shafran, an artist whose imagery often uses forms found in daily life—"washing-up on a draining board, construction scaffolding, grass cuttings"[150]—as a mirror to the patterns that humans engage with in everyday life. Cotton says of Shafran's work: "With

[150] Charlotte Cotton, *The Photograph as Contemporary Art* Third Edition (New York: Thames & Hudson Inc., 2014), 121.

an understated photographic style, use of ambient light and relatively long exposures, Shafran transforms these [domestic] scenes into poetic observations about the way we conduct our lives through our unconscious acts."[151] Cotton goes on to speak about the role of intuition in Shafran's images, "There is something highly intuitive in Shafran's way of working. He resists the urge to construct a scene to be photographed; rather, his is a process of staying attuned to the possibilities of everyday subjects as a means of exploring our characters and ways of life."[152] Cotton's observations regarding Shafran's images sum up the intuitive process of looking and noticing that is essential to my own photographic practice. Shafran's contribution towards understanding the relationship between human behaviours and humans' connection to place mirrors the aim of my project, namely to provide another access point towards understanding the mutability and complexity of the Irish landscape and built environments.

In the vein of repetition, another instance when I gravitated to photographing a similar subject matter (laundry hanging on a line and care for a garden) is *Council Houses* (see Figure 3.6). While *Council Houses* uses similar visual cues of cyclical domestic work, it conveys a very different human relationship to place than *Washing*. Whereas the mood in *Washing*, which depicts a rural setting, feels somber and perhaps even meditative, *Council Houses,* set in an urban environment, conveys a flurry of activity. For one, the drying laundry is a colorful mismatch of clothes, varying in size for all the inhabitants of that house. The neighbouring garden is full of plastic statuettes and miniature pagodas, suggesting escapism and a playfulness towards that environment.

Noteworthy, too—my favourite part of the image—is the sense of impermanence captured by the clothesline in this outdoor space. When looking closely one can see that the clothesline can only be strung up when the latch to hold it is accessible, that is, when the front window of the house is open—exposing the inhabitants to Ireland's frequently rainy and often cool weather, not to mention the quite low interior temperature at which houses are often kept due to high energy costs. The precariousness of the clothesline setup in addition to the proliferation of toys and plastic chairs in the yard suggests a very different use of outdoor space compared to *Washing*. What lies in the difference between *Council Houses* and *Washing,* is that I am specifically interested in: it highlights in fundamental ways the different expressions of or relationships to space, as well as the differences between rural and urban environments.

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[151] Cotton, *The Photography as Contemporary Art,* 121.
[152] Cotton, *The Photography as Contemporary Art,* 121.

Figure 3.6—*Council Houses.* June 2018. Photograph by the author.

Reflections: Weather and Windows

The recurring meteorological theme in my work, captured, for example, in and through windows (and already explored in *Council Houses* above), manifests important markers that heighten the malaise between the person and the environment, as well as the disconnect between indoor and outdoor spaces in the Irish sites that I explored in *Seeping into Stones*.

My image *Nana's* uses the frame of the window and the atmospheric conditions to heighten a sense of watchfulness and slight unease. This can be perceived in the framing of the image, where one could imagine fidgety fingers pulling back curtains to gaze out onto the road (see Figure 3.7). The soft colours of the evening sky and the dew on the window pane set a quiet, even otherworldly, tone to the image. The camera's slow shutter speed renders the person walking by as a blur, which emphasizes the built environment as the focal point of the image. Here, it is the small row of terrace houses that keeps watch as people, cars, cats, and foxes hurry past.

Figure 3.7—*Nana's.* June 2018. Photograph by the author.

Figure 3.8—*Clew Bay Window.* June 2017. Photograph by the author.

Clew Bay Window uses a similar compositional technique—that of including window architecture and depicting inclement atmospheric conditions—as the image illustrates a blurry hilltop obscured by rain (see Figure 3.8). When I photographed this image, another line from "Fjord of Killary" was the driving force. "It's end-of-the-fucking-world stuff out there,"[153] says one of the characters, referring to the weather. In *The Photograph as Contemporary Art,* Charlotte Cotton notes "how a fragile and fleeting phenomenon like the weather can be made to resonate through a medium like photography"[154] saying: "...the fact that weather conditions could have created this temporary physical effect, and then be observed by the photographer, has a magical serendipity."[155]

It is true that photography is especially apt at portraying such conditional changes in a given environment, but there is a degree of fortuity when relying on weather conditions to help tease out an emotional tone to a body of work. Waiting for the correct conditions in which to photograph was an equally important aspect of this project; choosing the optimal meteorological conditions under which to create the image is another instance that demonstrates the active reflection and attunement to the subtle changes in the environment that characterizes this project. I have already established how pertinent the notion of "seeping into stones" is for this series. The climate of a place and how it influences our outward perception—and how, in turn, our emotions influence our perception of the weather—offers a good example of how that environment impacts us in deeply emotional ways. Awareness of the local environment is inevitably heightened on an island like Ireland where the unpredictability of the weather creates uncertainty and a kind of disequilibrium: on any given day it may be sunny and warm, then extremely rainy and windy, then cool and cloudy, and switch again without warning. Specifically creating images that portray tempestuous weather conditions in Ireland may seem like the perpetuation of another stereotype—that it rains a lot in Ireland—but it is a fact not often featured in the imagery of Ireland travel brochures. To elevate such potentially disquieting conditions as they narrate Irish every-day life to the status of art photography, is yet another way to disrupt the normative narrative.

Reflections: Mountains

Another motif from Barry's writing which became significant in *Seeping into Stones* derives from various mountain ranges that are part of Ireland's topography. The metaphor of the mountain is often used in literature to describe the attempt to overcome an obstacle, or to deal with difficult circumstances. In Barry's world mountains themselves brood, they are depressed, and they are unimpressed with the human characters' actions. Stimulated by both these conventional literary metaphors as well as Barry's more impassioned and vibrant attributions I found myself, during my thesis investigation, trying to reconcile his more pessimistic, bleaker representation of Irish landscape with my own previous experiences of this place. Indeed, this process evoked in me some feelings of discomfort, sadness, loss and loneliness.

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[153] Barry, "Fjord of Killary," 27.

[154] Cotton, *The Photography as Contemporary Art*, 121.

[155] Cotton, *The Photography as Contemporary Art*, 121.

One way that I attempted to understand and cope with these new emotions was through undertaking a reframing of my own, stimulated by the narratives that Barry attributes to mountains. For example, my image which I chose to title *The Most Depressing Mountain (Croagh Patrick)* uses, as its title, a direct quote from "Fjord of Killary." But the subject matter of the image infuses the quote with additional emotional layers—humour, critique, and pessimism—a strategy which falls in line with the spirit of dark design. In the image, Croagh Patrick, which is a very recognizable and iconic landmark, and is known as the "holiest mountain in Ireland"[156] is cast to the background and thereby overshadowed by piles of rubble, in focus in the foreground, piles that are mountain-like, themselves, but unceremoniously so (see Figure 3.9).

Figure 3.9—*The Most Depressing Mountain.* June 2017. Photograph by the author.

Patrons flock to Croagh Patrick in honour of Ireland's patron saint (St. Patrick) and some climb it barefoot as an act of penance on "Reek Sunday," the last Sunday in July. My decision to focus most of my scene, instead, on the piles of rocks in front of the holy mountain is an intentional attempt to displace the religious connotations that are so deeply entwined in this Irish landscape. Furthermore, the pile of rubble recalls "ghost estates,"[157] a phenomenon which arose in Ireland

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[156] "The Holy Mountain," Teach Na Miasa, accessed July 22, 2020, http://www.croagh-patrick.com/visitorcentre/holy-mountain.

[157] Ghost estates are unfinished housing estates which still remain a common sight in the Irish landscape. During the highly-prosperous "Celtic Tiger" era which began during the late 1990s, developers generated a surge of single-family dwelling projects, many in regions that previously had minimal or no concentrated residential construction. The boom collapsed when recession hit

after the economic crash in 2008. Is it possible that the depressing mountains that Barry alludes to in his short stories are related to the irrevocable destructive marks that humans have left on the earth?

By happy coincidence, I was able to focus intensely on deep mapping Irish mountains in April 2018, when I took part in an artist residency called "How to Flatten a Mountain"[158] at Cow House Studios in Wexford, Ireland. During this residency I had the opportunity to climb, barefoot, the Blackstairs Mountains which are located on the border between Counties Carlow and Wexford in southeast Ireland. This act, which, as mentioned above, mirrored the yearly pilgrimage made by many to the peak of Croagh Patrick, became a significant moment in my research trip inasmuch as it created conditions for my own intense participation in the narrative that emerges when wayward Irish meteorology and topography become co-agential. It was hard, it was cold, and it was tiring; the slippery grass quickly turned to mud and I fell many more times than I would like to admit. But this experience was invaluable, not only because I wanted to engage in a wide range of contact with the material features of Ireland's geography,[159] but because climbing the mountain barefoot led me to a direct embodied engagement with that environment, and to have that physical connection serve as a kind of healing tool. The sensory engagement and required focus to hike barefoot in the early spring helped shift my perspective. Michael Sandler, author of *Barefoot Walking* speaks about the benefits of barefoot walking and hiking: "it's as if you've plugged yourself into an electrical outlet, one both of healing and of quieting the mind."[160] At this time, I was grieving the death of my grandmother who had lived in Dublin, a beloved figure who had always been very central to my research trips to Ireland, and whose house appeared in my work (see *Nana's*, above).[161] With her in mind, subjecting my body to the terrain felt important in my moment of grief, and towards slowly conquering my own mountains.

Through this process of undertaking a difficult physical task, interacting directly and viscerally with the topography of the mountain, I became more aware of the therapeutic connection between person and place. The terrestrial composition of the mountain, its wetness, its frigid mud, slippery grass, and sharp rocks plugged me into the deep map of that location. Every time my mind wandered, the blustering wind brought me back to the task at hand. This was not a passive landscape from the tourism website but a powerful force. Every time I fell I was reminded of the agency the topography had over me in these moments; the rip in one of my favourite pairs of trousers is forever a reminder of that. This meant that my attention to place and

in 2008, housing prices fell, and as a result many units were left abandoned and/or incomplete. See Ruth McManus, "Celtic Tiger Housing," in *Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape: Second Edition*, ed. F. H. A. Aalen, Kevin Whelan, and Matthew Stout, Second Edition (University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 2011), 156–65.

[158] The residency, which focused on exploring the history and site specificity of the studio where it was held, culminated in a group exhibition as part of the yearly PhotoIreland Festival.

[159] Other ways that I engaged with the geography of Ireland included hiking and swimming, in both the Irish Sea and the Atlantic Ocean.

[160] Michael Sandler and Jessica Lee, *Barefoot Walking* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2013), 7.

[161] My grandmother's house is central to my project *Sale Agreed.* Previous to that, it was also one the places that I photographed repeatedly as a BFA student in photography, during my time spent in Ireland visiting family.

environment in my practice shifted from it being merely something that I could *represent*, towards a phenomenon that I felt the need to become better attuned to. Understanding how humans are attuned with the geography of the area is one that other artists have also tried to comprehend. Charlotte Cotton speaks of this in *The Photograph as Contemporary Art* "One of the most dramatic uses of perspective in the context of ... life occurs where photographers have placed the emphasis specifically on the ways in which we see (or do not see) the things around us. In part, it is our perception of our environments rather than the things contained within it that are being scrutinized."[162] In many ways, this experience with the topography of Ireland shaped my project, insomuch that going forward, I wanted to use my practice as an artist and designer to help foster a more nuanced and layered understanding of the stories that have seeped into—and back out of—the landscape of Ireland, and which were perceived through the intimacy of my cold and muddy feet as they made their way up the mountain.

Part II: Material Exploration & Disruption

In Chapter One, I specified that the takeaways for *Seeping into Stones* manifest in two categories. On the one hand, I have harnessed a new way of seeing, interacting with, and being attuned to Irish environment, topography, and its agency through my research-creation and deep mapping practices. On the other hand, I have created tangible and material pieces (mainly: artist books, an installation, and a video) that collectively offer an embodied way to engage with the theories of this project as a means of disrupting the conventional narratives ascribed to the Irish environment.

Now that I have provided insight into the task of creating images, and into the process of reflection that was instrumental in developing both this thesis and the body of research-creation work, I will next discuss the material outcomes of this project. First, I will briefly lay out several related projects that I worked on during my master's, that have served as prototypes in anticipation of the final master's installation and helped frame the arguments of this thesis. I will next discuss my publication, *Seeping into Stones (CJIS)*, that appeared in the *Treasury of Resources* of the *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, because I consider it to be a major constituent element of my deliverables for this project. Finally, I will explore my thesis exhibition show, *Seeping into Stones (installation)*. Until now, I have given much attention, in this thesis, to my process of creating the images for these collective bodies of work. As will be evident below, I consider the installation of my project in the master students' exhibition as a crucial stage of that process, and will unpack its salient elements below. However, I imagine the *Seeping into Stones* exhibition, not as the culmination of my investigation of Ireland's built and natural environment and its material agency, but as an important phase of an overarching work still in progress. Given the mutable and continuously-expansive nature of deep mapping projects, as I indicated in Chapter One, it is my intention during future visits to Ireland to continue contemplating my engagement with the physical world through deep mapping and research-creation.

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[162] Cotton, *The Photography as Contemporary Art*, 133.

Related Projects

In this section, I will discuss tangentially-related projects and collaborations that I worked on as I completed my master's. The concepts I have investigated for these side-bar projects informed my process and creation for *Seeping into Stones*, so much so that I consider these works as prototypes in anticipation of the exhibition that took place at the end of my program. The prototypes resonate with key pursuits of my thesis, such as: the quest to access and promote the acknowledgement of multiple narrative layers, in line with deep mapping; the desire to explore cross-disciplinary processes in my work, over and above my identity as a photographer; engagement with the tenets of critical, speculative, and dark design; and an extended exploration of the materiality of the photograph itself, and the installation and exhibition of that photography as design research-creation. In many ways, then, one could examine these prototypes as part of the "deep map" of my research-creation thesis itself.

My involvement in two research-creation panel presentations acted as prototypes to consider the efficacy of deep mapping and the success of interdisciplinary work. I was a co-creator and presenter in *Meeting of the Ways* (2018) and *Echoes of Presence* (2019)[163] which were organized as salon-style conversations and presented in front of a live audience. My co-presenters and I dove into the relationship between the oeuvre of poet Kelly Norah Drukker, and my own work as a visual artist and designer. More specifically, we were interested in expanding the conversation that manifested between the affinities and divergences of our respective portfolios, both of which focused extensively on Ireland as a place of inspiration. Drukker, John Cairns (another graduate student from Concordia who functioned as our moderator and collaborator) and I worked together to create the format for this research-creation conversation and strived to express the nuances of those relationships. *Meeting of the Ways* (see Figure 3.10) and *Echoes of Presence* (see Figure 3.11) sought to highlight the richness that comes from a contemplation of the materialization and visualization of words through a material and visual art practice. This process helped me see my own work through the creative processes of my colleagues. Through this, I have come to understand collaboration as a layering of knowledge and, in its own way, a form of deep mapping. I also came to realize that the breadth of artistic work that can be created in response to, or inspired by, a certain location is in itself layers added to the deep map of an environment.

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[163] I was awarded the Canadian Association of Irish Studies Conference 2019 prize for best presentation at the Master's level, for my contribution to *Echoes of Presence* (see Figure 3.11).

Figure 3.10— Detail from *Meeting of the Ways*. March 2018. Photograph by the author.

Figure 3.11—Image from *Echoes of Presence,* presented at the Visualization Studio, Concordia University. Presenting in the Visualization Studio, which has a display wall (9.2 x 1.7 meters) of immersive and interactive touch screens, allowed for a deeper interaction with the images and a screening of my film *Grotto in Motion*. The image shows the multidisciplinary approach to our presentation. We also had a performative aspect with regards to revealing information (images, video, poetry, music) at certain points of the presentation which was made possible by the interactive screens. June 2019. Photograph by the author.

The many hours of discussion, brainstorming and planning leading up to our presentations were crucial moments of questioning and clarity for me, and there is no doubt that my thesis would look and feel different had I not had these experiences. Looking back on *Meeting of the Ways*, which took place during the spring of 2018, I note the emphasis that I placed on conventional

gallery practices in terms of the treatment of my images. I was careful to arrange the photos at equal height within the room in which they were presented; each image was of the same size; each photograph had a pristine white border, etc. These conventions would be intentionally disrupted in the exhibit I created for *We Ask More Questions Than We Can Answer*.

The next prototype *Sale Agreed*[164] conceptually engages with critical design and reflection. The series of images that make up this project speak to an experience shared by many first- or second-generation immigrants, namely the diasporic experience of returning to and remembering a familial home. *Sale Agreed* is a study in the agential exchanges between this particular vibrantly-material house and its past and present inhabitants. A house is not merely a structure of walls, roof, and floor; it is a collective space in which memory and ritual are embedded. Through engaged interaction with this space, those within it embody its presence due to direct as well as indirect contact with it. *Sale Agreed* seeks to extract for contemplation some of the narratives of these exchanges that come when a home has been vacated. Through the use of photography and images that both record and remember a home and the selling of it after a family death, the tensions and uneasiness of a home in transition may be discerned. I created this series as a reaction to the sale of my grandparents' house in Dublin. As previously mentioned, in 2018 I had planned to spend the summer working and researching for my thesis in Ireland, and living with my grandmother. However, a few days before I landed in Ireland she passed away. I was, therefore, the last person from my family to live in the house before it was put up for sale, and for that reason I decided to photograph it as a final harvest of its extant stories.

Later, this project took an inadvertent but, for me, very meaningful turn. When I was back in Canada and the house's listing appeared online, I was unsettled by the representation of the house in the realtor's images. Fulfilling a much different intentionality, the realtor's images seemed to erase rather than capture the house's history, in order to help prospective buyers imagine their own possible lives in that space. When exploring this project through the lens of critical design, my project sought to gain insight from the exchange of agency between house and inhabitant. For example, both Figures 3.12A and 3.12B illustrate the exchange between human and nonhuman in this particular house. Figure 3.12A demonstrates an intimate knowledge of the built environment of this house; if this image was created at another time of day—when this scene is not backlit—the photograph would not illustrate the same details: the texture of the carpet, the traces of dirt left by decades of shoes walking up and down the stairs, and the biological traces left in the inhabitants' wake. Figure 3.12B speaks to the agency of the house enacted on an aging body, namely the increasingly difficult task of climbing the stairs to access the other floor and the ways in which the house needed to change in order to accommodate the inhabitant's aging body (installation of a stairlift).

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[164] As per my timeline in my Introduction, I created the images for *Sale Agreed* in 2018 while living in my grandmother's home after she had passed away. In 2019, after some time to process and reflect, I revisited the images and created the body of work that became *Sale Agreed.* I included this project as part of my presentation at the Canadian Association of Irish Studies Conference (CAIS 2019) and at the Third Galway Conference of Irish Studies titled *"What is it to dwell?": Home(s) in Irish Studies* hosted at the National University of Ireland, Galway.

<div align="center">A.   B.</div>

Figure 3.12—Images from *Sale Agreed,* illustrating the human and nonhuman exchange in the house. June 2018. Photographs by the author.

Figure 3.13—Screenshots from "myhome.ie" which feature an image from the real estate agency and the details that present the house as a commodity. Screen shots created, by the author on February 7, 2019.

In contradistinction, the realtors' images perpetuated a distinctly un-critical, normative, and affirmative design reading of the house—the goal here being to present a commodity (see Figure 3.13). When explored through deep mapping and the parameters of critical design, the realtors' images merely conjure a "thin" map of the space, glossing over the depth and breadth of the house and, more importantly, over the discernable ways in which it stimulated (and was itself transformed by) those who occupied it. In contrast, my images highlight those traces of my family's impact and history on a cherished space and act as the critical-design catalyst that stimulates my insight—now more attuned—to the house, not only as the setting for family and other narratives, but as a vibrant agent itself in the creation of those narratives.[165] *Sale Agreed*, then, highlights a history that I believe should be celebrated when an environment like a home changes inhabitants. It also serves as a path toward deeper understanding of the nature of those inhabitants' dynamic exchanges with and within its walls – and, by extension, urges viewers themselves to contemplate the agency of the spaces in which they reside, as stimulants and reflections of their own stories. I draw strong parallels between the driving force behind *Sale Agreed* and *Seeping into Stones,* wherein they both aim to push back against a predominant reductionist narrative.

Finally, *House Organ* (2018) is a prototype that explores materiality and deep mapping. The installation-based piece, which was created in collaboration with my Master of Design colleague Ivette Nunez, aimed to access narratives that are encapsulated in the built environment of a given home. With the principal theme of "letting the house speak" the final installation consisted of several long-shot projected videos and amplified sounds. We let vibrancy of the built environment dictate how, when, and what was recorded in order to decentralize the human perspective in the sound and videos. We found that the house does not communicate in human "terms" and in order to access such narratives we needed to shift our sensitivity to tune into the house's form. We designed the installation in order to recreate the experience of accessing the house narratives. We created small upcycled structures, which when interacted with, mimicked the intimate awareness and recognition that we experienced as the collectors and translators of this project (see Figure 3.14) Through the lens of critical design, we aimed to generate a conversation between the human and the nonhuman in the built environment of the house. In doing so, Ivette and I were able to contribute to the deep map of this house while realizing that the house's "language" is directly related to its materiality.

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[165] See: Rhona Richman Kenneally, "'I am off-white walls': exploring and theorizing domestic space," *The Vibrant House: Irish Writing and Domestic Space* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2017), 13–35.
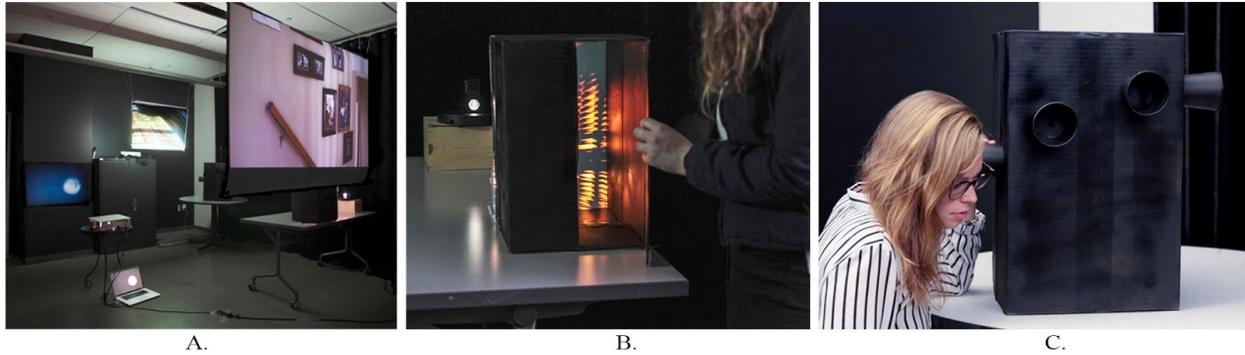
Figure 3.14—*House Organ.* A. Installation view. B. Opening one of the structures to access the projected video. C. Accessing the narrative through sound. April 2018. Photographs by the author.

Making Material

As I mentioned in Chapter One, there were two major deliverables for this thesis that focused extensively on issues of critical materiality. As *Sale Agreed* demonstrated, and as my quest to climb the Blackstairs Mountain revealed, an embodied engagement with tangible "things"[166] and with their material agency or what Jane Bennett calls their "thing-power" constitutes another, potentially very powerful, opportunity to create and engage with narratives in geography and in the built environment. The first was the publication, in the *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, of my composition entitled *Seeping into Stones (CJIS)*. Each issue of this annual publication contains a segment entitled the *Treasury of Resources*, devoted to the appreciation of non-texted-based primary resources deemed by the editors to be of interest to generalist academics in Irish studies; my work is found in *Treasury* of the 2019 issue. The second major deliverable was the thesis exhibition show *Seeping into Stones (installation)* exhibited at the 4th Space at Concordia University from April 30th to May 3rd, 2020. Both physical iterations of my project explore the theories of critical and speculative design and deep mapping, through the materiality of the publication and of the installation, and through moving the photographs at the heart of this project, by stages, off the figurative wall of the gallery and into the hands of interested individuals, to be interacted with physically as well as visually. This embodiment of materiality and deep mapping was made possible through the process of transformative gestures made by me as I engaged with the photographs as three-dimensional entities. By doing so I succeeded in pushing my own engagement with my theories, methods, research questions, and subsequent outcomes from the non-material to the material, and, later, encouraged others to do so by giving them the opportunity to flip pages, hold booklets, or physically manipulate the topography of my installation.

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[166] In *Vibrant Matter,* Bennett speaks about "thing-power" as the ability of inanimate items to exceed their status as *objects* and to manifest traces of independence, or aliveness. When an object appears as a *thing,* it means its vivid entity is no longer being reduced to the binary of dull matter and vibrant life in which humans usually set them. See: Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (London: Duke University Press, 2010).

I was very excited to publish a version of *Seeping into Stones (CJIS)* in the *Treasury of Resources* in a special issue of the *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* devoted to the contemporary Irish short story (see Appendix for the full publication). This special issue underscored the short story's capacity as a literary medium to engage with the unique complexities of contemporary Ireland.[167] My contribution, in the *Treasury of Resources*, was a means to provide further visual and material points of access to complement, heighten, and offer another point of view to the experience of the written critiques and creative works in the publication. I displayed an unbound prototype of the *Seeping into Stones (CJIS)* from the *Treasury of Resources* as part of my 4th Space exhibition, to demonstrate that my thesis had several iterations, to offer yet another access point to this body of work, and to emphasize how important *process* was to my research, creation, and reflection. Moreover, the journal project was a transition step toward what I consider the three-dimensionalization of the photographs of *Seeping into Stones*: since this prototype was unbound it presented an opportunity for viewers at the Concordia exhibition to move them to another location for deeper perusal. For those who did not attend the event, but had access to a copy of the journal (by subscription or other means), *the Treasury* piece facilitated direct experience of the materiality of the paper images themselves—to tear them out, write over them, re-sequence them, etc., and thereby materially appropriate them into new narratives of that audience's own making.

While preparing for the *CJIS* publication I considered how the physical form of this adaptation of *Seeping into Stones* could render material the themes of my project while adhering to, and yet disrupting, the physical format of a book. All the material and conceptual decisions made for this publication were chosen to reinforce my foundational theories of deep mapping and critical design. This included the sequencing and the layout of the text and the image on the page, which were chosen in the effort to both disrupt the stereotypical thematics of Ireland and the conventional format of a book, and to communicate the specific goals of the project—namely, the notion of visceral narratives being embedded in the "stones of the place," to provide another layer to the deep map of Irish space and geography, and to demonstrate the complexity of the tensions that I uncovered in the Irish environment. Moreover, of the tensions I have precipitated out for this thesis, I was primarily interested in communicating the disconnect with the environment that Barry's characters experience, and the subsequent cycles that they are stuck in in his writing.[168]

Early in the design process, I decided that I wanted to include excerpts from Barry's short stories alongside the images. This was for a few reasons: to create tension, to provide some context of Barry's writing, to set a specific tone to the images prompted by Barry's style, but also because I am interested in continuously exploring the relationship between image and literary text and what arises for the reader when both art forms are present. The transdisciplinary aspect of the

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[167] Michael Kenneally, "Guest Editor's Introduction: Contemporary Irish Short Stories," *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 42 (2019): 19.
[168] The *Treasury* was preceded by an interview of Kevin Barry by Michael Kenneally. This constituted an important juxtaposition of written and visual mediums and set down a kind of narrative conversation between Barry and myself.

CJIS publication (and this thesis) allows for multiple access points into deep mapping and critical design. In order to create tension between my images and Barry's writing, I placed the text excerpts that I chose of his work along the very bottom of the pages of my series. This specific placement between text and image on the page is not harmonious: the design forces the reader to make multiple decisions of where to look and when, as both the text and the images vie for the reader's attention. When perusing the series as a whole, it appears as if the sentences and the images are both on their own respective timelines. However, I intentionally chose not to align a certain excerpt with a specific image, even when the photo was directly inspired by one of chosen pieces of text.[169] The text excerpts roll the cumulative narrative back and forth, from and to an image that the reader may have looked at a few pages ago. A nonlinear pattern such as this—continually breaking the frame of the literature that it captures by chopping and changing which sentences from which stories are quoted, weaving interior and exterior scenes together in ways that are not immediately intuitive—further jars any anticipated narrative stream.

And yet, there is a thread of visual consistency in the composition of the images and in the way the words run across each page of the section. Being forced, given the nature of the publication, to adhere to the size of page, type of paper, rigid pagination sequence, etc., my strategies in creating this iteration of *Seeping into Stones*, my treatment and placement of text on the page and in relation to the images, are nevertheless meant to unsettle the conventional experience of this work. That those disruptions are subtle rather than blatant makes them seem innocuous, nonthreatening to an Irish-studies readership for whom richly-illustrated academic articles are still an anomaly. Especially to those familiar with Barry's short stories, my series could be considered as a kind of jigsaw puzzle, each piece of which is related to the others, but each having edge contours that do not immediately reveal how they are to be joined to the rest. In my own mind, I began to consider these sections of texts as manifestations of "stream of consciousness,"[170] because the short snippets came to me as a kind of unstructured mental ticker-tape of Barry's writing while I was photographing.

Choosing the sequence of images in this series created additional narrative opportunities. The themes of cyclicality and the disharmony between indoor and outdoor spaces is epitomized by my placement, as the final image of the series, of *Bus to Strandhill*. The predictable and consistent route of a city bus, and the passing landscape which is subsequently rendered blurry and unobtainable to the reader by the bus's speed and the camera's shutter speed, illustrate both the mundane and cyclical nature of everyday life and the disconnect that Barry's characters

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[169] This is with the exception of "the most depressing mountain" and "Atlantic City. Feel the Force!" Both quotes appear on the same page as the relevant image in the series.

[170] Stream of consciousness is the "continuous flow of sense-perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and memories in the human mind, or a literary method of representing such a blending of mental processes in fictional characters, usually in an unpunctuated or disjointed form." See: Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 244. As demonstrated in my analysis of my image *All the Lonely People,* Barry's prose was mediating the way I perceived my environment, perhaps due to the specific oral quality of Barry's writing or perhaps because of how I prepared for the research trip by reading his texts out loud. I chose "stream of consciousness" as a strategy that might further situate the reader of the *Treasury* to partake of or share my experience.

experience with the environment (see Figure 3.15; it also appears on the back cover of the publication).
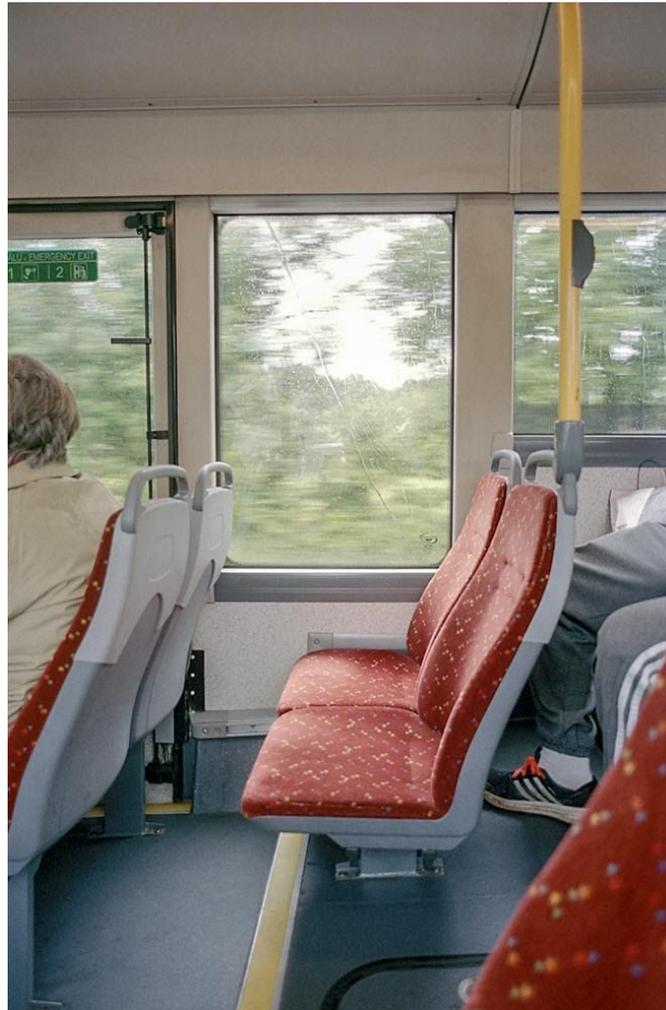
Figure 3.15—*Bus to Strandhill.* June 2017. Photograph by the author.

Once the reader reaches this final image, especially given the anomalous juxtaposition of the text-and-image layout created through the publication's design, the expectation of closure is disrupted by a sense of finding oneself back to where one started from, potentially to prompt the reader to revisit the first page of the publication, and look again at the series as a whole. This cue to *look again* refers to both the cyclical tropes of Barry's writing and this project, but also to the attention and attunement to the environment that I am trying to foster. The agency of this publication, created by the desire to disrupt and its interdisciplinary nature, sets the reader up to participate in deep mapping through the journal, experienced through the lens of Barry's writing and then again through my images.

Final Thesis Show: We Ask More Questions Than We Can Answer

The final thesis show, collectively named *We Ask More Questions Than We Can Answer*, was displayed at Concordia's 4th Space in the spring of 2019. My contribution, *Seeping into Stones (installation)* consisted of three pieces: a deep map constructed on a light table, a series of artist books, and a video installation. These physical pieces—which made my process, theories, and research questions material, and enabled participants' embodied experiences with them—came into being through a series of transformative gestures which I will explore in this section.

The exhibition space in itself was an opportunity to push back against the conventions of gallery practices with regard to artworks. Concordia's 4th Space is an experimental space that champions research-creation and knowledge-sharing practices rather than formal gallery exhibits. *We Ask More Questions Than We Can Answer* juxtaposed many critical and speculative works which engaged the senses and reflected the evolving nature of design as both experimental and cross-disciplinary.

All of the features of my own installation vied for simultaneous attention, calling through their vibrancy to be interacted with and manipulated by the curious. One of the elements competing for visual attraction was a light-table (made out of repurposed light panels) whose illumination penetrated a layer of black paper placed over it, which was laser-cut into a deconstructed topographical rendering of the Blackstairs Mountains—the mountain which was pivotal to my engagement with Irish terrain when I scaled it barefoot in 2018. The paper served to block out most of the light from the light table, except for where the cuts opened the paper and revealed the light (see Figure 3.16). In this way the light-table served as a platform of illuminated lines, glowing in the dimness of the exhibition space and pulling the viewer's attention to the scene. These meandering lines, which represented the mountain's elevation points (see Figure 3.17) were made up of key text-quotes from Barry's short stories plus a few lines I selected from my own travel journal. The resulting effect was a stylized rendering of a real topographical location, bound by a combination of Barry's and my own words and points of view.

In addition, the surface of the map and light table was covered with small grey stones; that is, the full breadth of the topographical scene was not immediately accessible to the viewer. To read the full quotes and thereby gain access to the narratives in the scene, the viewer needed to become a participant, to physically move the stones aside to see what was underneath. Through this gesture I hoped to make manifest the "digging" and reframing that are a necessary part of deep mapping and critical design. This gesture—created through tactility, movement, and play—is one of the ways that I invited disruption of the conventions of a typical exhibition space. As the stones moved around the surface of the black seamless paper, they left their mark. Consequently, that stylized map has changed with time and now has scratches, stone dust, and even small tears made by the force of the stones and the participants of the installation piece. Captured here, is the material narrative of its interactions with interested observers, with the stones themselves, grooved and driven into the fibres of the very paper it was made from.

Figure 3.16—Installation view of the light-table with topographical map of the Blackstairs Mountains. May 2019. Photograph by the author.
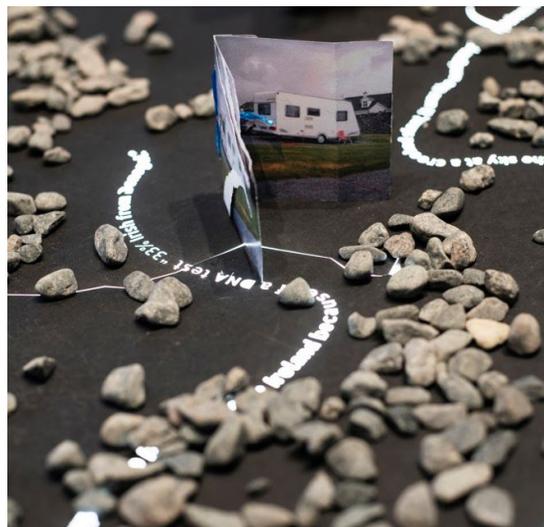
Figure 3.17—Detail view of the laser cut text quotes that created the outlines of the topographical map. May 2019. Photograph by the author.

The light table housed the artist books,[171] another element of my exhibition. These were material carriers of my image-based works, bound with blue baler twine by Japanese stab binding

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[171] An important transformative arc with regards to materiality and form, as I developed the *Seeping into Stones* overall project, was in my differentiating between a "photobook" and an "artist book." In particular, shifting to thinking of the book as an art object rather than a vehicle to display images. Research and exploration in the artist book collection at the Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec. Thanks to M. Wright and Pata Macedo for their consultation during this process.

methods.[172] I chose Japanese stab binding because, with this method, the binding material is visible and overlaps some of the image. I wanted the twine to become as much a part of the books as the images, as a way to underscore the twine's enigmatic and narrative agency and its capacity to connect all the elements of my thesis. My installation had twelve books in total, ranging in size from one by one inch to eight by eleven inches in size.[173] They incorporated some of the images that I have already discussed in this chapter: for example, *Atlantic City* was one of the largest books in the exhibition (see Figure 3.18).

Figure 3.18—Artist book created with *Atlantic City* image. The books were bound by Japanese stab binding techniques using baler twine and depicting the transformative gesture of ripping the image. Detail further shows that the images in the artist books were printed in black and white and colour.

Each of the twelve books was dedicated to a single image from my series, meaning one book consisted of one repeating image—printed both in colour and black and white throughout the book's pages, and printed so that when a page of the book was turned the next image was its

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[172] I had previously experimented with a variety of bindings and artist-book iterations, namely prototypes of accordion books, flag books, and sundial books.

[173] Getting to this point included many different experiments with the baler twine and with material interactions with the images. To name a few: I tried sewing the twine through a single image, I experimented with layering acetates of different colours on the images, and I experimented with piercing small holes in the images and allowing light to shine through. This last experiment was promising, and I included the prototype in my show with some of my studio materials.

mirror image. With deep mapping, critical design, and cyclicality in mind, I chose to repeat the images for each book because it encourages the viewer to really *look* and spend time with the scene, and to engage with it bodily—flipping pages, moving it around, running a finger across its uneven edges, twirling the blue baling twine. The visual recall of the repeated composition creates a heightened attention to the vignette, and enables a signaling toward certain important details of the scene. This intentional slowing down, created by the physicality of the repeating pages, is a push back against the way in which we might conventionally experience both place and imagery, namely through fast-paced and on-demand interaction, heavily-mediated and influenced by technology, including digital media technology. The repetition of the images, which on the one hand refers back to the cyclical nature of Barry's writing and the tensions that I explore in this thesis, forces the viewer, on the other hand, to notice details in the environment they might not have perceived upon a first viewing. Moreover, the tactility enabled by the books (as opposed to a photograph perfectly hung on the wall of a conventional gallery, for example) is the counterpoint to the two-dimensionality that these images would recede back to without the transformative gestures that I enacted, gestures that release and make available for contemplation by others, the agency of these books as deep maps.

Ripping and folding the pages of the books was another (intuitive) transformative gesture that pushed them from 2D images to 3D material objects. I ripped the pages of the books as an organic exercise rather than a measured one, so that the pulp of the paper became more pronounced at its edges, and the image was able to protrude partially underneath, (the same image but mirrored, potentially in black and white) (see Figure 3.18). Folding parts of the images to reveal different facets and layers, anyone wishing to investigate further had the opportunity to play with the materiality of the paper to see what was thereby hidden or rendered visible underneath. My decision to rip the images came from a desire for a drastic material intervention with my images. This action, which offered a literal opening up of my images, proved an embodied way to physically reframe my perspective and perception of the Irish land, space, and environment and encourage others to reframe it as well. In parallel with the cyclicality that I have described above, the rips, folds, and repetition of an image collectively defied a sense of finite closure that more conventional books might have communicated; instead, they collectively signified a rupture or fragmentation of the narratives, and consequently offered new access points to elements of those narratives that may not have been apparent upon first contact.

The vibrant materiality of the books—that they are printed on run-of-the-mill poster paper, that the binding material is a utilitarian farming rope, that they are precarious and prone to falling over and positioned atop a table at hip-height—all beckon the viewer not only to look, but to touch, pick up, and interact with them. The design discourses that I engage with (critical, speculative, and dark design) all seek to create space for discussion and debate around alternative ways of being and understanding, and to inspire and encourage people's imagination to flow freely, per the tenets of speculative design. In offering them for public scrutiny, I invite discussion, debate, speculation, and imagination into the books by encouraging participants to delve into, and enact their own agency, on the narratives presented in the twelve vignettes, with the hopes of expanding their awareness beyond these vignettes too. These transformative gestures pushed my practice from not only "artist and photographer" but to that of a "designer." This process of expanding upon and gaining this new expertise— through reflection, materiality, design discourse, deep mapping, transformative gestures, and research-creation—has provided

me with invaluable new insight which has effectively enhanced and transformed my skills of awareness, attunement, perception, and creation.

The final element vying for attention in my thesis show, and which reinforced the themes of deep mapping and critical design, was an extra-large video projection displayed adjacent to the topographical map and the books atop it. *Grotto in Motion* (see Figures 3.19 and 3.20) is a video of one of the artist's books (*Grotto*), seen from a bird's eye view as the pages of the book are turned. The images for this book were photographed at a grotto, on a grassy intersection in a suburb of Dublin. I created this image and subsequent artist book as a response to one of the tensions that I established in Chapter Two. Grottos, which are dotted all over the Irish built environment, are cave-like structures (often human-made) that usually house a statue of the Virgin Mary. Originally intended, and still used, as a site of devotion and worship,[174] grottos became emblematic with secrecy and women's rights in the 1980s. In 1984, a 15-year-old died, alone, during childbirth under a grotto in County Longford.[175] The death of the 15-year-old prompted, for the first time, conversations and new narratives, those of "hidden Irelands"[176] that intentionally confronted the secrecies that shrouded sexuality and reproductive rights in Ireland. Diarmaid Ferriter speaks of the many unearthed stories that emerged during that time period in *The Transformation of Ireland*, arguing that "a sort of secret history of modern Ireland emerged ... stories that had been told to no one, stories that had been bottled up and swallowed down."[177] This heartbreaking incident in 1984 was the catalyst to accessing many repressed and deeply buried narratives in Ireland.

Grotto in Motion functions as a visualization of that material deep mapping and, presented in such a large format, makes it difficult for the viewer to disassociate with it. The book, *Grotto,* that I chose to feature in the video is the only one in the series that has two different images, a wide-angle shot and a closer detail shot. The wide-angle image is intentionally photographed to situate the grotto in a built urban environment. The grotto sits to the back of the frame, just beyond a bend in the road. The foreground shows a lamppost splattered with graffiti. The contrast between the graffiti and the religious statues in the background of the scene reflects the tension between the contemporary and conventional explored in Barry's short story "Ideal Homes" (which, as discussed in Chapter Two, speaks of the restlessness of teenage twins Donna and Dee in their small town). To many, the graffiti in the foreground of the image could suggest a lack of respect of this environment, but to others, it alludes to a new generation leaving their own mark on the environment, much like the grotto symbolized to previous generations. The detail shot, which depicts an offering of wilted flowers at the grotto, suggests that the location is still used as a place of commemoration and worship, as a meeting point, as a pedestrian throughway, or more simply as a place that offers a moment of stillness and contemplation on this street corner. In the space between these two symbols, tension is created; again, the contrast between the contemporary and the conventional may be discerned, the manifestation of religious beliefs on the landscape, coupled with a different form of expression.

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[174] As may be observed in the image, fresh flowers and other devotional items are still placed at grottos throughout the country.

[175] Ferriter, The Transformation of Ireland, 715.

[176] Ferriter, The Transformation of Ireland, 715.

[177] Ferriter, The Transformation of Ireland, 715.

Figure 3.19—*Seeping into Stones (installation)* depicting the larger-than-life projection of *Grotto in Motion,* as well as the light-table which housed the stylized topographical map and the artist books.

Figure 3.20—Still from *Grotto in Motion.* May 2019. Video by the author. To watch *Grotto in Motion* see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gi0WviDXCZI&t=58s&ab_channel=ShaneyHerrmann

The multitude of uses for this space offers a compelling insight to active instances of deep mapping at this location. Much like the many access points to deep mapping and critical design that are present throughout *Seeping into Stones*, and teased out in diverse ways given the transdisciplinary nature of my thesis and this exhibition, the physicality of this book, presented in

this additional format—namely this extra-large projection—centers on deep mapping but, this time, expresses it in active motion, as a virtual expression, and in a bigger-than-human scale. The juxtaposition between the in-and-out-of-focus elements of the vignette offers multiple access points to the narratives of this specific location. The repeating shrouded figure shifts from tack sharpness, to a blurred figure in the foreground, as the pages turn. The result sets up another possibility for an embodied experience for the participant to walk around in this environment and look closely at an element in the scene, and then take a step back to focus on something else.

Upon reflecting, I found that *Grotto* is one of the stronger books in my series. If I were to change anything about this show I would have optimized the strength of this book and amplified to a greater degree its criticality and materiality, both to further deepen my engagement with some of the other iterations, and to further open up its agency to others. One of the reasons for the success of the book entitled *Grotto* is how much attention it did seem to demand of the viewer during the exhibition, in consort with the video presentation of it, not to mention the latter's size and its own celebration of deep mapping and materiality.

Concluding Thoughts

As demonstrated in this chapter, research-creation, deep mapping, critical and speculative design, and exploration of materiality through transformative gestures come together in *Seeping into Stones* as an opportunity to take on the challenge of deep mapping that Kevin Barry demonstrates in his writing and which I explore in a visual and material manner throughout my work.

The interventions and transformative gestures that I have discussed encompass the theories that make up the backbone of this project. They also incorporate the tensions that I have discovered are a part of Barry's writing and the Irish landscape alike. Through the research and creation that I undertook for this project, I have questioned the notion of deep mapping and cultivated a deeper attunement to that of human's relationship to stones, dirt, weather, land, narratives, and theories expressed through material means and by fulfilling the intention of design through the work and transformative gestures of *Seeping into Stones*, thereby moving past the conventional tropes that have grasped Ireland for so long in order to present the opportunity for a renewed, fresh look at the Ireland of today.

Concluding Thoughts

In *The Transformation of Ireland,* Diarmaid Ferriter, a highly-respected professor of history at University College Dublin, challenges the perception of Irish identity that was articulated by certain scholars of Irish cultural studies towards the end of the twentieth century, namely that Ireland was a diverse and pluralist society.[178] Instead, he quotes what he considers to be a more accurate representation, expressed by Jim Smyth in a 2002 piece that the latter contributed to the periodical *History Ireland*, namely that "Ireland possesses a class and power struggle apparently immune to change."[179] Even today, Ireland shows its traditional side (for example with people leaving fresh flowers in grottos as mentioned above), even as evidence of fundamental social change is apparent, for example, legislation supporting marriage equality in 2015 and abortion rights in 2018, unthinkable mere decades ago. How can the dynamic tussle between competing narratives of change and continuity—in all their complexity—be sought, traced, and brought up for discussion in meaningful and convincing ways? *Seeping into Stones* unearths new narratives in the Irish environment through a multidisciplinary material engagement with the tensions[180] that I have discovered through my research. Explorations in research-creation, deep mapping, design discourses, materiality, and transformative gestures all provide a platform to impress, upon a participant, the narratives that were meaningful to me in this process, but also with the hopes of stimulating a deeper attunement and awareness in themselves.

I acknowledge that throughout this process, I have not always portrayed Ireland in a positive light. However, in the search for and conjuring of alternative, darker, and perhaps even pessimistic, narratives of Ireland, I am fulfilling the mandate of the design discourse that is so important to this project. Through projects like *Seeping into Stones* or Barry's fictional writing—which I believe do successfully move past the tropes and assumptions that have gripped the country for over a century—alternative narratives and realities that encompass Ireland can be given a voice and a platform. This shift in perspective harkens back to the mandate of dark design which is to employ dark emotions or themes to "jolt the viewer out of … complacency."[181] Indeed, Barry's literary fiction models this idea and his writing has been championed as a counterpoint to the stereotypes of Ireland. The editors of *The Stinging Fly*, a magazine that promotes and publishes new and innovative Irish writing including Barry's, offers the following comment on his short story collection *There are Little Kingdoms*: it "chronicles life

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[178] Ferriter, The Transformation of Ireland, 751.
[179] Ferriter, The Transformation of Ireland, 752.
[180] Tensions between rural/urban, human/environment, and contemporary/conventional as discussed in Chapter Two.
[181] Dune and Raby, *Speculative Everything,* 43.

in the towns and cities of a changing land, where a strange new music sounds, where there are many uncertainties and absurdities, but where still there's laughter in the dark—it echoes as compassion. This is a place where everything is changing, and where everything remains the same."[182] As such, Barry's undercurrents of compassion and the resonance of "laughter in the dark" is the contemplation of the speculative futures that are so important to embrace.

Often, as research-creation demonstrates, knowledge is gleaned from process and reflection rather than a definitive denouement. Through *Seeping into Stones*, I've certainly learned to trust that process and to celebrate the curiosity that keeps me engaged, attuned, and aware, not just of my environment, but of my complex and entangled place in this world. The Master of Design program and the work that I undertook as a master's student, culminating with the thesis exhibition, *We Ask More Questions Than We Can Answer,* emphasized the notion that there is never a truly finite solution to some of the most important or complex questions.

How long is a piece of string?

Figure 4.1—*Blue Twine & Calf.* April 2018. Photograph by the author.

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[182] "There are Little Kingdoms," The Stinging Fly, accessed July 7, 2020, https://stingingfly.org/books/there-are-little-kingdoms/.

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Appendix – **Publication:** *Treasury of Resources, Canadian Journal of Irish Studies.*

Herrmann, Shaney. "*Seeping into Stones:* The Fractured Landscapes of Kevin Barry." *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 42 (2019): 48-73. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26693091.

Shaney Herrmann

Seeping into Stones: The Fractured Landscapes of Kevin Barry

Seeping into Stones: The Fractured Landscapes of Kevin Barry is a photographic work that was inspired by and explores the environment presented in the short stories by contemporary Irish author Kevin Barry.

In a November 2013 interview with the *Paris Review*, Barry expressed his sense that human emotion "seeps into the stones of a place." In his stories, he frequently saturates Irish place—landscapes as well as the built environment—with human characteristics like emotions, personalities, and anxieties. The series of photos that follows arises from this premise, and seeks to illustrate how a phenomenon so uniquely human might manifest itself in place. The photographic study also attempts to capture how these emotions, habits, or obsessions continue to make themselves felt, both to the generations of people who inhabit that land and to visitors responding to these material stimuli.

For this work, I travelled to Ireland on two research trips to determine whether I could perceive the emotional resonances that Barry's stories elicit. Since I was familiar with the country because of several previous extended visits, it was especially important for this project that I set aside any predetermined notions of place and try to allow the specific nuances of each location to guide my responses, so that I remained acutely attentive and receptive to their evocative power.

Seeping into Stones seeks to unearth an updated conversation around the Irish landscape by exploring and visualizing tensions that have settled into it—tensions between the rural and the urban, between the modern and the traditional, and between the human and their environment. ¶

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Emergency
Evacuation
Point

If you seek an answer to the sense of vagueness that surrounds your existence like a fine mist, please press four.

The haggard verges of a town put in an appearance. Motor factors: light industry, ribbon development,

new-build schemes, the health centre, an Aldi. Here was sweet life, and the common run, also the shades of

mild hysteria.   A slow rumbling, then the sullen build of momentum, and the countryside was unpeeled,

image by image: an old house with its slate roof caved in; magpies bossing a field; on higher ground, a twist

of grey trees in the grudging light.   The waters were rising yet.   "Atlantic City, Feel The Force!"   There was
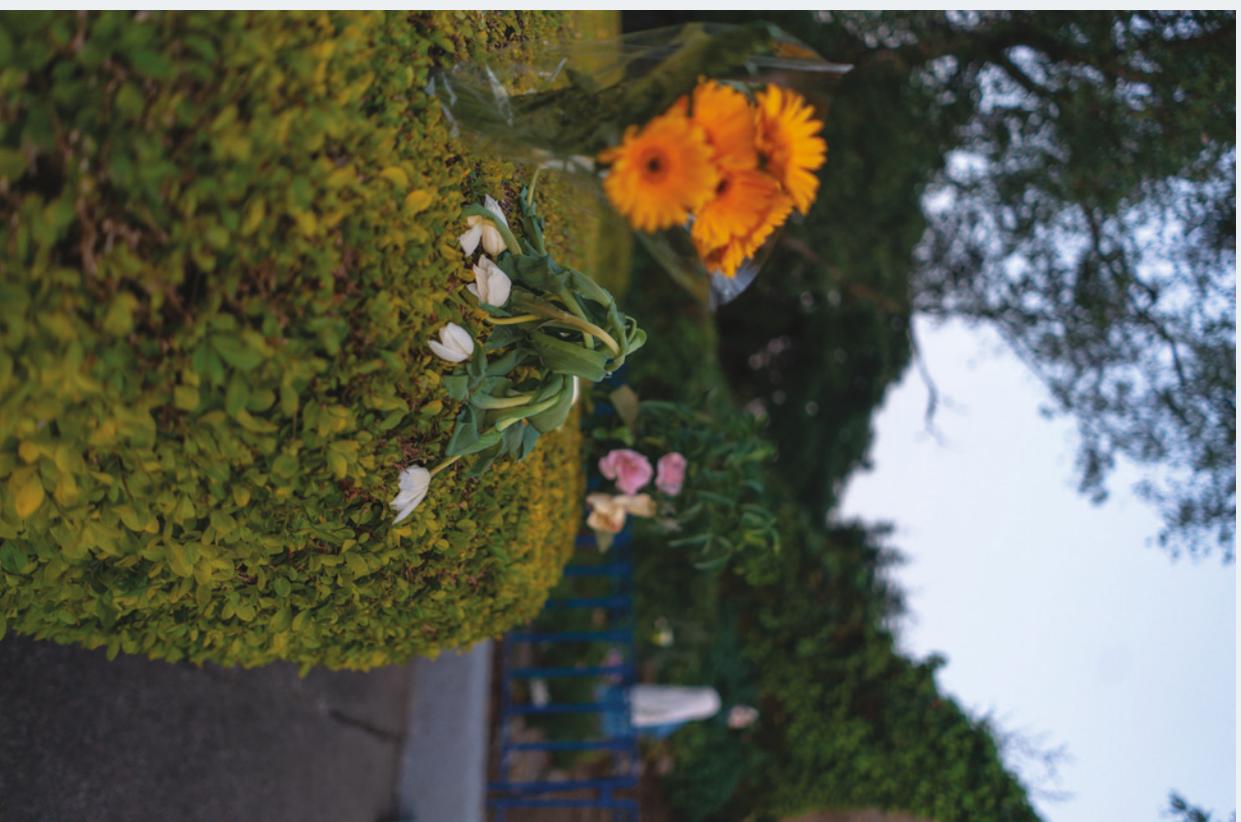
dark wonder in them. He knew more about the hills than he knew about himself. Do hills brood, as they

say? Oh they sure do. The summer would move on, and fade, there is always the terrible momentum of

the year's turning. He looked out onto the street and it was familiar but odd, as if streets were running into
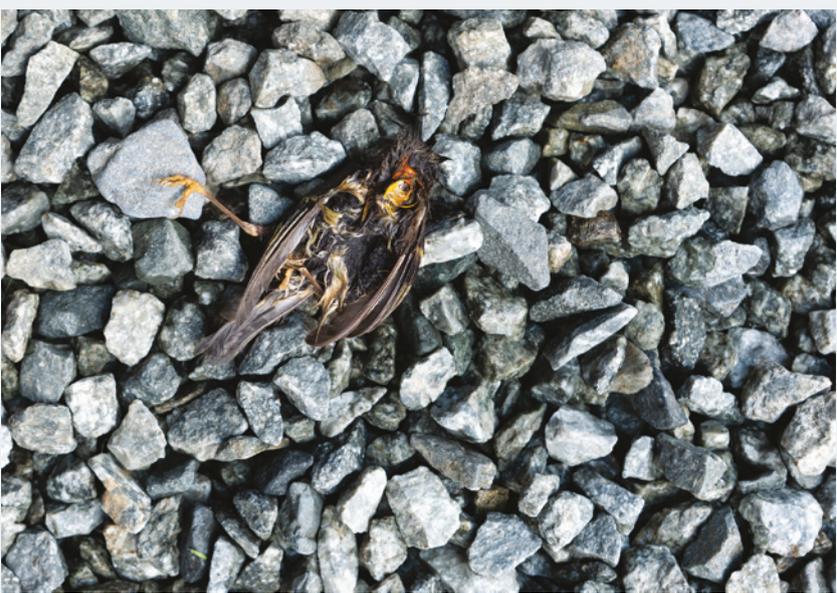
the wrong streets, as if the hills were wrong, and the sky at a crooked slant, it was the amalgam place of a

dream out there.   the most depressing mountain.   It's the sort of town that would give you a chest infection.

The town will lie flat and desolate and open to all weathers.   The people were terraced in neat rows and

roofed in with grey slates and were themselves forlorn, but they wouldn't easily have said why. An assault of fresh rain was carried slant-wise from the west. The hills above the town darkened with the shadows of

approaching night.   The blue flicker of television screens could be seen behind terrace windows.   A tuneless

brass band strikes up inside.   It was a scattering of acres outside the town of B——.   Nervous

agitation works like water on stone. It is a slow, steady dripping that can meet no answering force. The change that had come was mostly unseen. It took place behind closed doors, in front rooms and back kitchens,
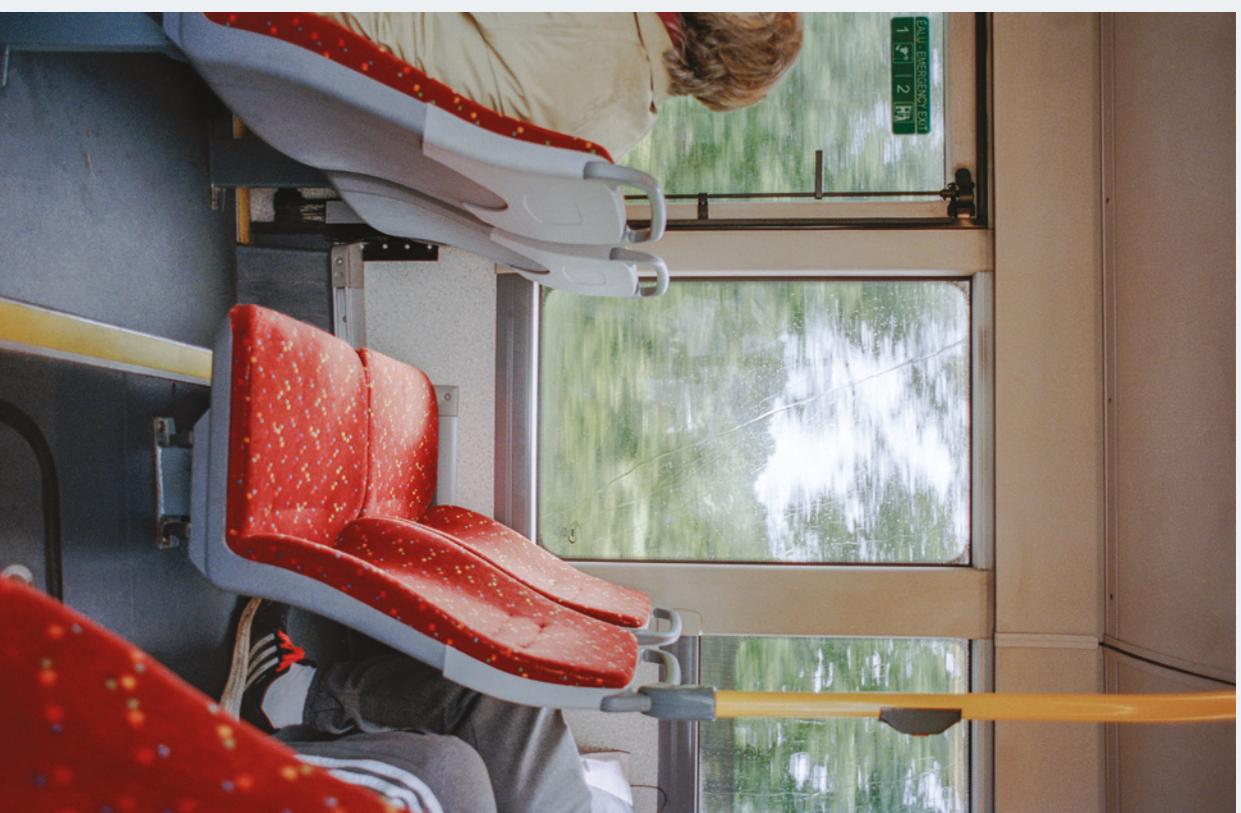
in bedrooms, in the heart. But if it was unseen, it was not unheard. It was a gear change, a low a rumbling.

a faint groaning beneath the skin of the earth. The ground was readying itself for new life.