

The Immanency of the Intangible Image

Thoughts with Neolithic Expression at Loughcrew

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ABSTRACT The power of images has played a fundamental role in the projects of both modernity and archaeology. Since the seventeenth century the past has been understood by the politics of display and visual documentation. Archaeological practice has progressed with modern visual technologies and scientific revolutions, creating standardised media. This has, however, created a situation whereby representational understandings of all things in the past dominate – to end with a representational interpretation is understandable, to begin with one is problematic. Such practices are most prevalent in accounts of motifs and passage tombs in Ireland. This paper moves beyond mere representation and the idea that things are passive, and instead offers a narrative of the Loughcrew complex, that is more collaborative and dynamic.

Contrasts

Some like to approach imagery from the Neolithic as if it harbors hidden messages or access to unseen places. In many narratives, images often adhere to a belief in an analogous universality that is always there, just beyond and waiting patiently to be revealed. Searching and then discovering such invisible realms and meanings is by no means a bad thing. Some scholars, however, start with an *a priori* assertion that they are already there, with approaches often framed by modern representational understandings. In many accounts, people seem to step from intangible worlds, in order to represent their experiences as visual symbols. In such proposals the material world – as distinct from humans – influences little in the process of representation. Materials appear transparent here; they simply serve as the substrate upon which representations are overlaid. This material substrate is imagined as an inert, stable and unchanging entity patiently awaiting the action of thoughtful humans. What would archaeology look like if we did not *start* with such conceptions of imagery? What happens when we consider different elements in the world as influential partners within expression? Would we still draw the same conclusions, or would other narratives be possible? This paper works along such questions by discussing the Neolithic complex of Loughcrew, which has been the subject of representational approaches for many years.

Loughcrew, or Sliabh na Callighe, is one of Ireland's most magnificent archaeological environments. It is located at the western end of County Meath and incorporates a complex of passage tombs and decorated rock panels distributed across the four neighbouring hilltops of Carnbane West, Carrickbrac or Newtown, Carnbane East and Patrickstown, in an area measuring 3km from east to west and 600m from north to south (Cooney 2000a:159; Fraser 1998:206; see Fig. 1). Regarding the dominance of representation in accounts of the Neolithic,¹ I think I understand why some people want to present a world of symbols; it is after all comforting. To live without indices is destabilising – as I discovered earlier this year in the United Arab Emirates, through my inabilities to decipher the signs. Destabilisation is not, however, necessarily negative and this paper moves beyond a paper that I wrote a few years ago (Cochrane 2005), to further explore potential relationships created by images. I use movement by people in and around the tombs and decorated stones as a starting point for a more than representational understanding of the site (see Lorimer 2005; Thrift 2008; Anderson & Harrison 2010).

Some expect one medium to replay what has already been given in another; the creation of original and copy – semblance and return (Doel 2010:119). There is an idea that some archaeologists can discover a true or more correct world of realities lying behind a veil of appearances (Cochrane 2009a; Latour 2010). At a most honest level, however, images are sometimes just images. They can be stimulated by references to other images and they can perform. They do not always just represent – in fact they can create situations whereby they only *present* with there being nothing behind them – often dissimulating that they have nothing to conceal (see Cochrane 2006). Within such approaches, the image is acknowledged to be autonomous enough to abolish prescribed referents, creating a performance where the image is much more than applied representation. Here, the image is not passively awaiting overlays of meaning. Images are not *about* a thing – they *are* the thing.

Images often like to be looked at. Associations between archaeology and the modern regime of vision have recently been much debated (e.g. Cochrane and Russell 2007; Thomas 2010). Indeed, with the perceived ocular supremacy, it is argued that other senses have been neglected and under explored in archaeological interpretations (Witmore 2006). Here, I will incorporate positions of 'visuality'. The term was first used in academia by the historian Thomas Carlyle in the mid nineteenth century. Opposed to panopticism and modernity, Carlyle strove to understand the past through visual narrative, to use visuality for performing or contesting a worldview (Mirzoeff 2006:54). Carlyle deplored attempts at the physiology of vision, and described the spectator less as a *see-er* and more as a *Seer*, thereby allowing more expressive and emotional visions. For Carlyle, visuality incorporated amongst other things, the sound effects, the drama, the complexities, the poetics, the images, the narratives, the taste, touch and the aroma of the past (Mirzoeff 2006:54-7). Although I acknowledge that

it is impossible to sense a past, this is an understanding of visuality that I employ here in exploring Loughcrew.

Why some people might have been stimulated to perform with the site and tombs will be proposed by considering first the personality of Loughcrew, that is how the environment influences what people do and think (see also Robinson 2012; Ingold 2000:257-8). I will review the possibility that materials can create carnival type environments when they wish – meaning that they can subvert, invert and deceive the norm (see below). The passage tomb motifs will be analysed as a flux of images and illusions that may have influenced in the Neolithic. Although there is indication of some people continually interacting with the summits of Loughcrew from the Mesolithic through to the Neolithic, there is currently no settlement evidence available from either period (Cooney and Grogan 1994:13; Kimball 2000:31). The passage tombs and engraved images were therefore probably removed from the context of daily life, possibly thought of as being placed in a liminal zone (van Gennep 1960), involving then as it does now, a strenuous physical exertion in order to reach the summits and the passage tombs. Contact with the passage tombs may have been temporal and in some instances physically and emotionally hazardous, potentially acting as some form of integration or separation.

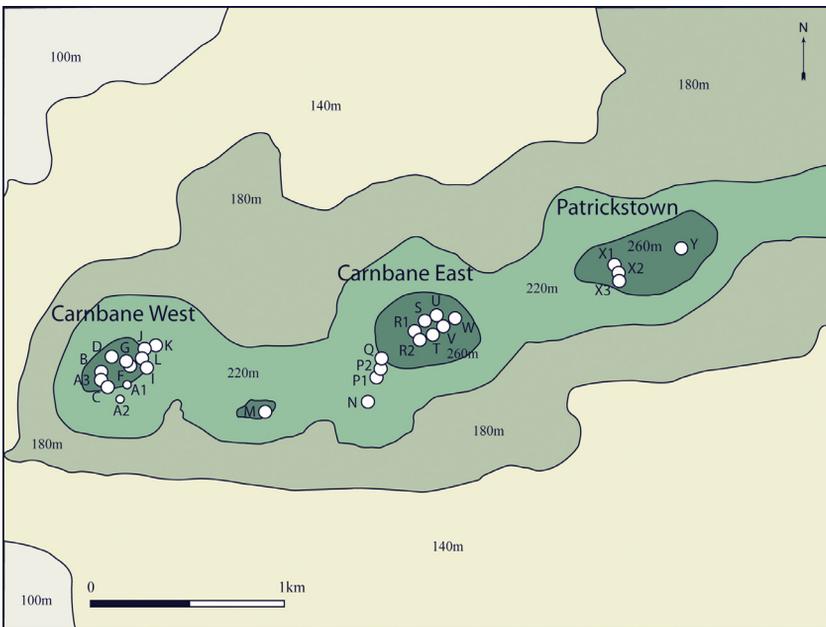


Fig. 1. Schematic plan of Loughcrew demonstrating the locations of the passage tombs (adapted from Cooney 2000a: fig. 5.10).

Previous accounts of the Loughcrew complex have addressed individual motifs and how they are related to burials and materials, the entire complex with the locations and orientations of specific passage tombs, and movements of people through and around the monuments (e.g. Herity 1974; Cooney 1990; Thomas 1992; McMann 1994; Shee Twohig 1996). Here, I build upon these previous ideas of environmental context and motif location with physical and visual engagements to develop a further argument that includes the possible sequences, differences, improvisations and repetitions that are being performed by the passage tombs. It is suggested that both the sequential images, the topography of the Loughcrew summits and the passage tombs themselves establish visions, gazes and glances that are only ever anchored in the present (see Gell 1992:173; Hirsch 2004:37; Cochrane 2009a; 2009b; 2010). I consider how the repeated alteration of the sites in the Neolithic (their present), among particular persons, was the result of the ways in which beliefs were continually established or improvised. By repetitively participating with the passage tombs, some people were devoting effort to be able to frequently ascertain the currentness of beliefs about events. Although we can never know what these were, we can detect themes, possible perceptions, generalities and repetitive actions; it is through some of these elements that I construct narratives.



Fig. 2. Looking west towards Carnbane East and Carnbane West (digital photo: author).

Recently, Thomas (1990; 1992; 1993; 2001) has explored the view that distances and explorations into spheres of knowledge are expressed not only through the internal architectures of the Loughcrew passage tombs, but also via the locations of specific motifs. By moving further into the inner areas of the passage tomb, the spectator is challenged with increasingly channelled movement through more complex spatial

divisions (Thomas 1990). This is argued to occur in order to facilitate the accumulation and manipulation of communal and ‘ancestral authorities’ (Thomas 1992:146). By incorporating representational textual analogies, Thomas proposes that that the motifs acted as symbolic media by which approved knowledges could be ‘read’ by and for particular members of society, possibly as part of an extended revelation (1992:143, 146, 154). The differing motifs on individual stones are described as being for different people or people at different temporal stages of a particular performance or practice (Thomas 1993:87). Thomas (1992:146, 154) does, however, stress that the interpretations and meanings of the motifs may have been fluid, multiple, and capable of change as a result of the ambiguity inherent in abstract images (see also Bradley 1995; Hensey 2012). I build upon these previous ideas of motif location with physical and visual engagements in order to develop a further argument that includes the possible sequences, differences and repetitions that were being performed by the passage tombs.

Loughcrew

On a clear day the panoramic views from the summits of these hills give a view of Ireland from sea to sea, about its narrowest part (Shell and Roughley 2004:22). Loughcrew stands out as a key complex of Neolithic imagery, having yielded over 124 decorated surfaces on passage tombs, and 20 examples of open-air rock art (Shee Twohig et al. 2010). This is one of the earliest known decorated sites in Ireland, and the only place where passage tomb motifs and rock art co-exist, within the same immediate environment (Shee Twohig 2012:125). The cairns are located on an east-to-west axis, with an almost linear structure, with smaller tombs arranged near larger focal ones. In this respect the Loughcrew passage tombs can be compared to the Boyne Valley sites (Cooney 1990). There are currently over 30 passage tombs in the Loughcrew complex and many of these are engraved with motifs, particularly on the internal structural stones and occasionally on the kerbstones. Patrickstown Hill is thought to have had a further 21 cairns, but that they were totally demolished with no remaining traces before 1864 (Conwell 1864:48; Brennan 1983:69). Shee Twohig (1981:94, figs. 213–41; see also Frazer 1893) recorded over 100 decorated stones (124 decorated surfaces), although the original number was probably more, and has argued for a distinctive Loughcrew style of imagery.

The topography at Loughcrew consists of a dominant elongated ridge orientated south-west/north-east on the interface between the areas of the Boyne/Blackwater and Shannon river systems. The outcrop projects out of the Lower Silurian rocks (Palaeozoic siltstone), mudstones and fine sandstones, with some of these grits being used to construct the majority of the passage tombs in the Loughcrew complex (Coffey 1912:79; Herity 1974:55; Cooney 1987:94; McMann 1993:23); to the south and

west of the hill are the comparatively low, undulating, limestone plains of County Meath and Westmeath, and to the north slate rocks occupy the low areas around Lough Ramor (Conwell 1864:43). From the summit one can see the mountains at the coasts of Carlingford and Sligo (Conwell 1866:355). The summit was estimated to command a view of at least 37 miles all round on a clear day, and specifically chosen as a special place for this feature (Conwell 1866:356). The passage tombs are situated along the curving spine of the ridge. The central component of the complex resides above the 214m contour line, covering an area of approximately 3.5km east-north-east/west-south-west and about 400m to 1km north/south (Cooney 1987; 2000b). The passage tombs are centred on moderately flat-topped summits and are similar to the Boyne Valley passage tombs in that the smaller sites are clustered around larger tombs. The Loughcrew complex is also similar to the Boyne Valley in that it is located between two river systems, namely the Boyne and Shannon.

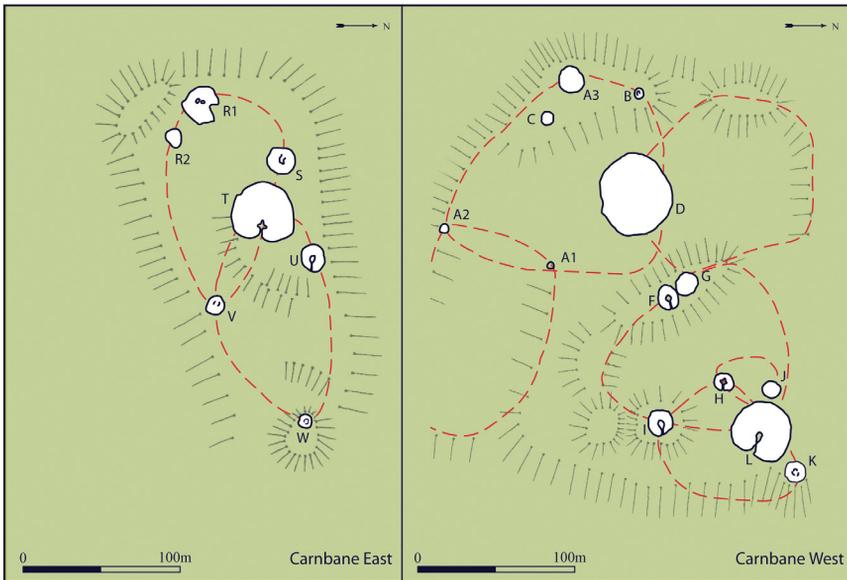


Fig. 3 The possible focal areas (indicated red dash line) as proposed by Fraser on Carnbane East and West. Terrain indications are an approximation only (adapted from Fraser 1998: figs. 8 and 9).

The undulating, steep and flattish features of the topography have been argued to directly affect and influence a person's visual experience through its contrast and transformation (Fraser 1998:212; see Fig. 2). The flat features of the summits are only apparent when one reaches the tops of the hills. It is interesting to note that most cairns

are located on the margins of the summits, although exceptions do occur (e.g. Cairn D is in a hollow and T is on the summit). This creates a visual 'island' whereby the internal spaces are framed by the steeper banks on the periphery of the summits and by the cairns, which in turn physically and visually block-out the external spaces (see Shell and Roughley 2004; Shell 2005; Shee Twohig et al. 2010; Kondo 2011; Shee Twohig 2012). Fraser (1998:212-14; see Fig. 3) has suggested that these topographical and created features possibly demarcated eight focal areas or as I propose 'islands' within the Loughcrew Hills. The summits form 'islandscapes' (Cooney 2004:145), special places where striking features of the land are embellished and special things created and collaborated with to enhance links, whilst also delineating boundaries to these liminal places (Bradley 2000:36). After Whittle (2004), we might therefore describe these aerial locales as 'islands-that-float-to-the-sky'. Indeed, some people may have regarded mountains and hills as part of the sky rather than just the land (Watson 2004:60).

In following Thomas's (1993) desire to create narratives that address more humanised interactions within the environment and associated materials, Fraser (1998) discussed the physical stresses involved in ascending the Loughcrew summits and the additional difficulties that would be incurred by leading animals, carrying objects or maybe people in a 'state of crisis' (Foucault 2002:232), such as the elderly, pregnant women, the sick, or perhaps the dead. Scaling these slopes might also have impacted upon notions of time and space. The act of climbing might have incorporated different senses of time than were generally used within the daily round. Bloch (1977) has commented that more than one sense of time can often exist within a group of people (see also Gell 1992; Lucas 2005; Cochrane 2009b). It is suggested that routine activities may be influenced by the seasons, such as knowing the right times to conduct certain events, whereas special activities may involve notions of time that are distinct from or distort the seasons (Bloch 1977). For instance, the summit tops at Loughcrew are generally cooler in temperature than the surrounding lowland areas and can be covered in snow when low-lying areas are not. This climatic feature might deliver the impression that the passing of seasons is respectively progressed or delayed as one rises up the slopes, with the developmental stages and annual cycles of fauna and flora being different to the lowland ones (Watson 2004:60; see Fig 4). Experiencing the Loughcrew Hills with differing climatic conditions and visibility distorted by atmospheric, may have lead to concrete testaments to the specialness of the summits.

Such features may confirm a worldview, at some level, in which the Loughcrew Hills are regarded as part of a cosmological *axis mundi*, where heaven and earth meet; acting as 'hierophanies', that is something that reveals itself to be special (Eliade 1964:32, 268). Following a less representational approach, Foucault (2002:231-33) describes these sites as 'heterotopias', that is a counter-site which can simultaneously juxtapose in a single place several places. These zones also contest and invert a place

while being outside all places, even though one can locate them in a physical reality. These summit tops or island settings may have subverted life, as often happens within the carnivalesque. For example, in discussing the possible significances of some 'natural' places, Bradley (2000:27) describes how mountain locations are sometimes used for role reversals in overturning the norms of life. At the Loughcrew summits, at particular times, some people may therefore have inverted their normal relations and disrupted how they thought about themselves, others and the world in general. How these themes interact with the passage tombs and associated imagery will be discussed in more detail below.



Fig. 4. Atmospheres of experience at Loughcrew. Top: a wall of low-cloud hides the surrounding environment. Bottom: looking south from Carnbane East (digital photo: author).

Disruption, sympathy and construction

There is currently a lack of direct datable evidence for the Loughcrew complex and estimated dates generally range from *c.* 4000-2800 BC (McMann 1994:526). This situation has led Cooney (2000a) to propose a speculative three-phase sequential model for the Loughcrew complex, based on Sheridan's (1985/6) developmental scheme. Cooney (2000a:159) believes that such an approach is useful as it allows one to further appreciate how the complex evolved through action. Sheridan's (1985/6) developmental scheme is also supported by some of the spatial relationships of the

cairns. For instance, both Cairns J and L, Carnbane West, share the same orientation to the south-east, diverging by only 5m (McMann 1994:529; Fraser 1998:207). As the entrance to the smaller Cairn J is mostly blocked by the larger Cairn L, it is unlikely that Cairn J was built later than Cairn L. I will not, however, include Sheridan's (1985/6) date estimates as the current shortage of chronological data makes it almost impossible to break down the speculative stages for passage tombs in general at Loughcrew, beyond a 3800-2800 BC (or fourth to third millennia BC) time-frame. As with the Boyne Valley passage tombs, County Meath, the larger Loughcrew tombs seem to be built *after* most of the smaller ones (*contra* Herity 1974:84-7), with most being built in the first two phases.

In *phase 1*, we witness the construction of cairns less than 15m in diameter on Carnbane West. These sites are located in two focal zones that are delineated by knolls that form a northwest to southeast barrier. Similar tombs are also located on Carnbane East on the western slopes and near the summit of this ridge, leaving the centre area clear, while Cairn U is situated on the junction of a flatter and higher area. Cooney (2000a:159) suggests that the three possible small passage tombs (Cairns X1, X2 and X3) at the western edge of Patrickstown ridge also belong to this phase. The passage tombs within this phase appear to emphasise and be sympathetic to the pre-existing features of the summits (Fraser 1998:216-17).

Within *phase 2*, we notice the construction of passage tombs of intermediate size, with cairns varying from 15m to 20m in diameter. On Carnbane West, the topographic northwest to southeast divide is further enhanced by the construction of three passage tombs, two of which form a pair on the knoll ridge (Cairns G and F), while Cairn H is placed to the northeast on the flatter slope and takes 'centre stage'. Cooney (2000a:159) has commented on the visual impact which the conglomeration of Cairns F, G, H, I, J and K would have created for spectators, and how the positions of the tombs close together would have restricted views of what lay beyond (see also Fraser 1998). Cairn M is located on the top of the Newton ridge to the southeast of Carnbane West. Combined with the construction of Cairn S on Carnbane East, the tombs in this phase draw the spectator's attention to the more level areas at Loughcrew.

It is during *phase 3* that we witness the construction of the larger passage tomb cairns within the Loughcrew complex. These sites include Cairn D at 54m in diameter, and Cairn L at 40m in diameter on Carnbane West; Cairn T at 35m in diameter on Carnbane East and Cairn Y at 30m in diameter on Patrickstown Hill (Herity 1974: 41-55). Whereas the earlier smaller passage tombs are positioned in sympathy to the topography, being located on raised knolls and on the periphery of flatter areas, the later larger passage tombs are sited in the centers of these previously open areas and therefore dominate in a 'constructive' manner (Fraser 1998:217). Although it should be noted that Cairn T also dominates one's focus in that it occupies the highest summit in the complex at 276m above sea level (Herity 1974:42). It has been suggested that some of these focal passage tombs replaced earlier smaller sites, and also included

older decorated 'rock-art' stones, as seen in Cairn T (e.g. Shee Twohig 1996:74; Cooney 2000a:161; see below). This then might obscure or invalidate Fraser's (1998) *sympathetic* through to *constructive* sequences. Interest with visual impact is not only suggested by the size of the cairns, but also by the inclusion of quartz, as is seen with a quartz standing stone at the northwest edge of Cairn D, on the very point of the escarpment of the hill, being on the western edge of the whole complex (Conwell 1873:50; Cooney 1996). Focus would also have been enhanced by the increased removal of local woodlands near and on Loughcrew during the Neolithic period (Fraser 1998: 222). The curving inward of the kerbstones, to highlight the entrances to the interiors of some passage tombs, is regarded as conspicuous expression rather than visual concealment (Conwell 1864:49).

This phasing of the passage tombs demonstrates that they were not all built at the same time, rather there were repetitions, episodes, and punctuated performances over time. The settings of the tombs in the final stages draw the spectator's attention to the more level areas at Loughcrew, creating 'stage' settings. It is noteworthy that as soon as one creates a stage, there is gaze and distance, performance and otherness, although particular interactions can subvert or abolish these dimensions (Baudrillard 2003:27).

Of the 31 cairns now visible at Loughcrew today, 7 have intact ground features, while 21 have remaining interior fragments and 17 have partial or complete kerbs (Cooney 1990:743; McMann 1994:526). Many of the motifs are deteriorating (15 cairns still have motifs today) and many more have been lost to the human eye in the last hundred years as a result of weather conditions, erosion, modern afforestation and even by flourishing nettles (Conwell 1866:365). The surviving images on these passage tombs do not present the same 'mature' plastic style that was observed at the Boyne Valley passage tombs, and appear more as a collection of random images that are 'crowded onto surfaces in a busy and seemingly unfocused manner' (O'Sullivan 1993:30). Following O'Sullivan's (1996a:87) typological sequence, none of the motifs progress beyond the Step 1 standard images, with the plastic aspects of the stones rarely explored. Due to restrictions of space here and preservation issues, I will only focus on the dominant Cairn T and its motifs within the complex. I do this to further understand some of the actions and dramas that may have been played out at within the complex in its later phases when all the cairns were in place. Before engaging in the specifics of the archaeology, I will briefly introduce the concept of the carnivalesque.

Lusts and actions

In attempting to appreciate the Loughcrew summits, I have been drawn to the notion of the carnivalesque and its pervasive and influential imagery. The word 'carnival' often evokes thoughts of an amusement park, Disney World, or public

event in Notting Hill, London. Historically, however, carnivals in Europe were quite different affairs. For instance, although they share the same ideas of merriment with their modern counterparts, European medieval carnivals were much more all-encompassing. Contemporary carnivals are diminished examples of the physical lusting, mutating and mutilating activities that were played out during some previous carnival environments (see also Gilmore 1998). Mikhail Bakhtin was one of the first authors to coin the term ‘carnavalesque’ (1968). He describes the carnivalesque as something that is created when the themes of the carnival subvert, distort and invert habitual or established life. In carnival, all that is marginalised and excluded, such as the mad, the scandalous and the uncertain, takes centre stage and liberates in an explosion of otherness (Stam 1989:86). In this environment, ‘negative’ bodily expressions such as hunger, thirst, defecation and copulation become a ‘positive’ corrosive force; life enjoys a symbolic victory over death. Bakhtin (1968) argued that folk-humour based societies in early modern Europe created manifestations of the carnivalesque that laughed at and mimicked those in authority, who believed that mentalités, history, destiny and fate were static and unalterable. The carnival is not ‘irrational’; it is the bodily immersion into false façades, monstrous creations, feasts, corporeal comedies and protocols, games and dramas, parodies, performance and imagery. It is the *overlay* of many things at once, it is the world turned upside-down, razing and generation coupled with comic, sensuous and abusive performances. It incorporates unbridled juxtapositions, grotesque ruptures and impugnation between perceived binary oppositions and their parodies; it is the routine with fantastical images. Thus it creates an environment where ‘everything is pregnant with its opposite, within an alternative logic of permanent contradiction’ (Shohat and Stam 2001:35). Within carnival, all barriers, norms and prohibitions are temporally suspended (Bakhtin 1968:15). The carnival incorporates a different kind of communication, based on free and familiar contact (Bakhtin 1968:17; Stam 1989:86). The term ‘carnavalesque’ therefore refers to the carnivalising of normal daily life fluctuating within fleeting permanence. It incorporates a number of themes and these can be summarised as follows:

- (a) The activation of life and love and the actualisation of myths, with communal and cosmic reunions.
- (b) Emphasis on sacrifice through the concatenation of life and death.
- (c) The idea of bisexuality and the practice of transvestitism as a release from imposed sex or gender roles. This can also incorporate same-sex orientated practices.
- (d) A celebration of the grotesque, excessive bodies, orifices and protuberances, with a rejection of decorum and polite speech.
- (e) Subversion through the world being turned upside-down, emphasising the permanence of change.
- (f) Anti-aesthetics that illuminate heterogeneity and the oxymoron, while erasing boundaries between spectators and objects or performers (Stam 1989:93-94).

Yet the carnivalesque is not only a Western, pre-Renaissance tradition; ethnographic examples discuss some people who have special performances for overturning 'good' order and respectable aesthetics. For instance, in the late twentieth century the Sioux of North America developed ritual clowns or *heyoka* to violate conventional expectations. The *heyoka* are noted to perform seemingly 'foolish' acts; in an example a man is described as riding backwards on his horse with his boots on backwards so that he is coming when he is really going; if it is hot he covers himself in blankets and shivers as if cold, and *always* says 'yes' when he means 'no' (Tedlock 1975:106). These performances were anticipated to entertain, but more importantly to open up the spectators through a mixture of laughter and panic, to a desired experience (Tedlock 1975:107). In such examples not *everyone* has to invert or participate, they can watch if they like (sometimes at personal risk), while the marginal is briefly brought to the centre. In a sense there are no 'real' spectators within carnivalesque environments (be they Western or otherwise), as all near are immersed within it; they live in it with 'normal' life ceasing to exist during its time-span (Bakhtin 1968:7). Through performance the carnivalesque creates more than imagined realities, it is life itself, but influenced via certain patterns of play (Bakhtin 1968:7).

Some studies show that often when one finds inequalities of power, wealth and status, one also finds practices that 'turn the world upside-down' (e.g. Tedlock 1975; Gilmore 1998; Bailey 2005). I will take the theme of a world inverted, and demonstrate how it is played out by the architecture of the Loughcrew passage tombs and settings themselves. For example, when one enters a passage tomb, there is a sensation of entering the earth itself, or a different 'other' place. This feeling of a world inverted is *magnified* by the processes of engraving images and by overlaying motifs with other motifs. Through unfinished and ongoing processes (see Gell 1998:80; see also Zeki 1999:32), senses of permanent resistance are literally etched away, as one engraves a potentially permanent and timeless stone. The possible application and erosion of natural pigment (via liquids?) may also have subtly evoked energies against diverse authority that was opposed to change (for discussions on pigments see: Breuil and Macalister 1921:4; Shee Twohig 1981:32-5; Bradley *et al.* 2000; Card and Thomas 2012). Whether these authorities were the dead, mythic entities or elders will remain unknown. We can, however, argue that the idea of the carnivalesque allows people to move beyond the limits of representation and fixation. At Loughcrew there are two episodes of the superimposition of one motif with another (Jones 2004:209, Fig. 21.6). The superimposition of motifs in this context may be a sublime interaction of a world layered upon layer and turned upside down, the celebration and animation of life in a place of the dead. Such a proposition recalls Nietzsche's description of a Dionysian fête, in which the revellers under the influence of narcotic drinks forever exult in the transformation of appearances (Stam 1989:89). This paper incorporates Jones's (2004; see also O'Sullivan 1986; Eogan 1996) position, but was

initially inspired by C. S. Lewis's (1971) paper 'meditation in a toolshed', in which he stressed the differences between looking *at* and looking *along* a particular idea. I am concerned that past models regarding passage tomb motifs have focused more on the structural forms of motifs than the processes that helped produce them (see also Jones 2004:202-3). They therefore are more about looking *at* the forms rather than looking *along* the processes. Indeed, Conkey (1982) stated that archaeologists tend to focus more on the 'secretions' of a process (that is the structured motifs), because they do not know how to deal with the process itself (see also Thomas 2004:145-161). The motifs on the Loughcrew passage tombs offer a unique opportunity to focus on these processes of secretion as they were produced in chronological sequences. By citing specific examples from Cairn T, Carnbane East, I will demonstrate how the initial creation of images and the superimposition of particular motifs may be viewed as the performances of creative carnivalesque principles. Particular stones are described in detail to emphasis the repetitions and differences that are played out at Loughcrew.



Fig. 5. Cairn T protruding from the top of Carnbane East when approached from the north west (digital photo: author).

Cairn T

This cairn is the focal tomb on Carnbane East and is a classic cruciform passage tomb 10m long. It is also a stalled structure similar to Site J at Dowth, Boyne Valley (Herity 1974:41). Cairn T, *c.* 35m in diameter, is visually noticeable from the lower plains surrounding Loughcrew and from most of the uneven topography below the hills themselves (Herity 1974:42; Fraser 1998:214; see Fig. 5). Interestingly, as one reaches near the summit of Carnbane East, from any direction, Cairn T and the other cairns disappear from view. It is not until one is three-quarters of the way up that the cairns appear again. This feature creates a visual capitalisation of the natural aspects of the hill architecturally creating an additional visual and physical boundary

for particular experiences (Fraser 1998:215). The cairn is delineated by a series of ice-boulders, most of which have been split in half, to form a kerb. The entrance constitutes a V-shaped in-turning in the kerb, with the façade emphasised by setting increasingly larger stones towards the entrance (Herity 1974:42).



Fig. 6. Cairn T as seen when approaching from Cairn V – note the flattish area between the cairns (digital photo: author).

Both Conwell (1866:372) and Rotherham (1895:311) reported loose quartz lumps outside the entrance and base of K29, or the ‘Hag’s chair’ (Conwell 1866:371; see below). The quartz outside the entrance was located in three oval settings cut into yellow clay, each *c.* 4.6m in diameter (Rotherham 1895:311). The occurrence of an oval setting could have created a stage for specific performances, that may have allowed certain people to appear momentarily raised or above others. Such site specific performances may have been highly charged with emotions, with intoxicant / psychoactive fuelled carnal actions, used as powerful tools to enhance experiences. The quartz may also have been adapted for its impact (especially if illuminated by fire, moon or sunlight), for the feel and smell of it (especially when struck), and its contrast with the surrounding areas. Whether it stimulated such reactions or not, it does suggest that some people were actively participating with the environment and being adapted by it for different purposes. Interestingly, oval settings have been found

directly in front of the entrances and façades of Knowth Site 1 and Newgrange Site 1, County Meath (M. O’Kelly 1982; Eogan 1996; Cochrane 2006). The mixture of demarcated oval platforms, imagery and quartz is very reminiscent of Knockroe, County Kilkenny (O’Sullivan 1996b:13; Cochrane 2012:185), and Torbhlaire, Argyll, Scotland, where quartz and clay is actively involved in the performance of motif production and reception (Jones 2012:87). Conwell (1872:91) also described a wall of quartz three feet high and approximately two feet in thickness around the entire base of the cairn. Regrettably, due to undocumented restoration work in the 1940s, there is no surviving evidence for it (Shee Twohig 1981:214; 1996:73; McMann 1994:537). Here the passage tomb is described in its current state. Two stones stand upright flanking the opening to the passage, on top of which there is a large lintel block, completing the façade and orientated south-east towards the Boyne (McMann 1994:535; see Fig. 6). The central octagonal chamber (*c.* 2.5m in diameter) is constructed from four large orthostats and it has three adjoining recesses. The overall width of the chamber is 5m and each recess is built from three stone slabs consisting of an upright end-slab and two side-slabs resting on their edges. This structure is roofed by corbelling (to a height of *c.* 3m) covered by a flat stone slab. All the recesses and main passage have a high sill (*c.* 0.5m high); above each of these there is a limestone lintel that interlocks with the uprights of the central chamber.

In total there are 19 decorated orthostats, two decorated sillstones, eight decorated roofstones and one decorated kerbstone at Cairn T (Shee Twohig 1981:214). The entrance to the passage is demarcated with a sillstone marked with irregular motifs (including three parallel arcs), and with the passage facing edges of C1 and C15, which both have some short lines, cupmarks and circles. In the main passage, nearly all the orthostats contain motifs. Located near the entrance on the left hand side are two heavily decorated stones, with L1 having motifs covering the entire front face of the stone, producing a striking arrangement of dots and concentric circles (see Fig. 7). Similar designs are presented on the nearby jambstones, while R5 and L5 are similar yet with more concentric circles and cupmarks (Shee Twohig 1981: figs. 232-34; 1996: 73). Interestingly, R5 and L5 mark the last part of the passageway into the main chamber, and it has been suggested that the cupmarks were deepened artificially by chalk and stone balls, such as those found in Cairn L (Conwell 1866:368-9), being repeatedly inserted into them (McMann 1993: 28; *contra* Frazer 1895). These repeated interactive performances are thought to possibly be part of processes that dissolve perceived boundaries during ‘normal’ or altered-states of consciousness (McMann 1994:541). Indeed, the repeated action of deepening of the cup-hole may have been experienced as a circular tunnel extending into the surface of the stone (Bradley 1995:113). Such acts that incorporate the inversion of surfaces fit well with discussions of the carnivalesque. Certainly the experience of being inside Cairn T is of ‘visual overload’, with the mind literally saturated by the plethora of motifs present

(see Fig. 7). Cacophony is not the right word – but it is one that springs to mind. Such intensity of imagery may have created emotionally charged interactions for the viewer, whilst challenging or perpetuating accepted beliefs.



Fig. 7. Motifs in Cairn T creating visual interruptions (digital photo: author).

All the chamber orthostats contain motifs and predominantly demonstrate circles and arcs, with a poorly picked radial also on C5 and meandering lines on C15 (Shee Twohig 1981:214-5). Sills 1 to 3 also have similar motifs, being located at the entrances to the cells. In reviewing these meandering lines, Coffey assumed a representational position and remarked that they were ‘sun-snakes’ (1912:88). This statement was not, however, qualified, and one hundred years later some still describe such images as representing ‘snakes’ (e.g. Robin 2012:146). Instead, we might be better considering what these meanderings that alternate from convex to concave actually do. For instance, they explore the surface tensions of the stone, and emphasise a suggestion of volume. Movement is stimulated by contrasting rigidity with gesture, and in a sense the meanders create items of content that are identical with themselves. Movement and distortion may also have been enhanced via fire, with the flickering light creating a play of shadows (Lynch 1970:40). Such illumination would work well with emphasis augmented by liquids, be they deliberately applied, or merely created by breath and condensation (Cochrane 2008). Such occurrences, with hearts racing from exertion, can develop

relations. Within such movements, images do not represent other imagined things; they are what they are.

Cells 2 and 3 both show some repeated concerns that can help us appreciate the ways in which the tomb was experienced, the histories of its creation and its relationships. Both cells are heavily decorated, and it has been suggested that some motifs deliberately occur in relation to sunlight. This is the case for Cell 2's central stone, C8, where particular motifs are illuminated by direct sunlight at the equinoxes (Brennan 1983; O'Brien 1992). It has been suggested that the reflected sunlight then illuminates the roofstone (Brennan 1983:169). There are, however, inherent dangers in focusing on the particular images that are highlighted by the sun, as a result of the extensive OPW (Office of Public Works) restorations that altered the original shape of the entrance (McMann 1994:537).

In terms of decoration, Shee Twohig (1996:74) has noted that fine, coarse and medium point methods were employed with C8 (see Fig. 7, lower right images). The particular images made with medium point continue under the supporting corbels, and suggest that the other fine and coarse images were made whilst C8 was in situ. Similarly, three grades of picking tool were used to create the panel on the roofstone in Cell 2 (Shee Twohig 1981:217). This roofstone has imagery all over the underside face. As the motifs continue beyond the supporting corbels, it is likely that the stone was decorated before being placed into the passage tomb (Shee Twohig 2012:131), and in this respect it is similar to the right-hand recess roofstone in Newgrange Site 1, Co. Meath (see C. O'Kelly 1982:181). Furthermore, Shee Twohig (1981: 216) has commented that it would have been very difficult to decorate an overhead slab so extensively. Indeed, today the images are best seen when lying on one's back with one's feet facing towards the passage entrance, and this is how Shee Twohig (1981: 216) described them. This feature has led Thomas (1992:149) to comment that only those people who had access to the deeper areas of the passage tomb would be able to engage with these images. The motifs on the roofstone are varied and generally 'haphazardly' placed, especially near the centre (Shee Twohig 1981:217, Fig. 238). As the images are basic abstract geometric, and as they do not conform to the modulations of the stone's surface, we can place this roofstone within step one of O'Sullivan's (1996a) sequence.

Similar themes are played out on underside of the cell lintel in cell 3, which has a picked dot with six radiating lines, while the underside of the roof slab has an incised image consisting of parallel zigzags (Shee Twohig 1981:217). These angular incised motifs are thought to have occurred before the later picked motifs in the passage tomb (Jones 2004:209). The stone also has a fresh surface, again with clear well executed images made with tools of varying sizes, possibly at different times and by different carvers (Shee Twohig 1981: fig. 238, Plate 36; Shee Twohig 2012:134). They therefore indicate episodes of superimposition. Its location on the underside

of the roof slab, in an inaccessible position, suggests that the image was produced before the stone was set in place (Shee Twohig 2012:135). These images highlight not only changes within the tomb (Robin 2010:391-2; 2012:150), but also broader partnerships of action.

In the entire Cairn T passage tomb, radial images dominate, being present on 37% of all the carved surfaces. Shee Twohig (1996) has commented that Cairn T demonstrates a desire for coherence, with almost identically styled images appearing in juxtaposition to each other in the passageway, with the 4 main orthostats in the central chamber also having similar imagery. Such symmetry fits well with Foucault's (2002:235) definitions of the roles that heterotopias may play. The juxtaposition of similar images creates a space of illusions that exposes and enhances the partitioning and ordering of movement within the passage tomb, whilst simultaneously reflecting and inverting the random, messy and jumbled aspects of life. Interesting, Cairn T appears to also juxtapose the outside hills within. For instance, it presents the greatest number of examples of 'landscape-rock art' type carvings, particularly cupmarks and cupmarks enclosed by rings, in the complex (Shee Twohig 1981: figs 232 and 233; Evans 2004:49). Many occur on surfaces that are weathered; this suggests that they existed on rocks that were exposed outside *before* being placed inside the passage tomb and joined by the later passage tomb images (Shee Twohig 2012:135). Such a proposition is possible at Cairn T, as the roof survived mostly intact before restoration, and therefore protected the internal motifs from weathering.

To the north of Cairn T and on the exterior is located K29 or the 'Hag's Chair'. This kerbstone has imagery on its front and back face. The top of the central part of this kerbstone is believed to be artificially cut to create the chair appearance (Shee Twohig 1981:217; *contra* Conwell 1866:371), and the inlaid cross on the 'seat' surface may have been cut by surveyors engaged in the 'Trigonometrical Irish Survey' (Frazer 1893:321; cf. McMann 1993:27). Six inverted boxed 'U' shapes and several double 'U' shapes and circles, one with central dot exist on the front face, and there are two roughly executed concentric circles on the back (Shee Twohig 1981:217). The occurrence of images on the inner-face of the stone, hint that others may occur on the unexplored inner-faces of the passage tomb, meaning that they were not intended to be seen (Shee Twohig 2012:136). If images are not viewed, the act of creation might be more important, than the finished piece. Considering that K29 is the third largest kerbstone, decorated and such a prominent feature, it is surprising that it was not placed diametrically opposed to the entrance, as is seen at some of the Boyne Valley passage tombs (e.g. K52, Newgrange Site 1). That images are presented on the outside of the passage tomb does suggest that they were intended to be seen by spectators in public. Such display may have allowed the passage tomb to operate within working nets of opening and closing that both isolated and rendered it penetrable. Performances with these external images may have incorporated differing or mirroring gestures and permissions than the internal motifs.

Repetitions, differences and stereotypes

With the exception of Cairn T, a recurring theme within a majority of the passage tombs at Loughcrew is the prominence of the right sides of the passage tomb as you enter deeper into it. In some instances this is emphasised by the right cell being larger than the others (e.g. at Cairns H and U), and in other examples the central cell on the right side is larger (e.g. Cairns I and L) (Herity 1974:42; Shee Twohig 1996:78; McMann 1994:532). Indeed, the right sides of the passage tombs often contain other distinguishing features such as the stone pillar and basin stone in Cairn L, and the basin/slabs in Cairns H and I. The right cells are often more elaborately decorated (Herity 1974:42, 123), with the sill stones or backstones being the most visually striking, such as is seen in Cairns H, L, I, and U. In multi-celled passage tombs, the cell in juxtaposition to the elaborately decorated right cell, is sometimes also stressed with prominence, such as in Cairns I and L. Here, we might be witnessing the priority of *dexter* over *sinister*. Shee Twohig (1996) has highlighted these occurrences and suggests that they constitute a choreography of the practices or performances that may have occurred within the passage tombs. Shee Twohig (1996) also noted that that the left cells are dominated by circular images, with the right cells demonstrating a greater array of images. Whether this is tantamount to more 'complex' panels is open to debate. Thomas (1992:146-7) creates a basic division and considers spirals, meanders and dots as 'simple' with concentric circles and lozenges as more 'complex' arrangements. Thomas proposes that 'simple' arrangements are rarely found on the same stone as the more 'complex' ones (1992:149). In attempting to challenge the dichotomy of 'simple:complex', Shee Twohig (1996:79) has argued that although 'simple' spirals and 'complex' lozenges do not occur on the same stones, spirals and concentric circles do (on 14 stones). She also notes that concentric circles and lozenges only occur on six stones in total, and therefore make the distinctions less impressive and removes some of the assertions of Thomas's spatial depth analysis (1992: fig. 11.3).

Thomas's (1990; 1992; 1993) proposals create situations in which space as well as spectator are controlled. For Thomas the Loughcrew passage tombs act as the 'gradual multiplication of bounded spaces... [creating a] greater subdivision of the audience, depending upon how far they were allowed to penetrate into the monument' (1990:176). The shapes of the passage tombs enforce a linear pattern of movement within the passage way and physical penetration into the chamber is dictated by the orthostats and by crossing a 'symbolically-laden' forecourt entrance (Thomas 1990:174; 176; 1993: 85). In some instances a person has to actually crouch down to enter and even lie down to see particular images (Lynch 1973:155). The physical aspects of such movements, of touching the stones and motifs, may have created tactile understandings, which vision alone cannot provide. These acts would incorporate the pores and skin and may have assisted in developing dynamic experiences of the motifs (see also Knappett 2006:240). When touching a stone, if you wait long enough

the pulse in your hand can create the sensation that it is beating - for me this is oddly satisfying. Within Thomas's (1990) depicted scheme 'lower ranked individuals' or more 'subservient' persons were only allowed to the outer-parts of the passage tombs. Thomas's (1990; 1992; 1993) studies are therefore centred around an 'inside:outside' dichotomy, being concerned primarily with the passage tomb interiors. Thomas (1992:145) does not consider external or public engagements other than commenting that there may have been prescribed patterns of spatial movement between the cairns, possibly a linear based one (see Cooney 1990), with the limited intervisibility between some individual passage tomb exteriors indicating possible sequential encounters. For instance, as one could not visibly see the entrance to Cairn H from the entrance of Cairn L, Carnbane West, one would have to physically move nearer to it (see Fig. 3).

As a response to studies that privilege the interiors of passage tombs, Fraser (1998) suggested that greater importance lay in the larger-scale and possibly more frequent encounters that could have occurred in the spaces *between* and *outside* the passage tombs at Loughcrew. For Fraser (1998: 209), the public spaces were not only able to add legitimation to specific practices, authorities and beliefs, but also they were able to challenge or subvert them, as a direct result of the public nature of the places and events. The spaces in between the cairns (see Fig 2 and Fig. 9) become 'theatres in the round' (Bradley 1998:116) acting as foci (see also Sharples 1984:116), and as with all good theatrical performances, incorporated elements of apprehension, risk and danger. The notion of risk and danger is amplified if one imagines the Loughcrew summits to be liminal zones where the dead or spirits dwelt or to which they had access. As with all theatre spaces, they are designed to produce systems of simulation and illusion of place and persons (Pearson & Shanks 2001:117; see also Turner 1982). Indeed, it is within liminal spaces that all performances operate (Pearson & Shanks 2001:53). By incorporating notions of performance, simulation and the carnivalesque, we can begin to create more emotional narratives. Things may have happened within the open spaces, involving larger numbers of people; more people than the passage tombs could hold. The availability of the open spaces and the framing by the topography and cairns may have stimulated action. As such, we can imagine some people acting with less physical restrictions on movement, deploying festive laughter to momentarily enjoy a notional victory over the spirits and death, over all the perceptions that restrict and maybe even oppress within the daily round (see Stam 1989:86). By deploying carnival ideas people may have overcome the confines between passage tomb, cairn, hill topography, bodies that are alive or dead, whole or cremated, and the world in general. Bakhtin describes these events as 'interchange' and 'interorientation' and proposes that 'eating, drinking, defecation and other elimination (sweating, blowing of the nose, sneezing), as well as copulation, pregnancy, dismemberment, swallowing up by another body - all these acts are performed on the confines of the body and the outer world, or on the confines of the old and new body. In all these events the beginnings and end of life are closely linked and interwoven' (1968:317).

A taste for the unexpected

We do not have to settle for interpretations that depict either some people operating within the passage tombs, or conversely only performing outside the cairns. By developing the models presented by Thomas (1990; 1992; 1993; 2001), Shee Twohig (1996; 2012) and Fraser (1998), we can begin to speculate that different people were doing different things and sometimes even the same things, but in alternative settings. The Loughcrew settings may present permanence in flux with punctuated shifts in orientations. Within the passage tombs the activities may have been more formalised, with spatial distinctions, barriers and the motifs creating fluid, improvisational and interactive types of communication. Outside the passage tombs these activities may have been temporally suspended, with the carnival-like modes in the focus 'island' areas and oval settings erasing the boundaries between spectator and spectacle. We can maybe imagine a celebration of life creating unique perspectives that were no less important than seriousness or even tears (as seen at some modern Western funeral practices). Carnivals can certainly be transgressive, creating an 'irrational' yet real state of happiness, from miserable situations or locations (Stam 1989:101, 119). Indeed, the apertures to the passage tombs themselves conform to carnivalesque modes in that they can instantly invert from an entrance threshold into an exit one, with entry leading to exclusion and openings becoming closings (or vice versa).



Fig 8. Interchange at Cairn T – sunset and cloud (digital photo: author).

The Loughcrew passage tombs act within rhythms of continuity and rupture. The motifs, passage tombs, covering cairns and focus 'island' areas simultaneously embody, reflect, contest and invert spaces and place, visually and physically. These features were not static, sanitised and sterile. The motifs perform as sources for invention and belonging, sometimes being creativity and reasonable – at other times, they played at being inept and unreasonable, creating gaps and absences within the world. Such performances lap over each other yielding an abundance of fresh impressions. These processes can lead to an escalation of display, engagement and disengagement. This can create feelings of destabilisation, and can also create an increase in the material production of images. These anxieties can produce subversive and inversive technologies or strategies. The motif and the passage tomb within a specific location might therefore be an intensification of expression, discourses and materials that helped support and distort perceptions in direct and indirect ways. Mounds and motifs may also have embodied different expressions of temporality that deny transformation as a forward striving force, instead being more about (dis)continuity and reduplicating reorganisations. The motifs are manipulations with stone, rendering presentations *in* rather than representations *of* the world. Motifs are therefore events in their own right and not subservient to an invisible immutable symbolic original – that is located just out there, or over there, or behind and below. Passage tomb images are an emergent novelty within tastes of unexpected hesitation and possibility.

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Endnote

1. Such approaches to passage tombs have been dominant for over 150 years. They are representational and stipulate that things and meanings lie behind or just beyond the image – through the cracks if you like. They mostly subscribe to textual understandings – and often can be very expressionistic and poetic. Ultimately based on the idea that an image can represent something else – be it an ancestor, text, creature, hybrid, language, face, god, swastika, plant, celestial phenomenon, worldview or another image, like a hallucination. This sample list is by no means exhaustive: Wilde (1849); Deane (1889-91); Coffey (1912); Breuil (1921); Macalister (1921); Mahr (1937); Crawford (1957); Herity (1974); Brennan (1983); Thomas (1992); Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1993); Dronfield (1995); Tilley (1999); Nash (2002); McCormack (2012). For a comprehensive review see: Hensey (2012:161-8).

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