

## Anticipatory Mappings: the lost poets of the *Magnificent Seven*



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*Remember that while we are searching for the history of by-gone days the scenes before our eyes vanish and are forgotten. Stereotype then, as it were, the present, and afterwards trace back to the earliest times.*

E.G.Harvey<sup>1</sup>

Chris McCabe's poetic journeys – the author of *Penned in the Margins' In the Catacombs: A Summer Among the Dead Poets of West Norwood Cemetery* and *Cenotaph South Mapping the Lost Poets of Nunhead Cemetery*<sup>2</sup> – capture a sense of anticipatory mapping, a theme that I will be discussing in this mapwork. This sense is also enhanced by an illustrative map that accompanies Chris's published journeys; a map of the Magnificent Seven, the seven London cemeteries of Brompton, Kensal Green, Highgate, Abney Park, Tower Hamlets, Nunhead and West Norwood where many lost poets are interred. The map of the magnificent seven, which blends with a textual mapping of the poetic history of London's Victorian cemeteries, also relates another narrative trajectory on its overleaf, listing the poets buried in each cemetery. The combination of these different ways of telling is the inspiration for this mapwork. However, one of the central ideas that Chris brings to conveying his obsession of finding the lost poets of London to us is the way he blends his own stories and experiences with a poetic retracing of the past as a kind of emergent mapping, or rather an anticipatory historical mapping<sup>3</sup>. Anticipatory because it is something happening and being performed; a history because the blending is a tracing, or folding, of different temporalities, past, present and future; and a mapping because through Chris's steps one is able follow map-like, his journey into the past as a kind of anticipatory history. Like Hayden White's progressive history,<sup>4</sup> anticipatory history is a term that captures a specific historiographical position, fitting well with the tensions revealed by Stephen Daniels and Hayden Lorimer's call for new narrative spaces to re-address and question official or established stories of place.<sup>5</sup> The map therefore that accompanies Chris's book and others like it, is an assemblage - a montage - of people, places and temporalities.

The retelling of the lost poets in this blended way, through Chris's own encounters in which his contemporaneous politics and personal life, and his frustrations and rewards in discovery are told, is a setting of a landscape framed by a history in which movement rather than stasis

is key. Here, not only is the text an anticipatory history, but so too is the illustrative map and others in his books, which are narrative devices: folding time, place and people into a single entity; bringing Karl Marx at Highgate to bear alongside Walter Thornbury at Nunhead. And while keeping one eye on the map, and another on the path, one becomes both a participant and an observer in Chris's search for the lost poets. And it is through Chris's multiple narratives on the map and in the text that one can imagine the journey as an intimate space – a new narrative space – where there is a retelling of old stories, a repeated art of telling in which re-imaginings and Walter Benjamin's 'weaving and spinning' adds rather than distracts from the story.<sup>6</sup> As Daniels and Lorimer suggest: 'Listen. In the shadows of the story stirs the storyteller.'<sup>7</sup> An observation that perhaps is contained in mapworkings too.

Hodological spaces, the performative rethinking of space along different pathways, as Turnbull suggests,<sup>8</sup> reveal those hidden spatialities and temporalities that are out there and on the map. And as Ingold tells it, the traveller 'knows as he goes ... he is quite simply mapping'.<sup>9</sup> This sense of going as mapping does not just elide experiences of the path, but rather enhances various aspects of it. In Chris's own journeys through the seven cemeteries it is the complementary nature of the experience, the mapping and the observations as a kind of anticipatory history through the retelling of the lost poets of London that is, in Turnbull's own words, a distributed knowledge.<sup>10</sup> The trail that Chris takes can be re-experienced, re-mapped, re-told, by us, in which an autonomy of knowledge is used to follow and create local knowledge maps through space. In this anticipatory history, or hodological space, new connectivities are made explicit through a performative re-telling and sharing of experience in text of maps, some of which may be elided by others.<sup>11</sup> Chris, who is also a poet, in the final few pages of his *Cenotaph South* book offers a statement that appears perhaps as an ending for him, but which is also a beginning for others in continuing to follow and create the paths to the lost poets of London, or to embark on, other anticipatory mappings.

*All poets speak across space and time to the other; it's inevitable that I've ended up here, at the end of my map.*<sup>12</sup>

<sup>1</sup> E. G. Harvey quoted in DeSilvey, C. 2012. Making sense of transience: an anticipatory history. *Cultural Geographies* 19(1), 31.

<sup>2</sup> McCabe, C. 2014. *In the Catacombs: A Summer Among the Dead Poets of West Norwood Cemetery*. London: Penned in the Margins; McCabe, C. 2016. *Cenotaph South Mapping the Lost Poets of Nunhead Cemetery*. London: Penned in the Margins.

<sup>3</sup> After DeSilvey 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Domanska, E. 2008. A conversation with Hayden White. *Rethinking History* 12(1), 3-21; DeSilvey C, Naylor, S., and Sackett, C. 2011. *Anticipatory history*. Axminster: Uniformbooks.

<sup>5</sup> Daniels, S. and Lorimer, H. 2012. Until the end of days: narrating landscape and environment. *Cultural Geographies* 19(1), 3-9.

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin, W. 1999. The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov, in H. Arendt (ed.) *Illuminations*. London: Pimlico, pp. 83-107 (p. 91).

<sup>7</sup> Daniels & Lorimer 2012, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Turnbull, D. 2007. Maps Narratives and Trails: Performativity, Hodology and Distributed Knowledges in Complex Adaptive Systems – an Approach to Emergent Mapping. *Geographical Research* 45(2), 140-149 (p. 142).

<sup>9</sup> Ingold, T. 2000. *The Perception of the Environment*. London: Routledge, pp. 230-231.

<sup>10</sup> Turnbull 2007.

<sup>11</sup> For another example, see Sebald, W. G. 1998. *Rings of Saturn*. London: The Harvill Press.

<sup>12</sup> McCabe 2016, p. 329.