

**Department of Humanities
School of Design and Art**

**A 21st Century Pilgrim's Progress: art practice, place and the
sacred**

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**This thesis is presented for the Degree of
Doctor of Creative Arts
of
Curtin University**

November 2013

Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Signature:

Date:

Abstract

The artworks and exegesis that comprise this body of work explore what it means to belong - in place, in a lineage and in relation to the sacred - and seek to understand how art practice works to interrogate and address the alienating effects of dislocation, transience and otherness. The work is driven by the sense of 'homelessness' and non-belonging I experience as a result of my position as a Euro-American migrant to Australia and also by the sense of otherness that results from my uneasy relationship with the sacred.

This work finds its purchase and significance in its confluence of ideas and in its mix of practices. The methods employed here comprise both practical and theoretical explorations. The practice component includes a variety of forms and media each of which provided unique experiences and new understandings: first, about how the transitional and liminal aspects of the creative process can be understood as sites of emplacement; and also how art practice constitutes a collaborative engagement, thus challenging traditional notions of personhood and expanding the concept of what an encounter with the numinous entails.

The exegetical component adopts a similarly multi-disciplinary approach and draws on anthropological, archaeological and ethnographic research in relation to the meaning and means of how art practice enacts and serves as a site of belonging. The text shifts back and forth between two primary voices and between narrative and discursive treatments as a way to forefront the importance of the differences between the experiential and the conceptual knowledge acquired and to highlight my dual roles as scholar and subject, the observer and the observed.

Acknowledgments

This thesis is dedicated to my son, Maxwell Elliot Frankel and to my lineage of ancestors, especially my parents, Edward R. Adams and Marjorie H. Adams and my maternal grandmother Mabel A. Tolstrup.

I wish to express my immense gratitude for the guidance and support provided me by my advisors Dr. Joan Wardrop and Dr. Ann Schilo, without whose mentorship this work would not have come to fullness. Their ceaseless encouragement allowed me to find the authenticity of my own voice and the courage to delve to the core of my ideas. I am similarly indebted to Dr Noel Nannup for his generosity in sharing the vast depth and breadth of knowledge that provided this work the clarity of its direction. I would also like to thank Dr. Ted Snell for the insights and enthusiasm he offered during the early stages of this project

I wish also to express my profound gratitude to my family for their unwavering enthusiasm and support, especially to Max Frankel and Ebbie Williams, Susan Cossett, James and Kathy Williams Tolstrup, David A. and Barbara Tolstrup, David R. Tolstrup and Julia Tolstrup Mathien; and to thank my colleagues and friends Christine Gosfield, Dr. Janice Baker, Jane Grellier and Dr. Marilyn Metta for their insightful understanding of the meaning of this work; I am also deeply indebted to Sal and Flo Yepa, Kate Reitzenstein, George and Dr. Janet Samuels, and David and Sara de la Barre for their generous participation in parts of this study.

And finally, for Evlin de la Barre, our diamond tears rise up.

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Introduction



Figure 1: Neglected petroglyph, Fremantle, Western Australia, 2013

Tucked amidst ropes of ivy at the back of my garden is a petroglyph I carved to honour my human ancestors and to initiate a practice of communion with their spirits. It is where I go to make prayers and offerings to my lineage of forebears, to my mother and father, grandparents and great-grandparents; to satisfy my need for contact with the numinous; and to remind myself of the bloodlines to which I belong.

Four years ago, when I first carved and set the petroglyph in place, it sat, almost uncomfortably, as if not quite able to find its right position in my garden. The stone into which it was carved was not local, but came from the Kimberley region, thousands of kilometres to the north. Its distinctive, red-striped surface seemed to broadcast its alien status. It jarred against the dusty brown and grey-green of its surroundings. Not even the slab of local limestone that I positioned at its front could mitigate the intrusion: it also looked out of place, belligerently white and sharp edged against the organic and unruly profusion that crowded resentfully from all sides. For months the stones sat in uneasy juxtaposition to each other and to their situation, like settler and native vying for purchase on the same bit of inhospitable ground, until the forces of time and nature, the actions of the sun, the rain and the wind began to blur the distinctions between them. The stones started to take on the patina and character of their surroundings: green moss and lichen began to mottle and creep across the dirt and up the surface of both stones until the dark red and stark white became greyed and muted. The dirt around the stones settled and then began to sprout new vines and weeds, while insects took up residence in the dark hollows below.

I have not made prayers nor laid offerings for my ancestors at the petroglyph for several months and because of this the stone is now barely distinguishable from its surrounds. A swath of vines, long unattended, loops over and around obscuring the carved symbols and the limestone slab is littered with dead leaves, twigs and fallen blossoms. Though the petroglyph was intended to inspire a habit of daily communion with my ancestors, my efforts have been more sporadic; inhibited by the fact that such gestures are not natural to me nor related to practices or traditions I have inherited from my family and culture. Rather the motions I make stem from a broad

mix of influences and traditions: they are part adaptation, part intuition, part invention and entirely new to my experience. As a result my attempts are tinged with a slight self-consciousness and often seem stilted, awkward and out of place.

My struggle to find easy communion with my ancestors reflects many of the challenges inherent in this research. First amongst these was my struggle to find the authority of my own voice from within a balance of the scholarly and the personal and between the theoretical and the experiential. The artworks and exegesis that comprise this body of work explore what it means to belong - in place, in a lineage and in relation to the sacred - and seek to understand how art practice works to interrogate and address the alienating effects of dislocation, transience and otherness. The experience of working through these themes has shoved me in and out of place with what now seems to have been a breath-taking regularity.

Throughout the progress of this study my work shifted back and forth between practice and theory. Though I first explored each of the themes as a maker, the work as a whole found its authority in the contrast between my experiences of scholarly writing and those of making art. It could not have been realised solely as a body of artworks or a thesis, but required both to come to fullness. There was and continues to be a salient difference in my relationship to each approach and this difference exemplifies displacement and emplacement, the core theme driving this research. These shifts are further reflected in the exegetical discussion where I endeavour to encapsulate a sense of fluidity in the construction of each section. The text does not employ a singular voice or conform to the traditional framework of literature review followed by successive chapters but rather shifts back and forth between two primary voices and between narrative and discursive treatments. This structure serves to forefront the importance of the interplay between the experiential and conceptual knowledges presented. Throughout my exegesis the scholarly voice appears as a standard font while the narrative voice is italicised.

There is also a third, poetic voice that appears at infrequent intervals throughout the text. These passages are comprised of cut-out words and are based on the tradition of 'Dada poetry'.¹ Premised on chance, each work begins with a random selection of words (previously cut from newspapers and magazines) that gain meaning and direction due to their rearrangement into phrases, lines and stanzas. The significance of this voice is that its message is always surprising to me, as if it comes from somewhere other than my own understandings, and that it is a manifestation, the result of, the convergence of my scholarly and artistic practices.

My efforts to find footing in the scholarly practices necessary for this research were marked by insecurity. For me, academic writing is unfamiliar terrain where I am easily and frequently displaced. The process of gathering my thoughts and ideas and putting them into words often feels like foreign territory where I perceive myself to be underequipped, hopelessly lost and dislocated from myself: like a newly arrived migrant who lacks the language, experience or practical skills to find safety in a new environment. In contrast to this, I am so familiar with the processes of artmaking that even when I am lost in a new work or challenged by a new technique, I am entirely at ease. My efforts are confident, practiced and instinctive. I know that I will find my way through a work, but unlike my experience of writing which seems to drive itself towards some sense of completion, I am content for my artworks to remain in process or, as Marcel Duchamp described, to work them to the point where they are "finally unfinished" (quoted in Paz 1978, 3). I am at home in my art practice.

As my research progressed, I found that my approach my scholarly practice began to resemble the expansive and experimental approach I inhabit easily through my art practice. As an artist, I have never adhered to one form or another, neither have I identified as a particular type of artist – a painter or a sculptor but have let each work dictate its own form and medium(s) and to develop naturally. While I began this research thinking that I knew the themes that it would engage and address, I found

1. This approach was first practiced by Dadaist Tristan Tzara and later by William S. Burroughs (Lydenberg 1987, 45).

that my approach to ideas began to follow a similar pattern to my art practice. My research moved naturally across several disciplines as was required to follow the various overlapping concepts that presented themselves: ideas about how I experience and relate to the sacred overlapped with how I experience and understand emplacement and belonging, how I recognise myself as the feminine other and how I engage relationships that challenge and cross borders of otherness.

My realisation of how I am emplaced or displaced in either practice, forced me to re-examine how, as a non-native Euro-American, Australian migrant I relate to the ideas of home, belonging, permanence and transience. My sense of emplacement within the fluidity of art practice alerted me to how this differs from my experience of geographic locations: how my search for place-related belonging privileged a binary defined as here or there, or perhaps more significantly, as home and not home. Here, a number of scholars influenced new directions in my thinking. The first of these was Morris Berman (2000) who argued that humankind's natural state is nomadic and is characterised by a sense of acute, attuned awareness. This idea was provocative for me in that it described my sense of art practice-related emplacement in geographic terms and this allowed me to re-imagine how geographic emplacement might be recognised and experienced.

Also pivotal was Edward Casey's extensive discussion about what emplacement entails, particularly that it defines moments he describes as 'thickened' (1993, 253). It was a term I understood from the experiences of my art practice but also in relation to Berman's idea of acute awareness. I experience thickening as a heightened sense of awareness both of the tactility of my surroundings but also of my own body in place – its weightedness, strength and flexibility – and as the physical means through which I occupy the space around me and interact with the materials at hand. Thickening is, for me, an intensified sense of engagement with the tactility of the physical world; the experience of fully inhabiting my body.

Working with and through subject matter that holds deeply personal ramifications also poses difficulties and I often struggled to find my position in my dual roles as scholar and subject, as the observer and the observed. This is reflected in the way I have approached this exegesis and my decision to compile tracts of writing thematically, shifting back and forth between reflection and observation so as not to privilege one voice over the other. Some of the scholarly discoveries I made challenged positions I did not realise I held and these incurred shifts in the premises that underpinned my project. Not the least of these was the process of unravelling the assumptions and worldview I brought to bear in my understandings of the sacred.

At the start of this research I assumed that the American-Protestant worldview passed on to me by my family and culture no longer informed my conception of the sacred. Yet, as my work progressed I realised that I retained vestiges of its influence. First amongst these is that I have continued to conceive of the sacred as positioned in a binary and as an entity or presence that is recognised as something *other*. The remaining traces also manifested as suspicions and resistances that inhibited me from further delving my fascination with the mystical and otherworldly and prevented me from investing fully in my work with ancestor energies. I struggled at times to find the scholarly significance of my investigations into the supernatural and found it harder still to reconcile the scholarly with the personal: to find the balance between how the numinous encounter might be examined and explained and how it is experienced.

I am aware that my efforts to understand the meaning of the sacred moved this research across unmappable territories where, I admit, I have had no intention of staking a claim: I make no attempt here to define the parameters of the numinous nor to address all of its manifestations and aspects. Rather, I seek understandings of how the sacred may be recognised and to discover practices and processes of communion with the numinous *other*. In choosing this subject matter, these means of engagement and academe as the forum in which to engage this conversation, I assume a position on the periphery: as a pilgrim seeking alternative ways of understanding something *else*. While this seemed, at first, like a place of exile or of rebellion, it slowly became a

heterotopic position where I experienced a sense of ease with my shifting stance from scholar to seeker, between the physical and the metaphysical, and from the real to the unreal. I gained deeper understanding of this shift in perspective through Michel Foucault's (1986, 25) suggestion that heterotopias can be understood as a single space that contains several sometimes contradictory spaces. This idea provided the theoretical grounding for how I was to proceed and a position from which I could begin to perceive sacred space, profane space, marginal space and the centre as merged. I was further encouraged by Peter Read's treatment of the supernatural as subject matter in *Haunted Earth* (2003). His text demonstrated for me that there is power in the interplay between the rational and the irrational and served as an example of how other worldviews and ways of knowing can be recognised and afforded a prominent and essential place in scholarly works.

Practices of Knowing

My art practice has always spanned several disciplines and continuation of this approach allowed me the flexibility demanded by this research. To begin, I chose two new forms of practice: pilgrimage as an experiential means by which to explore what it means to engage with ancestral landscapes; and petroglyph (stone) carving as a way to enact belonging and to acknowledge and mark sacred place. A third practice, also new to me, was added in response to new understandings that arose as a result of my experiences of pilgrimage and of carving stone. This resulted in two works that were constructed in the platforms and with the tools and methods of digital media. The first of these is a website which I envisaged as a cyberspace gathering place where my family could collaborate with each other and me on the construction of a comprehensive family narrative. The second work is a virtual pilgrimage that was constructed using a 3D game engine and utilises computer game principles to replicate aspects of my pilgrimage experience. This work had and has particular significance in that it was a collaborative effort undertaken by my adult son, Max and myself and represents an amalgam of our individual expertises and knowledge: his of 21st century digital media and mine of our family's lineages and stories. The process of collaboration provided me a 21st century means through which to pass on to my son what I know about his forbears and allowed him to reframe that knowledge in the

tools and media of his generation. Both the virtual pilgrimage and the website were created for my family as ways for me to engage with them despite the physical distances that separate us and as such constitute my attempt to contravene the disruptions that migration and transience can incur in relation to maintaining close family relationships.

Transitional Belongings

My practice of pilgrimage was based on an idea that stemmed from a confluence of influences. The conceptual grounding came from an amalgam of Mircea Eliade's (1987 [1959]) concept of the sacred as a perceivable fixed point of orientation, Belden Lane's (2002 [1988]) notion that sacred place chooses to make itself known and Barbara Bender's (1992) suggestion that landscapes 'speak' with the voices of those who have inhabited them. But the real fuel for my pilgrimage came from stories told to me by Indigenous friends and colleagues about what it means to set foot on ancestral ground; to know landscapes that are imbued with sacred energies; and to recognise that your presence is intrinsic to a particular place and part of its on-going story. Such accounts defined an experience that bound together elements that, for me, had always been disparate - place, the sacred and belonging - and made clear how ancestor energies serve to bridge the distinctions between.

In July 2008, I set off for my ancestors' European homelands with high expectations and a multi-fold purpose. I envisaged that engaging my ancestors' native landscapes would bring me a heightened sense of connection with them and that by listening for their voices in the landscape, I might learn how to discern the difference between sacred and profane place. Further, I hoped that by learning how the sacred manifests in ancestral landscapes, I might discover how the sacred can be understood to permeate any landscape.

What eventuated, however, was unexpected and this brought about a significant shift in the direction of my research. While I knew from the outset that movement is the

essence of pilgrimage, this aspect was not one of my prime concerns, yet it was to prove the pivot on which my ideas about place and belonging, permanence and transience turned. While walking across landscapes known by generations of my ancestors, I experienced a sense of attunement but not with any of the manifestations of the sacred I had imagined. It was more a sense of heightened relationship to the places I encountered,² a dissolution of the boundaries that separated me from place. These resulted in an unexpected sensation of connectedness: instances of presence marked by the sensation of being unfixed but solidly placed in a continuum that merged the journey's starting point, progress and destination and spanned the past, present and future.

The piquancy of these moments was so far from my usual experience that it compelled me to document what I could of the sensation. The result was a series of photographs I have since named *Feet in place*.³ These moments were the driving force for a new, significant line of enquiry that challenged my understandings of how I experience physical place and also how I perceived here, there and the points between. From Henry David Thoreau (2010 [1862]), Rebecca Solnit 2001; 2005) and Tim Ingold (2004), I came to a deeper understanding of how the act of walking engenders a heightened awareness of the spaces between places and blurs the distinctions between the starting point and the destination. To this, Tim Ingold's (2004) discussion of travel proved particularly illuminating. His argument, that western notions of travel privilege observations made at points of rest and the contributions of the mind over the perceptive and sensate knowledge accumulated in transition by the body in motion, mirrored my own perceptions, not just of travel but of all transitional movement. This was furthered by Michael Jackson's argument that the western concept of home fetishes the fixed address (1995, 87). Together, these ideas began to shift not only the way I perceived my relationship to the places I lived and my fixation on the destination, but brought me to an acute awareness of the fact

2. I understand this experience as the acute, attuned awareness described by Berman (2000).

3. Many of these walk through the chapter, *Walking to Knowing*. All *Feet in place photographs* found in this work are listed in Appendix 4.

that my life, like many other contemporary lives, is lived in and premised on transition.

The shift in my experience evinced in the *Feet in place* photographs was to have significant impact on the direction of my research: I became aware of the significance of the liminal as an unbounded place of profound potential, and this opened a number of exciting new directions for exploration. I began to re-imagine my various belongings as progressions across a number of continuums: how I am placed in lineage and in an ancestral narrative; how



my geographic belonging is not fixed to distinct locations defined as here or there, but rather in the movement between them; how the sacred might be understood not as a distinct essence but rather as the movement into and out of a state of communion, in the dissolution of self and other.

Enacted belongings

Approaching the idea of enacting connection to ancestral place from another direction, I conceived of the idea of carving petroglyphs to mark the places discovered along the route of my pilgrimage where I experienced a sense of encounter with the spirits of my ancestors. The work was inspired by my previous experiences of encounter with prehistoric petroglyphs and my interpretation of their meaning as having sacred significance related to ancestral spirits and perception that they marked places of sacred concentration. Part of what drove these efforts was my desire to work with stone, a material that possesses attributes that I perceived as correlative to my intentions for the work.

For this, I drew inspiration from other artists who expressed similar affinities for stone. Amongst these, I found two that were especially inspiring: Atsuo Okamoto's *Turtle Project* (2007)⁴ which is based on the idea that stone absorbs the environmental and spiritual essences of the life that surrounds it and Ken Hiratsuka's continuous line petroglyphs (Guyon 2007)⁵ which he undertakes as a way to take part in the lineage of carvers that stretches from prehistory to the present. I wanted to carve enduring messages to and for the spirits of my human ancestors that would form a material and conceptual bridge between worlds: between the physical and the metaphysical, the present, past and future and between the dead and the living.

My petroglyphic works were also undertaken as a means of re-enactment and were based on the idea that to best understand the worldview brought to bear by prehistoric carvers, I had to employ similar methods. Here, the project undertaken by Barbara Bender, Sue Hamilton and Christopher Tilley at the Leskenick site in Cornwall, United Kingdom (Tilley, Hamilton, and Bender 2000) provided me the scholarly context for the conceptual underpinnings of the work. Though they are all experts in the field of archaeology, they approached the work as artists on the premise that engaging physically and aesthetically with the stones in place would gain them deeper understandings of the prehistoric people who built the site.

My initial approach to carving petroglyphs and working with stone was mostly based on archaeological accounts of prehistoric petroglyph sites as well as from ethnographic studies of present-day megalithic cultures both of which drew correlations between the attributes of stone (its endurance, imperviousness and persistence) and perceptions about the eternal nature of ancestral relationships and realms. Specifically, I was inspired by Paul Taçon's suggestion that in many cultures stone is understood to represent immortality (1991), Mike Parker Pearson's suggestion that stone serves as a material expression of the eternal (1998), Christopher Tilley's assertion that the stones at prehistoric sites might be understood as focal points for

4. Okamoto's *Turtle Project* is discussed in depth on pages 41-42.

5. Hiratsuka's work is discussed on page 46.

ancestral energies or as direct embodiments of ancestor spirits (1996: 161), and Max Duramunmun Harrison's (n.d.) observation that stone is a substance into which all life that passes near it becomes concentrated. The choices I made with regard to my work with stone were underpinned by a number of ideas but first amongst these was that the means of engagement I sought with the spirits of my ancestors and with place was not something that reflected the understandings and traditions of my family and culture, but rather required me to look to other cultures for context and meaning. I found this both in the archaeological accounts discussed and also in Indigenous accounts of the relationship between the ancestors and the sacredness of the specific elements that make up the landscape.

I began my petroglyphic work with the expectation that my efforts of carving the stones and, afterwards, the stones' enduring presence would instigate and then provide the space and context for experiences of communion with the spirits of my ancestors. But again, as with my expectations of pilgrimage, what eventuated was more than I had imagined. Working with stone heightened my sense of the physical nature of my art practice. The stone's attributes, its hardness, faults, grain and texture, held an unusual authority that deepened my understanding of my art practice as a collaborative engagement. I experienced the stone as a co-presence and the progress of the work as a series of negotiations. I enjoyed that it exuded a formidable presence, an authority and ancientness that stood in contrast to the fragility and impermanence of my life and seemed to demand that I work more thoughtfully, cautiously and responsively than usual. It did not easily succumb to my intentions or designs. Each line I etched was the product of a negotiation; the stone aided and resisted my efforts in obvious ways that I found both challenging and thrilling.

However, it was not until I discovered recent theories on animism that I began to understand what such collaborations mean both as regards my experiences of making, but also in relationship to how I perceive the sacred. The theories expounded by Graham Harvey (2002; 2005), Nurit Bird-David (1999; 2002) and others (see Haber 2009; Ingold 2006) begin by redressing the idea that animism defines a religion or set

of religious beliefs and repositions it as a worldview: a way of being in the world that privileges relationship over autonomous being. They draw on Irving Hallowell's idea that personhood is not a uniquely human attribute but rather is the product of being in relation. In particular, Hallowell's category of "other-than-human person" (1960, 28) allowed me to understand the full ramification of my art practice as a collaborative gesture and the relationships they entail as encounters with the numinous.

Robert Wallis' (2009) observations of the rock art at Kilmartin, Scotland also proved fundamental to my understanding of my collaboration with stone. His discussion of rock art sites as places of negotiated harmony resonated with my own experience and encouraged further exploration of the communal and interactive nature of my work with stone.

A further aspect of the petroglyphic works highlights my sense of art practice as a means and also as a vehicle of engagement. The finished petroglyphic works became sites of communion and marked the location where I left offerings, made prayers and appeals and instigated a conversation with the spirits of my ancestors. This on-going practice held deep significance for me in terms of my understanding of how conversations across barriers of otherness are maintained but it also demonstrates my disinclination to the idea of art as object or as the product of a completed 'creation story'. Rather, it reflects the idea of creation as something ongoing and infinitely expanding. The petroglyphs I carved have a life independent of mine but our relationship – and as well how our collaboration included correspondence with ancestral voices - allows that the site of our convergence can act as a vehicle through which the conversations engaged continue.

Virtual belongings

My work with virtual platforms and digital media was inspired by events that occurred during my pilgrimage and my growing awareness of two related issues. The first was that I noticed how the ready availability of Internet Communication Technologies (ICTs) enabled me to correspond with my family and colleagues with such frequency and ease that it changed my experience of physical separation from them. I sent and received regular emails and maintained connection through the social networking site Facebook, but most of the significant exchanges occurred as a result of a blog I had created⁶ as a place to document my progress.

My experience of posting almost daily accounts of my discoveries and impressions had a sense of immediacy that was deepened by the sometimes instantaneous responses posted not only back to me but also between other members of my family. The theoretical issues that arose from this work were two-fold. The first was focussed on the ways ICTs have and are changing the migrant's experience. Specifically, how they serve to dispel the sense of loss and alienation that have traditionally been the migrant's lot and how they provide the context for maintaining multiple belongings and senses of place. The blog served as a space in which my family experienced a sense of virtual co-presence which, as Mihaela Nedelcu (2012) and others argue, is the underpinning of a new transnational habitus (see also Baldassar 2008; Bacigalupe and Camara 2012; Wilding 2006).

The blog became a meeting place where, after years of separation, my family and I gathered together as if around a virtual hearth. My place at the hearth seemed that of the family storyteller, who night after night unfolds a long family narrative. But I recognised my place as the pivot of the stories: many were not my stories (or at least not solely my stories). I had not started them, nor would I finish them but I had culled

6. The blog titled *21st Century Pilgrim's Progress* and all pilgrimage entries and responses are archived under the link for 2008. As of 2013, these are accessible at <http://21stcenturypilgrimsprogress.blogspot.com.au/>. The entries are also accessible and compiled chronologically on the Virtual Kindred website, accessible at http://www.virtualkindred.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2&Itemid=107.

them from our shared ancestral past and from the distant places related to our ancestral story. What I presented were pieces of ancestry that other family members then claimed, expanded and offered back into our shared history. I understand the weight of this in relation to an observation made by Barry Lopez (2011) that stories lack value if they are only about or meaningful to the storyteller. Stories that are worth listening to are about 'us', they include, reflect and have meaning for the listener (Lopez 2011). The stories, begun by me, became about us as they were altered, expanded and deepened by collaborative contributions of my family. And I also understand how collaborative renditions serve to challenge stories that become "lodged as singularities" (Stewart 2007, 6) and move the rendition from being about how 'I' view 'us' to being about how 'we' view 'us'. This alerted me to a loss we had all suffered as a result of the separations and dislocations that characterised most of our lives. Like many others in contemporary culture, we lack the place, the opportunity and means to construct or discover the connective passages that thread the disparate renditions of our story together into a multi-layered but cohesive family narrative.

The first digital work to grow from these realisations was the *Virtual Kindred*⁷ website which was constructed to provide a platform, a virtual gathering place, where my family could collaborate on our ancestral and family narrative. As you will discover in the attached CD Rom, the website consists of two levels, the public pages and the private pages, organised into a number of parts. The most significant of these are the two private sections, the ancestor pages and the kindred pages, to which all adult members of my family have equal access and are authorised as co-contributors. While I designed these pages, the platform and the means of access and uploaded the core content for each page, I do not exert any control over the content. The content can be added to or amended by any authorised user at any time. Beyond the kinds of knowledge afforded by genealogic searches, the website was designed as a repository for stories, for the personal reflections, observations, memories, insights and questions that reveal, collectively and individually who we are. It is intended as a repository for what we know about ourselves and each other and can remember or

7. The website is located at <http://www.virtualkindred.com/>.

have learned about our predecessors: a place to build a rich multi-voiced story for the generations that follow us.

A second digital work, the *Virtual Pilgrimage*, was created in collaboration with my adult son, Maxwell Frankel and drew heavily on his expertise with digital media. Built into a 3D game engine, the work consists of a virtual landscape that users can wander through in search of petroglyphic stones that each represents one of Max's and my lineage of ancestors. Imbedded in each stone is a link that provides access to a corresponding ancestor page located on the *Virtual Kindred* website. Users navigate through the landscape in ways that are standard in many of the currently popular computer games. The work is intended for those who have an interest in exploring digital landscapes.

I conceived the work as a way to accomplish two things. The first was that I wanted to work collaboratively with my son, using the skills and tools that were specific to his generation, but were unfamiliar to me and entirely unknown to our ancestors. This work is my response to the idea that while knowledge is passed from one generation to the next, it is not static but rather is continually reconfigured and reframed to incorporate new ways of knowing and of expression. The work was generated from my knowledge of and gleaned from our ancestors in the tools, media, language and formats of Max's generation for our present family and future descendants.

The second impetus was that I wanted to share my experience of pilgrimage: specifically in the way it had shifted my understanding of liminality. I was unable to reconcile my actual experiences with Turner's (1969) idea that the liminal defines a temporary condition, the finite passage or process from one place or state of being (the known) through a transitional phase (the liminal) to a new place or state of being (a return to the known). Rather, I experienced the liminal as an unfixed and unbounded state of being that was not bookended by a sense of before and after. Attempting to replicate this, I chose not to define a start or end point, or to set a

specific goal or destination for users, but rather to construct an open-ended experience that encouraged users to wander and explore as they chose.

The work took several months of collaborative and individual effort to complete and during the process I began to realise that it served a third, perhaps most significant purpose. As the work progressed, the discussions between my son and I became more detailed in terms of the knowledge I was imparting to him about specific ancestors. I thought of this aspect as a kind of 21st century geneonymy,⁸ a process that acted like a ritual recitation of ancestry, kinship and lineage.

Stitched belonging

The final practice engaged for this research is needlework, a method of working that is so natural to me that it feels like second nature. I have stitched, embroidered, beaded and sculpted textile works for as long as I can remember and thinking back over my various projects provides me a sense of continuity not found in any of the other practices and engagements that make up my life's work. Needlework is the *thread* that binds me to my mother (who taught me to sew) and beyond her to a continuous, predominantly female lineage; it is the thread that runs through many of the following narratives. It is also the practice through which I experience my least equivocal sense of emplacement and this is reflected in how I have chosen to place reflections on and discussions of my needlework practice throughout this exegesis.

Its status and position in relation to other, more privileged practices (sculpture, painting, drawing and performance) mirror how I perceive my own place as a woman artist in contemporary culture. Pivotal to my understanding of this was Rozsika Parker's (2010) discussion of how needlework has long been interpreted as an expression of femininity, but has also been assigned a complex and often contradictory set of values and meanings. Above all, because of its categorisation as a feminine activity, needlework is understood as a lesser art and in relation to the

⁸ In ritual practices related to ancestors, geneonymy is the commemoration of ancestors by name (Asante and Mazama 2009, 48; Fortes 1964, 124).

contemporary art world, needlework-artists are relegated a marginal place. This, for me, is part of its appeal. I stitch, as a subversive act, in part to celebrate my gender and also as a gesture of defiance and to contradict any artwork edicts about what does and does not constitute serious practice or result in important and meaningful works of art.

I think of stitching as an engagement with the eternal, and needlework projects as stories that never have to end. They can be worked, *amended*, unpicked, embellished and refashioned without end. Stitching is also where I experience the deepest sense of emplacement and the practice on which the direction of this research turned. Its quiet comfort, like a mother's crooning, lulls me away from my alienation and back into myself. In the simple act of threading a needle, I am home, lost and found in the liminal.

As this thesis will highlight, my art practice is the means through which I incorporate new ideas into old knowings and realise fundamental shifts in my understandings. It is the context through which the theoretical becomes situated in me as new knowledge. While scholarly understandings served as a compass for the direction of my creative explorations, this doctoral research underscores that art practice is the means through which I am able to immerse myself in the liminality of process, transition and becoming and to cross the barriers that separate the cognitive and the sensate. It is where I experience the deepest sense of connectedness and oneness, and where I begin to recognise my own belonging.

Place and Emplacement



Figure 2: Petroglyph, Malden, Massachusetts, revisited. 2013

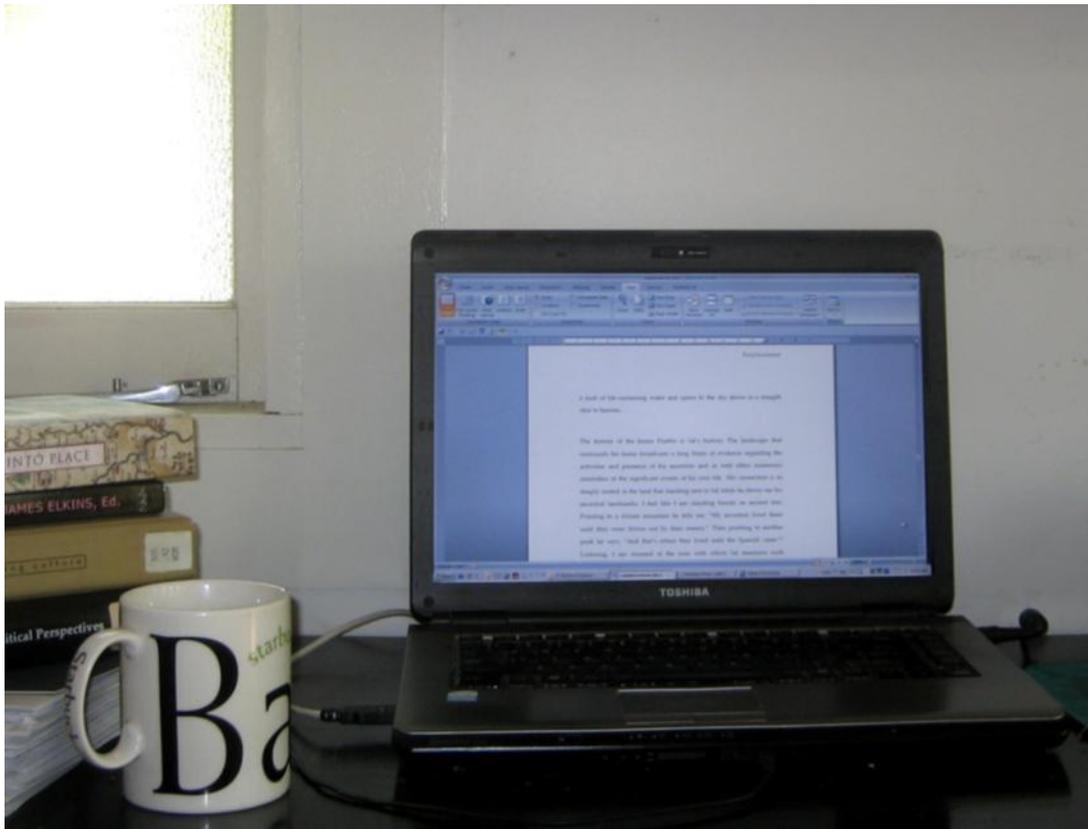


Figure 3: Displaced at my desk, Fremantle, Western Australia, 2013

I am adrift in this piece of writing. Disoriented. Everything about my physical being feels heavy and weighted yet precarious. As though there is nothing substantial between me and the abyss and nothing recognizable between where I am stranded and the horizon. I stare at the screen while my mind scrambles for words to describe ideas I know that I once held clearly. Insights that seemed so important in the moment of their hatching seem juvenile to me now. Unformed. Unrealised. Unimportant. I am a migrant here, confronted by the unfamiliar languages, protocols, conventions and terrain. I am placeless, as Edward Casey describes, I am lost at sea (1993, 3). Cut off from my native place and having lost sight of my destination, I no longer know where I am. Saturated by an uncertainty that is anchored to every insecurity I have ever had, I am at once the disappointing daughter, the inadequate mother, the irredeemable heretic, the mediocre artist and the deluded individualist.

My inadequacy to understand and articulate the conceptual complexities of emplacement - how it works, where it can be found and how it is accessed - dislodges me from my body. The entirety of my being rushes to my head and I am disoriented, dizzied, unstuck, displaced. My breath quickens and becomes shallow. The only way I can regain my balance, to calm myself and re-enter my body is to leave my desk.

I walk across the room to sit in an easy chair. I pick up a pad of paper and wait, pen poised, for an idea to form itself into words. Nothing. My shoulders sink and my chest aches with the creeping nihilism of doubt. I cannot think my way to emplacement.

I put down the pen and pick up my needlework.

The suede is soft and supple. I reach for a needle, its hole so tiny I cannot see it clearly. Nonetheless the motion of threading is so familiar I can do it easily by feel alone. I draw the thread through and knot the end. Piercing the needle into the suede from the underside, I reach for a hank of beads. They are cool to the touch and sing a soft, gravelly chorus of glass against glass as I thread a half dozen or so onto the needle. I lay the line of beads against the surface and tack the thread between them with small sure stitches. I repeat these motions - pierce, thread, lay, tack - again and again. My breath slows and loosens. The heaviness lifts as I come back into myself. Like so many women before me, I am quieted by the activity, made substantial and self-contained (Parker 2010 [1984], 11).⁹ I stitch my way back into my body and from there, re-grounded and whole, I am returned, like Mary [figure 4], to a state of grace.



Figure 4: The Virgin sewing, Basilique Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Chartres, Chartres, France (Marian Relics 2011).

As I come back into myself, I recognise needlework as an occupation of my art practice through which I am emplaced. This is familiar territory for me, like an ancestral landscape. I am so accustomed to its rhythms and contours that I am free to explore its tracts of ambiguity with an instinctive ease born of history and memory. While stitching, I experience a sense of indigeneity;¹⁰ an awareness of the

9. In *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*, Rozsika Parker argues that a complex relationship exists between needlework and femininity such that “embroidery signifies both self-containment and submission” 2010 [1984], 11). It is understood as a source of privacy and pleasure for women but is can also be viewed as evidence of their powerlessness.

10. I use this term to describe the situation of being born to or knowing association with a landscape that has been inhabited by several generations of my forebears and has been (cont)

substantiality of being in the place I belong. Absorbed by the physicality of stitching, drawn into myself, situated and wholly present, I experience myself in place in a way that Casey describes as 'thickened' (1993, 253). The conceptual barriers between my environment and me are dissolved, replaced by an acute awareness of the interfusion of self, other, nature, culture, time and space.



Figure 5: Beadwork in progress, 2013

fundamental to my sense of place and self.

Born on foreign soil

Emplacement is not my natural mode of being. This is not surprising given my history. I am a migrant to Australia, the American-born descendant of migrant forebears all of whom *arrived* in North America from their various homelands in Northern Europe and the British Isles. Compared to what I imagine as the experience of indigeneity, I was born not belonging; barred by virtue of my migrant ancestry from the experience of being a part of, intrinsic to *somewhere*. Neither my sense of place nor my identity is founded in relation to an ancestral homeland. I do not feel a sense of ancestral connection to the place of my birth nor have I ever resided where the landscape “trill[ed] with the memories” of my ancestors or was “rich with the life of [my] kindred” (Chief Seattle quoted in West 2006, 27).¹¹ Though landscapes do not serve as agents of my belonging, I know from the accounts of others that ancestral landscapes can offer a powerful means of connection between living people and their ancestors, history, culture and environment.

Picking our way through thigh-deep ferns and over moss-covered boulders Frank says, “You have to watch where you step because you never know which stones are your grandparents and which ones once circled a sacred fire.” Our steps careful, responsive to what is underfoot, we move quietly through the woods. Frank stops every few yards and listens, at ease in this place that knows and welcomes him, led along by the voices of his ancestors.

I, too, am at ease, being led like a child. My mind, quieted by the freedom of following, wanders to the borders of my understanding of ancestral places: how they are companions rather than adversaries; helpmates rather than captive subjects; animate with presence and meaning, infused with memory. Here, it matters where you step (Research notes, Nova Scotia, August 28, 2008).

11. Chief Seattle (Si'ahl, 1786 – 1866) was a Duwamish chief and leader of the Duwamish and Suquamish tribes in the region that now comprises Washington state.

I know that the experience I crave of belonging in and to native or ancestral places may be no more than what Homi Bhabha refers to as a “dream of the deprived” (2004 [1994], xi):¹² the ideal it represents of unequivocal, inextirpable knowledge of where I am from and where I belong may well be a romanticised, illusory sense of place that does not exist. Nonetheless, against this ideal, my relationship to place feels disjointed and frail. I am placeless. Untethered. I come from nowhere.

Migration as an interrupted narrative

Though my family’s history in North America is built around a migrational core, the stories we tell are rarely about our journeys or how the various lines of the family came to converge in one place. Rather they privilege the banal experiences of our day-to-day lives and suggest a relationship to place that Doreen Massey defines as “self-enclosing and defensive” (1994, 147).¹³ By focusing on the quiet continuity of our habits, our stories create a “kind of refuge from the ‘hubbub’” of dislocation or change and provide us the means by which we fix and secure our senses of identity and place against that which is strange and alien (1994, 151). In overlaying the foreign with the familiar, our stories undermine the distinctions between places while our lack of stories about the journeys we have undertaken obscures the importance of our transitions.

12. Bhabha relates this idea to his own craving, at the beginnings of his academic career, for what he expected to find at the centre of English literary culture and his subsequent realisation that the richness of his position in relationship to that culture was that he approached it from the margins.

13. Massey employs this term to describe the fixed and unmovable premises that underpin much of the discussion about what place means, how it relates to community and how senses of place are formed.

Habitual transience 1954 – present



Moves undertaken with my family 1954- 1970

- July 1954 Beverly Massachusetts
- July 1962 Hamilton Massachusetts
- June 1963 Lebanon, Indiana
- July 1966 Tell city, Indiana (2)¹⁴
- June 1967 Beaconsfield, Québec (3)
- December 1970 Morganville, New Jersey

Moves I have undertaken alone 1971 -1999

- October 1971 Red Bank, New Jersey
- May 1972 Marlboro, New Jersey
- May 1973 Belmar, New Jersey
- January 1973 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (2)
- December 1974 Asbury Park, New Jersey
- August 1976 Brighton, Massachusetts
- August 1977 East Cambridge, Massachusetts
- August 1978 Tucson, Arizona (3)
- June 1981 Penacook, New Hampshire
- June 1983 Pembroke, New Hampshire
- November 1995 Ubud, Bali, Indonesia (3)
- November 1996 Yamba, New South Wales
- January 1998 Fremantle, Western Australia
- November 1998 White Gum Valley, Western Australia (2)
- February 2014 Fort Collins, Colorado

Figure 6: A succession of my family's homes, 1955-1970

14. The number in brackets indicates the number of moves made at the one location.

From early childhood, my sense of myself as perennially displaced was compounded by my parents' habit of moving house [figure 6]. Like many other white, middle-class, upwardly-*mobile* American families in the years post World War II, mine moved house many times during my childhood. Our prized mobility was, as Philip Sheldrake contends, "a freedom bought by money and education", yet each time we uprooted ourselves we became increasingly "out of place" (2001, 48).¹⁵ We moved because it was part of our privilege and an aspect of our destiny but, while there was opportunity in our mobility, there was also loss.

The alienating effects of being part of a "continually drifting" (Casey, 1997, xiii) mobile generation¹⁶ made it difficult for me to forge foundational relationships with place. Not one of the nearly indistinguishable suburban neighbourhoods where we lived represented home place to me, nor did any of them exert a marked influence on the memories or accumulations of knowledge that underpin my sense of self. It was as if I was never anywhere long enough to form an awareness of place as "the house of being" (Heidegger 1958, 26) and to experience myself as solidly and wholly emplaced. Rather, my sense of homeplace has long been unfixed and ephemeral as if the events of my life drift above the places where they occurred, like dandelion seeds blowing in the wind.

My birth family's narrative is also riddled with silences, missing passages that fail to account for our periods of transition. These attest to the binary that informs my family's perspective: that our movements between places do not hold their own merit but rather are defined by the static conditions that precede them and those which follow, our old and new places of residence. Transitional phases are endured as means

15. Sheldrake (2001) describes this situation as a particular pathology of western culture. That, as rootless people, the contemporary western experience is predominantly characterized by a sense of illegitimacy and displacement, an alienation from the idea and experience of home.

16. Casey suggests that the modern disinterest in place-attachment may be attributable to the disruptions caused by the 20th century world wars: the forced displacement of thousands of people and the creation of anti-places such as Auschwitz.

to an end, as temporary conditions: passages of time that are situated outside of and apart from our everyday lives.

Our stories do not recount the experiential aspects of our journeys – even when those journeys are remarkable - but rather they comprise discreet observations made from points of stasis. At best, the tales my family infrequently shares of events that occurred during times of transition, the disasters averted or the unexpected windfalls, are understood as anecdotal and given little credence. Our perspective echoes Tim Ingold’s observation about western notions of travel: that it privileges “the accumulation of observations taken from successive points of rest” (2004, 331) over the experiential aspects of passage from place to place. It is, as if, the experiences we gain in transit have less relevance and merit than, or are not as real as, the experiences we acquire from within the fixed security of home.

Moreover, my family’s lack of historical connection to each of our places of residence meant that the surrounding landscapes were riddled with what Yi Fu Tuan describes as “temporal gaps” (1980, 470). The places where we lived were devoid of evidence of our forebears and history and, as such, read like “blank pages of our diary” (1980, 470). These, together with the lack of linking passages, the accounts of my family’s lived, sensed and tactile experience of movement between places, lend our narratives of belonging a disjunct, stop-start quality. Between the stories we tell of our lives lived in place our periods of transition interject as missing pages or as ruptures in our story. As a result, it is only in episodic fashion that I recall the succession of places where I have lived. I work creatively, intellectually and spiritually to mend the rifts by stitching, contextualising and unifying the parts of my family’s story into a unified whole.



Figure 7: Sandra Adams, *Map of my father*, 2012

Stitched in place

I am stitching myself into my father's life. His face again close to me, his eyes watching as I work make me feel safe, comforted. Across the maps, I begin to stitch the route of his life as if in stitching I travel with him from Boston to Maine where he spent boyhood summers. My connection to this part of his story is thin, based only on a handful of references he made to his family's past. Working the needle, I feel a wash of regret. I wish, now, that I had asked more questions, been curious to know more of his story, known that he would not always be here to answer in ways I might more fully understand. Darning the needle in and out of the layered cotton, I am taunted by the lacunae. I stitch to mend the gaps in his and my story, to piece together my father's history.

I begin to stitch what I do know, our history together: the places we lived, the route my family followed across five states, from Massachusetts to Indiana, on the first of the moves that cleaved us from our grandparents, aunts uncles and cousins and later from each other. From Indiana to Québec to New Jersey I make tiny stitches to circle the places where we lived or visited, lingering over the places where it seemed my father was most contented. Stitching a circle around Lake Winnepesaukee, I smell pine woods, sweet fern, the lingering smoke of our campfire and the fecund damp of lake water. I hear the echoing call of loons, the rustle of a black bear in the blueberry thicket. My father taught me to swim and to dive off the high tower in the middle of the lake – one rung of the ladder at a time until I was brave enough to plunge from the top.

Embroidering a word over the map of New Jersey, I hesitate, aware suddenly of my body. Sorrow. My back cramped, my shoulder aching, the hardness of the needle shrills against my blistered fingertip. I am chastened in the knowledge that here, once again, the story I know of my father's later life is riddled with missing passages. Grown and living my own life elsewhere, I only stayed with my father in New Jersey as his visitor; first at the house where he lived with my mother and later, after her death in the house where he lived alone. I imagine New Jersey as the site of some of my father's deepest pleasures, the contentment of a fully realised career, children grown and establishing

their own full lives, the births of his grandchildren but it is also the site of his most abject suffering – where the death of my mother saturated him with a grief so raw and absolute it seemed unstemmable. It oozed from him like sap from tree. The bones in my fingers ache as I stitch the word ‘sorrow’ over the place where his grief had its most doleful edge: an inadequate gesture that cannot match the profundity of my father’s mourning.

The ache subsides as I am pulled from my body, entangled in a sudden, acute recollection. Months after my mother’s death, I gave my father a copy of C. S. Lewis’ ‘A Grief Observed’ (1961) for solace. He read it immediately and read it again, thanking me often and saying that the book had affected him deeply. Finally, he asked if I would like to read it too and offered me his copy. I borrowed the book but could not read it because the rawness of my father’s grief was carved and soaked into the pages. Some of the passages were underlined so fiercely in pencil that the point had torn through the paper; others were marked and puckered by water droplets, punctuated by the remains of tears. Surely, my father wanted me to know this, know the depth and breadth, the acuteness of his grief, but thumbing through the pages, I felt like I was reading his diary: a transgression, a trespass. Stitching now across the ‘w’ of sorrow, I hear my father say, “I wanted you to know. I want you to remember.”

I have come to the end of the word and knot the end of the final stitch. I am relieved, rescued from the wash of bitter memory by one that is sweet. A bundle of love letters, tied together with ribbon that my sister and I once discovered in the attic. I was eleven years old, my sister fifteen, but naive as we were about the ways of love and romance we understood that the tender declaration made in one of the letters was, perhaps the first time my father ever told my mother that he loved her. Surely, this is a memory, a moment and a realisation that bears special marking. I put aside my cotton and begin to circle the location with a finely embroidered line of beads.

In the quiet of stitching, I am caught by the small stories emerging, an intimate portrait drawn together bit-by-bit with needle and thread. The questions raised and the answers recalled, surmised, invented and offered are never-ending. My father's map, my story of his life, our conversation will not be finished in my lifetime though there will one day be a final conversation I will hold across the divide that separates the living from the dead, a final story recalled, a final layer added and affixed to the rest with a final stitch. Fixed for my son, for family who come after me.



Figure 8: My grandparents' home in Massachusetts, 1940s

Home

I have never lived in the house pictured on the previous page and yet it is the only house I think of as home. I have known it all of my life. It is the house in Malden, Massachusetts where my mother and uncle grew up, where my grandparents lived when I was a child and where my uncle still lives.

Although the photograph shows a snow shrouded scene, the house and yard are evocative for me. Even its obscured details are etched in memory. I do not need to see the wooden steps of the front porch to remember the sound and feel of them under my feet, nor see the contours of the porch to remember what it felt like to wait there for my grandmother to open the front door. I know without seeing it how the side yard slopes from front to back and the tangle of lilacs hedge, now gone, that stood in a row just outside the camera's view. The snow reminds me of winter Sundays of my childhood and how it felt to step inside, out of the raw winter cold, into the crowded steamy warmth of my grandmother's foyer. We would huddle there a moment, cocooned in the scent of damp wool, stamping snow from our boots, the long afternoon stretched out endlessly before us.

I remember the sounds of the house: the chattering staccato of my cousins playing board games, the low murmur of adults talking in the kitchen; my grandmother playing the piano, *Side-by-Side* or *Onward Christian Soldiers*, always with a syncopated rag-time rhythm, her left hand moving like a windscreen wiper, back and forth across the bass keys. I remember, just as clearly, the house's scents: Ivory soap, Ponds Cold Cream, the horsehair sofa, faint tobacco; and the hearty fragrances that wafted from the kitchen, my grandmother's domain, strong coffee, roast beef, corn chowder, brown bread and Indian pudding.

These scents drew me to the kitchen but I was held there by a feeling of safety. It was where the grown-ups sat after supper, talking and drinking coffee. My grandfather always poured his coffee from the cup into the saucer to cool before sipping it. This,

he told me, was a Norwegian, *flatheaded*, custom. I did not know what that meant, but knew it was an expression of uneasy disdain for the old-world customs retained by Norwegian immigrants in America. He was proud of his Norwegian heritage but defined himself as a thoroughly modern American man. My grandmother would make a place for me at the table and bring out her button box, a wealth of exotic treasures. I loved to sort through it, and retrieving them one by one, line them in rows, my favourites first, across the table in front of me.

At one end of the kitchen, a door led to the cellar: down creaking stairs lined with shelves full of preserves - jam, peaches, stewed tomatoes, green beans and pickles - was another world, a subterranean, masculine place where the air smelt of dank earth and stone. My grandfather's domain. On his workbench lay an intriguing and orderly assortment of tools - chisels, blades, chains and claws - too dangerous, we were warned, for children. An ancient furnace expelled ominous rumblings and set an eerie tone, a soundtrack against which I was constantly poised to run up the stairs away from any ghastly spectre that might materialise.

I did not like going down into the cellar, but it lurked in my mind almost like a dare; the allure of its dangers at odds with my instinct to stay safely ensconced in the familiar surrounds of the kitchen above. I wanted to be brave and so willed myself to descend the stairs but always felt a rush of relief when supper was ready and I was called back to the kitchen, to take my place amongst the family gathered around the table. Home.



Figure 9: The family gathered at my grandmother's table, Massachusetts, 1959



Figure 10: Carving with my grandfather's chisel, Malden, Massachusetts, 2008

Making place

I grab my grandfather's chisel loosely in my left hand. I like its feel. Pebbled with rust, solid and weighty, it lacks the sternness of my stainless steel chisels with their cruel carbide edges. Fatter than the others, my grandfather's chisel nestles, cold and grainy, in the crook of my palm drawing warmth from my skin as I pause to consider the first strike. I level the chisel's dull point against the stone and strike its end with my hammer loosing a puff of dust - the soul of rock - to mingle with my breath. The ringing blow digs the surface and resonates a dull ache up my arm. It is an injury shared between me and the stone. As the chisel point looses a line from the surface, I remember what Andy

Goldsworthy, said about colour – it is “raw with energy” (1994, 1).¹⁷ I think this especially true about the colour I scratch from this stone’s surface. The stark white line sings as it is freed from beneath the tyranny of weathering and oxidation.

I strike and strike again as the chisel and my hand gain equal temperature. The succession of strikes builds a rhythm that rustles the leaves of overhanging trees and resounds from the surfaces around me. Dull thuds sink below asphalt and wood, sharp rings glance from glass and hollow moans console from other stones. I stop to rest, blowing stone dust from the surface to check the progress of the line.

Dropping the hammer and chisel, I flex the cramping from my left hand and rotate the soreness from my right wrist. My cousin comes outside and asks me the meaning of figures I am carving and I reply that the upright figure represents us and the inverted one represents our ancestors. He tells me he misses my mother, but has felt all day that she is here, watching.

Rested, I start again. More progress on the line. Another rest. Absorbed, I work until my hands are so tired I can no longer grasp the chisel or lift the hammer. Standing slowly to unfold the tension from my back, I survey the progress made. It is good. My work is finished for the day.

17. Andy Goldsworthy is a contemporary British artist (b. 1956) widely regarded for his site-specific sculptural works that utilise materials found on site.



Figure 11: Petroglyph stone, pre-carving, Malden, Massachusetts, 2008

Carving my place in stone

The stone I am about to carve sits to the side of the Malden house just beyond the end of the driveway [figure 11]. Its visible surface, like a granite iceberg jutting from the sea, suggests a massive, sonorous watchful presence below ground. Its features, its size, shape, surface and position, made it perfect for my purposes. It is close to the house, but in an unobtrusive position and has a flat, carvable face just big enough to accommodate a good-sized design. I did not find this stone by myself, but was directed to it by several family members. One cousin told me that when he was a child he was fascinated by the stone and spent many hours trying to dig it out of the ground with a teaspoon.

I am momentarily frozen, gripped by a rare hesitance as I begin the work; humbled by the significance of the medium and daunted by the task I have set for myself: to work with stone so as to etch my family's history permanently into the landscape, enacting what Miriam Kahn calls the "spatial anchoring of myth" (1990, 55).¹⁸ Chisel poised, I think of Max Duramunmun Harrison (n.d.), a Yuin elder from the southeast of New South Wales, who says that stones are witness to history, that they hear and observe all that occurs around them. I hesitate in my approach to this stone because it figures in so many of my family's memories and has heard much of our story. It knows all of us: my great-grandparents, grandparents, parents, uncles, aunts, sister, cousins and me. It also holds its own story. As Andy Goldsworthy observed, stones have their own history and to work and engage with them adds to that history (1994, 1). The stone beneath my chisel has witnessed a history far more vast than mine. My marks on its surface will be only a small part, another chapter, of its story.

18. During her fieldwork in Wamira, Papua New Guinea, the anthropologist Miriam Kahn (1990) observed how the local villagers placed stones at significant points in the landscape to physically represent and to recall past events and people. She argued that the stones functioned similarly to an oral history in that they provided the means of recall for historical and spiritual knowledge.



Figure 12: Atsuo Okamoto, *Volume of Lives for London*, 2012 (Art First 2012).

This idea resonates with the work of the sculptor Atsuo Okamoto, who says, that “[s]tone is living [...] weathering slowly [...] breathing a very small amount of water and air” (Okamoto 2007), it absorbs and holds the histories of the elements and entities with which it comes into contact. Okamoto refers to this process of absorption as an “infiltration of life” (Art First 2012). This idea forms the underpinning premise of his *Volume of Lives for London*, 2012 [figure 12], a work comprising a series of granite blocks that are shaped and split into segments using a traditional Japanese technique called *wari modoshi*.¹⁹ Each segment is sent to a volunteer caretaker who lives with it for five years before returning it to the artist to be reassembled into its

19. *Wari modoshi* is a traditional Japanese technique used to split huge landscape stones into moveable sized pieces so that they could be transported to a garden setting and then reassembled, like a puzzle, into their original shape (Salisbury n.d., 30).

original form. Okamoto insists, however, that the resulting stone is not a reconstruction of the original, but rather is a “volume of lives”, reflecting “the diverse movements each segment has undertaken [and] “the lives of the people that have touched it” (Art First 2012).

From this I understand that the gouges I make into a stone’s surface will have the effect of changing, in some way, its future: cause it to weather differently; change the patterns and placement of lichen, mosses, spider webs, burrows and cocoons. They will impel me back on occasion to examine its surface and perhaps pique the curiosity of people who know nothing of why the marks were made or what they mean.

The presence of the Malden stone as witness and participant in our lives feels sacred. Perhaps, this is why my family led me to it and why I am impelled to mark its surface as an act of reverence. Its potent pull on my attention reflects Robert Wallis’ observation that rock art occurs in places that are “intrinsically ‘sacred’ due to the life abundant within them” (2009, 54).²⁰ It is a humbling prospect, but one that offers a sense of relief; a reminder of Belden Lane’s assertion that “sacred place [...] is not chosen, it chooses” (2002 [1988], 20).²¹ I am encouraged to imagine that the abundance exuding from this stone acts as the instigator, the initiating agent for the marks I will make on its surface. I am the instrument.

20. Wallis (2009) argues this from an anthropologic perspective in the context of new ideas on animism that position it as a “relational epistemology”, underpinned by reconsiderations of what personhood entails. Noting what appear to be peculiar choices in relation to the siting of petroglyphic works at Kilmartin, Scotland, he asserts that rock art is the result of collaboration between human artists and *others* – the forces and elements of nature and spiritual beings – all of whom are agented partners in the production of works. I discuss Wallis’ observations at Kilmartin in more depth on page 70.

21. Lane approaches the idea of sacred place from a theological standpoint. Much of his work addresses the relationship between geography and faith.



Figure 13: Sandra Adams, *Untitled* (ancestor petroglyph), Malden, Massachusetts, 2008

“The stones pass on a message”²²

Ancient petroglyphs speak to me of the interplay between worlds, between the physical and supernatural, and suggest a body of knowledge that might have been passed on to me had the course of European history, that of my ancestors, progressed differently. I cannot help but agree with Lucy Lippard and interpret the messages, the voices of those who created rock art as being “more eloquent than the voices that eclipsed them” (1988, ix). In the forward to *Marks in Place: Contemporary Responses to Rock Art* (1988), Lippard suggests that while many Native American peoples were vanquished as the result of European invasions, their rock art survives to speak – in many cases – in a voice that is more clear and eloquent than that of the vanquisher. Rock art hints to me about something I have hoped for, an unequivocal sense of connectedness and engagement through the natural world to my ancestors, to the sacred and to place.

Petroglyphs embody an abiding presence that serves, as Thomas Heyd aptly describes, as “memory tablets for the itinerant” (1999, 455). He says that the presence of rock art serves as reminders of the significance of particular places to the prehistoric people who remained there long enough to produce the works. The durability and fixity of petroglyphs stand in potent counterpoint to the transience of human life. I perceive this difference keenly in relation to the instability that characterises my own sense of place and to my desire to fix my belonging in place. From an archaeological standpoint, petroglyphic marks and the materiality of stone are understood together to represent enduring significance. Paul Taçon asserts that stone represents “persistence and immortality” (1991, 2001). Moreover, as the physical manifestation of that which is persistent and unchanging, stone is often understood as a material substance into which the surrounding life becomes concentrated (Harrison n.d; Jackson 1984).

22. This title comes from Mike Parker Pearson’s account of the modern day Madagascan practice of erecting standing stones called *vato holy* for the ancestors or the dead. Translated, the local proverb “vato namelan-kafatra” means ‘the stones pass on a message’ (1998, 310).



Figure 14: Communing with glyphs at Newgrange, County Meath, Ireland, 2008

Pearson and others also argue that the medium of stone was (and continues to be)²³ frequently used in relation to practices that are for or about the spirits of ancestors and that it served (and continues to serve) as the locus for communication and exchange between the living and their dead ancestors (Pearson et al 2006; see also Bender 1992; Devereux 2008; Eliade 1962; Gillings and Pollard 1999; Kahn 1990; Pearson and Ramilisonina 1998; Taçon 1991; and Tilley 1996). Though I am moved by these suppositions about the meaning and purpose of ancient stone works and thrilled by the idea that I am inspired similarly to engage with stone as a means to commune with my ancestors, my interest in petroglyphs goes beyond the scholarly to a place that resonates with some of my deepest longings. I, too, have a message, one which I choose to craft in stone so that it will endure; written in a language of symbols I have devised with the intent that it might be readable across the borders between worlds; between me and my dead ancestors, the living and non-living and the human and other-than-human.²⁴

23. To this, Pearson's discussion of Madagascan *vataholy* (1991) and Miriam Kahn's discussion of Melanesian ancestor stones (1990) address present day practices that mark a direct relationship between standing stones and the spirits of dead ancestors.

24. These differences are addressed in the context of my understanding of ancestors on page 53 and in relation to my work with stone on pages 69-72.

The glyphs that mark the surface of prehistoric stone sites exude a deeply poignant humanness. They are material expressions of ancient peoples' intentions and thoughts (Taçon and Chippendale 1998, 2); forms of communication that speak to us still even if we do not quite remember the language. In this, they “express the eternal in material form” (Pearson and Ramilisonina 1998, 311).²⁵ The carving of marks into stone comprises an enduring gesture that is read in the present as the intent of prehistoric people to communicate with or about supernatural forces and to mark the sites of other-worldly encounter (see Herva and Ikaheimo 2002; Heyd 1999; Loubster 2010; Pearson and Ramilisonina 1998).



Figure 15: Ken Hiratusuka, *Untitled*, continuous line petroglyph, Shimodate, Japan (Hiratusuka 2003)

I am compelled to the work of carving petroglyphs by my desire to know the intentions that drove prehistoric artisans, to reach a sense of like-mindedness and so to know a sense of place amongst this lineage of carvers. In this, my efforts reflect those expressed by sculptor Ken Hiratusuka who carves contemporary petroglyphic works based on the idea of a continuous line [figure 15].

Hiratusuka says that his work allows him to understand his context and place within “an ancient continuum both human and geologic” (Guyon 2007). Likewise, through my own physical engagement with stones, I am working to instigate a dialogue between the present and the past and between myself, the medium, my ancestors and the lineage of petroglyphists.

25. Based on his work at Stonehenge and its wooden counterpart at Durrington Walls, Pearson argues that the materials used to build each structure correspond to the nature of those for whom they were intended. The stone used to build Stonehenge, a place for the ancestors, relates to that which is unchanging, inviolable and eternal, while the wood used at Durrington which was built as a place for the living, represented the temporality of human life; that which is *perishable* (Pearson and Ramilisonina 1998; Pearson et al. 2006).

A significant aspect of my work with petroglyphs is that they are undertaken as a form of re-enactment. They are impelled by my conviction that to learn how prehistoric carvers understood their relationships to the elements, with ancestors and the spirits of place I must engage similar practices. The physical engagement demanded by petroglyphic work is the means by which I seek to gain subjective and kinaesthetic understandings of how, why and in what context(s) prehistoric works were created. I mimic the efforts of prehistoric makers so as to enhance and expand what I am able to know conceptually and objectively of their experience.

I recognise a similar impetus in the work undertaken by Sue Hamilton, Christopher Tilley and Barbara Bender as part of their Leskernick project (Bender, Hamilton, and Tilley 2007)²⁶ which was premised in the idea, that the “production of art in the present can be dialectically linked to an active, interpretative understanding of the prehistoric past” (Tilley, Hamilton, and Bender 2000, 35). Through interaction with stones in place at the prehistoric Leskernick settlement site, Hamilton, Tilley and Bender aimed to engage an experiential connection with the ancient artisans who had constructed the site and to deepen their sensitivity to and understanding of the landscape where it is located. To this end, they created a series of works based on contemporary environmental art practices as a means of interaction with specific stones in place at the site. Amongst the works created were sculptural stones wrapped in painted plastic [figure 16] and photographic views that framed and re-imagined focal points in the site and the surrounding landscape.

According to the artists, the artwork projects at Leskernick were undertaken as “a means to negotiate a relationship with the past from which we have become alienated” (Tilley, Hamilton, and Bender 2000, 44). Though our methods differ somewhat, our work is fuelled by similar premises and intents. By engaging the work, we are seeking to understand the nature of sacred landscapes and to recreate and *re-enact* a connection to ancient artisans who shaped them. We interact with sites and stones in an attempt to acquire subjective and visceral understandings of the

26. The project was undertaken in 1997 at Bodmin Moor, North Cornwall.

experiences and perspectives of our prehistoric ancestors and their relationships to the sacred and to place.



Figure 16: Barbara Bender, Sue Hamilton and Christopher Tilley, *Shrine Stone*, Leskernick, Cornwall, United Kingdom, (Bender et al. 2007)

The petroglyphs I carve act as a touchstone that reminds me how I am linked physically, conceptually and spiritually into a chain of human ancestry that stretches across time. They are a way in which I enact a sense of connection and are, in and of themselves, a place of my belonging.



Figure 17: Sandra Adams, *Untitled (Gosfield petroglyph)*, Fremantle, Western Australia, 2012

Navigating the Sacred



Figure 18: Sandra Adams, *Visiting ancestors*, Fremantle, Western Australia, 2009

A Moment

Spirits swirl and the words hiss. I catch my breath, seized by a sudden awareness. Ancestors are whispering to me, around me, behind me. A slight breeze sweeps the damp perspiration of my neck, a slight shudder. The hairs raised on the back of my arm. My body locked upright. I am sitting surrounded by a sea of words, waiting. My hand suddenly guided, phrases form beyond my control. I am held here, suspended; fixed in place by ghosts and their unfolding message.

ancient Shape shifters
haunt the Cellar of my dreams
and whistle an irresistible *Ambition*

these Radiant Shadows
approach from THE borderline
to TELL A tribal STORY
of starry-eyed Adventure
and the perils of forgotten hope

These Divine witnesses
prowl from beyond history
to AWAKEN a terror of sumptuous thoughts

and weave their proud Lessons
into my BOUNDLESS banshee
SOUL

Figure 19: Sandra Adams, *Ancient shapeshifters*, 2011



Figure 20: Ancestor Feast Shrine, Fort Collins, Colorado, 2008

Unearthing ancestors

My interest in pursuing practices related to my ancestral lineage stems from the idea that relationships forged and enacted between living people and the spirits of their dead kin provide direct and personal access to the entities subsumed within the sacred. Ancestors are often honoured and remembered through what social anthropologist Meyer Fortes describes as a “domestic cult” (1976, 12), an idea I find appealing in that it imparts a sense of the supernatural (or sacred) that is accessible and present in everyday life. Ancestor practices are based in the understanding that “death does not extinguish a person’s participation in the life and activities of his family [...] but rather opens a way to a mode of participation that is different from the mundane mode of the living” (Fortes 1976, 5). What compels me about this

conception of ancestors as supernatural guides is the implication that the presence of ancestor spirits provides a means to bridge the borders between the natural and supernatural worlds. The presence and participation of ancestors in the lives of the living allows living persons access to other realms and connections. The work that I do related to ancestors begins with this premise.

The ancestors I address through my various creative and scholarly practices are of a specific type in spite of the fact that in its various uses the term ‘ancestors’ can refer to a variety of entities. It can indicate persons who are living or dead, either directly or communally related to the living (Fortes 1976; Newell 1976; Whitley 2002) indicate entities that are referred to as “other-than-human” (Hallowell 1960, 21) including the residual spirit energies of dead humans, animals, things, elements and forces; or refer to totemic Creator Beings such as those described in Aboriginal Dreaming myths as the progenitors of humankind (Berndt 1970, 216-217; Steadman, Palmer, and Tilley 1996, 63). While I am not resistant to the possibility that some ancestors are non-human, nor disinterested in exploring my various cultural ancestries, I am not sufficiently versed in my human lineage and cultural identity to know what form and place such ancestors have in relation to me.

Ultimately, the focus of the explorations I engage in relation to *my* ancestors is confined to the specific group of no longer living human kin from whom I directly descend in what Fortes describes as my “demonstrable ancestry [and] descent” (1976, 4); insofar as is possible, a named lineage of persons who have been identified through genealogical record as my direct progenitors.



Figure 21: Sandra Adams, *Ancestor Beadwork Panel 2*, 2011

Needlework as lineage

A stinging ache shoots through my fingertip as I push the needle once more through the leather. I have been stitching for a while now, absorbed, but am pulled from my focus by the soreness that gnaws the top of my shoulders. I am suddenly aware of how darkness has encroached on the room. The fading light has drawn me deeper down into my chair, until I am hunched and folded over the work. I stop to stretch my back, the kinks make a cracking noise as they ease, loosen. Sitting straighter, I switch on the lamp and begin again.

Pulled back into the reverie of working, I stitch across a cut, like a wound in the leather. I stitch to mend it, heal it, make it whole, make it glorious. Stitching beads across this skin is an autobiographical act, testament that I am able to stitch my own wounds, able to make myself whole. There is beauty both in the wounds and in their stitching.

I am beading a panel in offering to my ancestors. The work is an acknowledgement of the threads of familial history and genetic inheritance that bind us together. Tens of thousands of tiny beads, each one a prayer, an offering to the lineages manifest in me. The profusion of colours and patterns stitched across the surface are inextricably bound to each other like the convergence of bloodlines. Creation occurs in the intersections of time, place, action and circumstance.

The leather panel, heavy with beads, weighs on my lap, warming my legs. It is a chilly night and the warmth is welcome. I think of my mother who first taught me to sew, whose mother also taught her to sew. She often stitched in the evening as she sat watching television with my father; her needlework draped over her lap like mine is now. Together, we are stitched into lineage of needleworkers. Across one hundred thousand years of human history,²⁷ we are bound to the lineage of women who, in other times and places, sat stitching and might also have welcomed such warmth.

27. The oldest known beads date from the Middle Palaeolithic period (Dubin 2009).

The artifacts remaining from their endeavours, the remnants organised in museum cases, or those passed down through the generations of my family or those discovered crumpled in bins at charity shops and second-hand stores allow me a sense of kinaesthetic recognition and provoke “a profound sense of shared humanity” (Randall White, quoted in Dubin 2009, 19).²⁸ They are evidence, that through stitching, I become part of a lineage that runs from me to my mother, back through the medieval embroiderer, the Native American quillworker, the colonial cross-stitcher and beyond. The artifacts are reminders of how our mutual practices suspend us in identical moments of enterprise despite the differences of time and circumstance that separate us; how we are joined in work, our fingers sore, our shoulders stiff and hunched, and our eyes stinging from prolonged and intense focus.

28. Randall White is an anthropologist who specialises in Palaeolithic art and personal adornment. He says that his own experiences of coming into contact with the material remains of the works produced by prehistoric artisans allow him to imagine and empathize with their efforts.

Answered prayers



Figure 22: My father's photograph on the wall over my desk, Fremantle, Western Australia

Struggling again with words, I am frustrated, doubtful. I want this passage to come to coherence, but cannot see my way to the end. I turn away from my work and glance at the clock. It is 11:11.

Though he is long dead, I feel a rush of my father's presence. He loved 11:11, an anomaly of numbers, the only time of day (on a twelve hour clock) when

all four numbers are the same. I can still hear my father call to my mother,

"Look Marge, it's 11:11!" and my parents would both stand, as if at attention until the time ticked over to 11:12. In the years since my father's passing, I have experienced occasions when my eye is drawn to the clock at precisely 11:11 as a message, his way of saying "I am here."

11:11 now bolsters my courage. My father would have been proud of the work I am doing, loved that my research challenges what he taught me about the nature of the world and my relationship to the sacred. In moments of self doubt, I feel him watching; a grounding presence, a safety net into which I wish I could fall freely. Glancing at his picture on the wall above my desk, I say, "It's okay, Dad. I'll keep going." The words feel like prayer, but more immediate.

Just a closer walk with thee

My cousin Jim once told me a story about a young Native American man from Prince William Sound in the Gulf of Alaska who was at a crossroads in his life and in need of advice about what he should do. He went to the mountains to seek guidance from his ancestors, asking them to indicate his right path by showing him a green arrow. He prayed hard for about an hour when the clouds suddenly parted and a vivid display of northern lights appeared over a mountain across the water. As he watched, rays of green light gathered themselves into an arrow shape and flew across the water towards him.

**Just a closer walk with Thee,
traditional**

*I am weak, but Thou art strong;
Jesus, keep me from all wrong;
I'll be satisfied as long
As I walk, let me walk close to Thee.*

*Just a closer walk with Thee,
Grant it, Jesus, is my plea,
Daily walking close to Thee,
Let it be, dear Lord, let it be.*

*Through this world of toil and
snares,
If I falter, Lord, who cares?
Who with me my burden shares?
None but Thee, dear Lord,
none but Thee.*

*Just a closer walk with Thee,
Grant it, Jesus, is my plea,
Daily walking close to Thee,
Let it be, dear Lord, let it be.*

I learned to pray as a child, but never with a similarly pragmatic simplicity and certainly without ever believing that an answer could be as obvious and immediate as a flying green arrow. Hearing the story, I thought how comforting it must be to believe that prayers are heard and responded to but more I was startled by the logic of such a direct appeal; that knowing an intimate, immediate relationship with the object(s) of my prayers allows that the answers given have an invested, personal significance. Unlike the prayers I whispered in childhood to a seemingly remote and impersonal God, prayers directed to the spirits of my dead kin seem more likely to be heard, attended to and answered.

Losing my religion

Raised from birth to believe in *something*, I found myself, as a young woman, with a sense of an empty space where my parent's Protestant faith had failed to take root. My father once asked me what I believed in and I answered, "Nothing". I did not know it then, but my answer was not entirely true. The nothing I perceived was a wound left open where the sacred had once been.

I knew that my father's beliefs afforded him a secure sense of place and so understood his question as an expression of his desire that my relationship to the sacred might offer me an equally solid sense of belonging. Yet, the difference in our experiences was less about how we characterised the sacred but rather what was significant was how we experienced ourselves in relationship to it. What my father had that I did not have was a clear sense of being *in relation* to that which he understood as sacred. The sacred, as I had been raised to understand it was beyond my reach. It was the province and purview of God, an omniscient, all-powerful *Father* whose judgement was swift and terrifying, whose ways were mysterious and requirements absolute. As a child, I struggled to understand what God wanted from me and why at any moment and for reasons beyond my comprehension or control, God might punish or banish me for disobeying rules I did not know or could not comprehend.

Confronting the dangerous feminine

I first learnt about God in Sunday School at the 2nd Congregationalist Church in Beverly, Massachusetts and it is pertinent to note here that the town of Beverly is situated just to the north of the city of Salem, site of the famous witch trials, 1692-93. Our church was founded in 1714 by a Puritan congregation some of whom had direct involvement, both as victims and accusers, in the trial proceedings.²⁹



Figure 23: My sister Suzi and I, Easter, 1960, Beverly, Massachusetts

Though the vehement, often anti-feminine and certainly anti-heretical fervour (see Burnham 1997; Demos 1970, 2008; Koehler 1974; Morgan 1937; Reis 1995, 1997; Westerkamp 1990) that swept the region and sparked the witch trials had subsided by the time my family and I were members of the congregation, there remained a residue of fear and intolerance aimed towards rebellious women. The idea that the autonomous feminine exerts a ruinous influence continued to be promulgated, unchallenged, through a wide range of cautionary Biblical texts that featured female antagonists. The stories of whores, harlots, seductresses, tramps and witches, Eve, Jezebel, Salome, Delilah, and Lot's Wife made clear the oppositional nature of the relationship between God and the seditious feminine. They are pitted against each other, locked into perpetual combat: the sacred versus the profane; male versus female; good versus evil. Eve's story illustrates two hierarchical relationships: the

29. The most noteworthy amongst Beverly residents involved in the witch trials were the Reverend John Hale, an early supporter of the trials who was often called to testify against members of his congregation and his wife, Sarah Noyes Hale who was one of the accused. Prior to 1692, the Reverend Hale was an avid supporter of the witch trials. However, as the hysteria grew, he began to moderate his view. When his second wife Sarah became one of the accused (but never charged or tried), he began to actively advise moderation and caution in the pursuit and punishment of witches. After Sarah's death, Reverend Hale wrote the famous tract *A Modern Enquiry into the Nature of Witchcraft* (Hale 2006 [1702]).

sacred over the profane and male over female. Eve, the feminine, is subsequent to Adam, created as his helpmate and companion. Moreover, she is weaker, both in body and spirit and so is more easily (cont) corruptible. Her disobedience was the cause of humankind's expulsion from paradise and therefore of all human suffering. In addition, the stories of Jezebel (whose manipulative sexuality inspired idolatry), Salome (whose careless sexuality led to the beheading of John the Baptist) and Delilah (whose trafficable sexuality was the source of Samson's betrayal and downfall) correlated female sexuality to seductiveness and, by doing so, positioned both as dangerous, destructive and unholy. Finally, the fate of Lot's wife (who was turned into a pillar of salt for disobeying God's injunction to not look back) furthered the idea that, regardless of how incomprehensible or seemingly insignificant, *all* of God's commandments have to be obeyed. Inherent, particularly, in Eve's story and her role as the instigator of mankind's debasement was the message that her weakness and her potential for wreaking ruin was shared by all women. I understood this to include my grandmother, mother, aunts, sister and me.

The divide I perceived between the feminine and the sacred deepened as I absorbed the idea that the sacred was male; a notion that is entrenched in Biblical lore by the constant use of masculine descriptors for God. Although all humankind was said to be fashioned in God's image, I could not find myself reflected there. As Carol Christ argues, referents like "Lord, King and Father [...] He, Him, His, never She, Her, Hers" make it hard for women to see themselves, or any evidence of the feminine, reflected in *His* image (2004, 26). What image I found of myself was disheartening: a hierarchical ordering of male over female; the feminine as *subsequent* to the masculine; the idea that Eve came into being as an afterthought, as a helpmate to Adam built from an extra, unnecessary rib.

Subsequently, my relationship to God was fraught with insecurity; my sense of place as one of God's children felt as tenuous as membership in a dysfunctional family where the father's rages are devastating and inexplicable. I did not know how my humanness made me unworthy, nor why my femaleness increased the distance

between me and the sacred, but I knew my only way to God was through subjugation of myself. The stories I learnt about recalcitrant women admonished me to be obedient and contrite in recognition of my own inferior and profane nature and cautioned me against my own questioning, rebellious, and contentious *feminine* will. Moreover, they made clear that if I was ever to find belonging in relation to God, it would be *despite* my humanness and my gender.

Ultimately unwilling to cross the immense rift I perceived between myself and God or to accept the idea that the sacred exists as my oppositional other, I abandoned the Protestant beliefs I absorbed in childhood and for many years also rejected any other notions regarding the existence of the sacred. I fixed my attentions entirely to the material and everyday; on realities and phenomena that could be engaged, known, measured and named through the workings of my mind and body and dismissed the idea, as irrelevant and inconsequential to me, the urges of my spirit to engage with the supernatural. Yet, the hierarchy I created within myself - of mind over body over spirit - incurred a cleaving of selves and what Suzi Gablik describes, as an “amputation of the soul” (1991, 46)³⁰ that left me with a sense of disjointedness and unease; not unholy, but unwhole.

30. Gablik argues that the “prevailing sense of disenchantment” that characterises contemporary western culture stems from the privileging of “rational modes of perception” over that which is mystical, perceived or felt. The result is a “single-tracked universe” in which the visionary and mystical have little or no place.

Sensing the Extraordinary

Despite my decision to ignore its call, my alertness to the presence of something *other* would not be suppressed. The spiritual continued to murmur to me like a conversation not quite overheard from just below or beyond my consciousness, pulling me, almost as an undercurrent, away from the mundane workings of my everyday life towards engagement with the inspired, supernatural, uncanny and numinous. It incurred a sensation Lucy Lippard aptly describes as “living the ordinary while sensing the extraordinary” (1997, 14)³¹ but more it alerted me to the potential for communion and relationship in every moment and in every place; a means to find, across barriers of otherness, a fluid, constant and portable sense of belonging.



Figure 24: Sandra Adams, *Untitled shrine*. 1980

My awareness of the ‘extraordinary’ first came as the result of my art practice and through the realisation that much of my working process is driven by my desire for the experience of communion; that my engagement with my work constitutes a conversation with supernatural others and is, at times, a form of prayer. This was first

³¹ Lippard coined this expression as a way to identify her own spirituality in its simplest terms and to remove it from the complex connotations associated with the word ‘spiritual’. She argues that in present day, the word ‘spiritual’ has come to incorporate many different approaches to the sacred, some of which are institutional (religions), some individual (mysticism) and some parareligious (occult).

made apparent in a work I constructed in 1980 as a means to focus my thoughts and to navigate my way through the complexities of a personal crisis [figure 24]. Though it utilised the familiar methods of my art-making process – stitching, building, writing, assembling - its purpose as the locus of meditations and appeals exposed the ways in which I sought to engage in conversation with the supernatural. As I worked, I became aware that I was engaged with and was appealing to forces and presences I had previously dismissed as non-existent. Precisely to whom or to what *other* was I appealing? I did not and still do not know yet I experienced it as a responsive entity, an intermediary and as my collaborator. The ways in which this collaboration differed from the ordinary occurrences of my everyday life,³² forced me to confront my own habituated resistance to the idea of the supernatural but also to acknowledge that my art practice is the means through which I seek the experience of oneness, relation, communion, connection and collaboration with people, beings, entities or forces, some of whom I once perceived as sacred but now think of as supernatural *others*.

In my effort to seek a deeper recognition of what it means to experience oneness, I understand that my best approach is like that of the mystic who, as Michel de Certeau asserts, allows a ‘burning bush’ to speak, but does not seek to concretised its character or meaning into an absolute (1992, 12). I am not attempting to name the ineffable, nor to determine its form and shape. I am merely trying to hear and attend to its voice. To do this, I must rely on “an intuition that [is] foreign to [my] intellectual understanding” (de Certeau 1992, 12);³³ to forgo my questions and disbelief; to resist my hunger for concrete explanation and to embrace a “mystical point of view as opposed to a scientific one” (1992, 12). Ultimately, my purpose is best served if I am able to allow my experiences of the numinous to remain the “rendezvous of an enigma” (de Certeau 1992, 24), to welcome its presence but to leave its mysteries unexplained.

32. This corresponds to Lippard’s idea of sensing the extraordinary as previously discussed and to Michel de Certeau’s assertion that the mystical is divergent from the norm (1992, 13).

33. de Certeau explains that mysticism holds an uneasy place in contemporary culture due to the fact that it relies on intuition, a skill that finds purchase and power beyond reason or discourse.

Practicing oneness

Stitching is an act of integration. It is a means of creation that is premised on binding disparate elements together into a coherent whole while maintaining the integrity of the parts. A sleeve stitched to a bodice is still a sleeve, but stitched together the sleeve and bodice make a blouse. Stitching as art practice lays challenge to the myth that the artist works at the “verge of disintegration” (Wilson 2006, 27). As Wilson argues, the idea that artists live at the verge of disintegration is central to the myth of the artist as solitary genius (2006, 27). However, this perspective can only find purchase where it is assumed that the artist works alone, gripped by a kind of obsessive frenzy to produce a specific product. It does not take into account the various impetuses or ways of working that can be employed, nor the variety of relationships available to artists through engagement with their work. It misapprehends the meaning of the collaborative relationships engaged through the creative act. I suggest that there is no verge about it: art *begins* with the artist’s disintegration into a sense of enthralled, holistic and transcendent collaboration with the mediums, concept(s) and context(s) engaged. Like the loss of self experienced by the mystic, the artist’s experience is less that of the *dissolution* of self, but rather more of being *in* solution with the other.

I hear echoes of my relationship to stitching in a poem by the West Australian artist Nalda Searles titled *A Stitching of Words* (2009, 30). She writes:

*I fell in love with half hitching at age thirty four
a simple knotting that binds plants into weavings
threading along sticks / stones / rags / bones
obsessed / I was up all night half hitching
dreaming / hitching / hatching dreams / plans
drunk on knots / lover’s knots
always thinking whilst half hitching
until I’d tied up all the flotsam and jetsam within reach.*

Her words – *obsessed, dreaming, drunk* - describe an enthrallment I recognise and share. It is the experience of being simultaneously absorbed in both the visceral and conceptual activity of stitching together the ideas, aspects and elements of experience while immersed and lost in a wash of memories, observations, insights and dreams. Grounded by the familiar and repetitive motion of stitching, I experience a sense of concentrated presence that is reminiscent of prayer. My conscious mind is engaged, leaving my subconscious mind to experience a sense of unbound and unedited freedom. My thoughts wander an indefinite territory where connections are drawn and redrawn and new understandings are forged across my memories and ideas. While stitching, I often experience a fluid sense of time in which the past and future are imminently available to me. I am one with the needle, the surface it pierces, my environment. My subconscious mind, unloosed from the constraints of practicality and reason, listens and responds. Inspiration converses with me as if from everywhere and nowhere. The voices I hear, those of guidance, memory and inspiration, speak to me across boundaries of otherness and responding to them has a mystical quality. I hear them as proof that through my work, I am able to cross supposedly uncrossable boundaries and find belonging in relationships where no relationship is thought to be possible.

The capacity of needlework to foster this experience is intensified for me in the process of bead embroidery which is slower and more painstaking than many other forms of stitchery and has a heightened physicality. Beads are tactile and varied. They are heavy and cool to the touch; their surfaces are silky, slick or slightly rough depending on the finish. In contrast to the cloth onto which they are sewn, beads are audible, whispering gravely-voiced conversations as they move against each other. As bead embroideries are worked, their surfaces form a subtle Braille and become activated as light gives the swathes of colour a changeable density; they become heavier and more deeply textured. Each sewn bead represents a moment of collaborative integration in which the stitcher, the bead, the stitch, the ground, the design and its influences are joined. Some beads resist integration, denying passage to the needle or splitting as the needle passes through. Others affix easily to the ground and sit comfortably as if they belong.

In contrast to the silky smoothness of their beaded surfaces, the undersides of bead embroideries are rough; animated by a dense tangle of knots and tiny stitches. These engage a quieter conversation; a history of intimate engagement. Each stitch, a reminder of a single moment, records its place in the act of integration.



Figure 25: Sandra Adams, *Ancestor Panel 2* (detail - underside), 2012

Collaborating with others

Setting to work, I notice a large flake across the top third of the stone I am about to work. It seems unstable, ready to cleave off and I am worried that carving over it will cause it to crumble. I realise that I must remove it before I can begin carving. I am nervous. Angling my chisel into the cleft between the flat of the stone and the flake, I close my eyes and take a deep breath. I feel myself being guided. The tension lifts and I strike the chisel with my hammer.

It takes little effort. A few quick blows and the flake shears from the surface to reveal a distinct, meandering line across the surface. Now I see how the line revealed divides the stone as if to divide upper from lower worlds, the realm of the living from that of the ancestors.

I did not intend this line but sense that I was guided to assist in its making. The line revealed is powerful, evocative, better than I had envisioned. It becomes the fulcrum of the marks I make. I am not in this alone.



Figure 26: Finding the line, Fort Collins, Colorado, 2008



Figure 27: Cup-and-ring carvings at Achnabreck, Kilmartin, Scotland, photograph used by permission (Gyrus 2004)

My experience with the sheer line reminds me of an observation made by Robert Wallis regarding the positioning of the rock art at Kilmartins, Scotland (2009). Noting that there are several instances of glyphs that are carved into deeply cracked surfaces [figure 27] despite that there are numerous smooth surfaces nearby, Wallis contends that the placement of these glyphs is intentional and indicates that the artists who carved them preferred cracked surfaces despite that the smoother ones seemed “the [more] obvious choice for image-making” (2009, 55; see also Jones 2006; Tilley 2006, 28). I understand this choice differently. Like the line revealed beneath the loosened flake, the cracks at Kilmartins not only contribute to the design, but might be understood as marks made by non-human agents; pre-made designs or elements to which human artists are invited to contribute. Cracked surfaces and other features of stone like texture, hardness, fragility and colour might be understood as an invitation to collaborative relationship and experienced as evidence of its agency.



Figure 28: Carrowkeel Megalith Site, County Sligo, Ireland, 2008

Negotiating harmony

Walking across the Carrowkeel Megalith site,³⁴ I am struck by a noticeable visual correspondence between the undulations of surrounding hillsides and the human-built cairns that are scattered across them [figure 28]. Several oddly perched stones dot the hilltop. Some of these seem to be the result of human activity while others appear to be naturally occurring, though the situation of each stone and its correspondence to those surrounding it seems neither random nor serendipitous.

Carrowkeel does not appear to be a dominated landscape but rather as one in which the human contribution and the surrounding landscape yield to each other. It evinces what Robert Wallis describes in relation to prehistoric rock art as the “negotiation of

34. Carrowkeel is a Neolithic passage tomb complex in County Sligo, Ireland.

harmony [...] between humans and nonhumans” (2009, 55). The interplay between the natural elements and the human-made structures that comprise the site suggests that the correspondence is intentional: not the product solely of human design but rather a collaborative effort brought into being by multiple ‘hands’.

Wallis’ notion of negotiated harmony appeals to me and has particular resonance with the experiences of collaboration I engage through my art practice. It is most keenly felt in relation to my efforts to work with stone. Unlike any other material I have worked with, stone has a presence that I experience as having equal authority to my own. Its mass and weight and the imperviousness of its *skin* compel me to adjust my approach to marking its surface. Its ancientness commands respect and this prompts me to approach with an unusual prudence. The substantiveness of its body has the unexpected effect of making me acutely aware of my own body as I work (the steadiness of my breath, the posture of my spine and the strength and flexibility of my muscles). The sense of focussed physicality that underpins my work with stone incurs a wider awareness of my self emplaced and situated.

October, 2008

The strikes of my hammer build a rhythm that rustles the leaves of overhanging trees and resounds from the surfaces around me. Dull thuds sink below asphalt and wood, sharp rings glance from glass and hollow moans console from other stones. I stop to listen, aware suddenly of how I sit, weighted to the ground; how my skin, dampened with the sweat of my effort, chills to the breeze; how the sun penetrates the ache in my shoulder.

I brush stone dust and leaves from the stone's surface and trace my finger down the line I have carved. It is not the line I intended, but is one the stone allowed. The stone's texture, its hardness pushed this line to its final configuration, resiting and then yielding to the edge of my chisel. I hold no illusion about the supremacy of my 'hand'. This stone is neither unrealised nor unfinished, nor malleable, nor subservient to my efforts and I do not seek to be its master. I cannot release the art from within this stone but merely can only try to find its harmony.



Figure 29: Negotiated line, Fort Collins, Colorado, 2008



Figure 30: Stone in progress, Ft Collins, Colorado, 2008

Understanding collaboration

I recognise aspects of my own experience as a petroglyphist in Wallis' assertion that the production of rock-art engages "a significant range of relations than are associated with the single artist/individual alone" (2009, 55). Further, I agree with his inference that the meaning and purpose of the relationships engaged between the artist and the medium(s) is the creation of harmony. I understand the beginnings of this in relation to my own efforts as moments in which I experience mutuality and accord, a sense of synergistic partnership that moves me beyond my usual field of relations. These are moments when I recognise that my efforts are being guided, when the rock resists or yields to my chisel, or when I am moved to respond such as when the beauty and power of the sheer-line revealed itself to me.

I make sense of this partnership by drawing on recent shifts in theories regarding the nature of animism and of personhood. The first of these counters the traditional view that animism is a form of religion but rather defines a worldview that assumes a wide-ranging and inclusive "connectedness between beings in the world" (Haber 2009, 429; see also Bird-David et al. 1999; Harvey 2005; Ingold 2006; Stringer 1999; Wallis 2009). It privileges 'being in relation' which does not simply imply the *relatedness* of beings but rather the *relationships* engaged between them (Bird-David et al. 1999, S88). Animism conceives of the world as "filled with people, only some of whom are human" (Wallis 2009, 52) and this not only expands the potential field of beings with whom/which relationship is possible but also challenges the assumption that personhood is a uniquely human attribute that defines a finite and immutable individual who is "bounded by the skin" (Bird-David et al. 1999, S88; see also Strathern 1988). Animist personhood is not a characteristic of individuals, but rather is realised through the relationships formed between them (Bird-David et al. 1999, S72; Wallis. 2009, 61); not an attribute or static state of being, but rather is an *emergent* condition (Keen 2006, 516).

Underpinning much of the recent scholarship is Irving Hallowell's exceptional study *Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View* (1960; see also Bird-David et al. 1999;

Wallis 2009). Hallowell wrote that the Ojibwa worldview does not impose “spirit/body, natural/supernatural modernist” distinctions (Bird-David et al. 1999, S68), but rather advances a movable concept of personhood which places both human persons and ‘other-than-human persons’³⁵ in dynamic and reciprocal relationship. Unlike the western concept of personhood which, Wallis argues, draws boundaries around persons and defines distinctions between entities, “creating closure around” and arresting the permeability between them, animist notions of personhood are fluid and expansive and “embrace a variety of human and nonhuman people engaged in ongoing relationships in which the boundaries between one thing and another are diffused” (Wallis 2009, 60). As well, categories such as person/object and animate/inanimate, which from a Western standpoint are believed to be distinct and immutable, are recognised to “shift from one category to the other, depending on the context” (Reynolds 2009, 161).

My relationship to stone is premised in these ideas. It begins with the recognition of the stone’s potential for personhood and the establishment of “a ‘conversation’ with a counter-being” (Bird-David et al. 1999, S78) but I find this sometimes difficult to accomplish. My intent to collaborate, person-to-person with stone requires me redress my own habituated belief that persons are human and relationships can only be formed with other living beings; and to accept that it is fellowship rather than [the recognition of] common essence - that makes other beings “a self in relation with ourselves” (Bird-David et al. 1999, S78). Underpinning my lack of ease is “the language of dualisms and dichotomies” (1999, S67; see also Harvey 2010, 14-34) that is used to discuss other ways of knowing, which encourages the perception that there are immutable distinctions between the self and the other, the animate and the inanimate, and the person and the non-person.

35. ‘Other-than-human persons’ should not be thought of as anthropomorphised entities, but instead viewed as a category that includes all non-human spirits, forces, entities and objects that are both autonomous and agented. (Hallowell 1960, 28)

However, my work with stone affords me the opportunity to rethink the meaning of the relationship(s) it incurs. In recognising the work as a collaboration, and particularly the ways that the stone yields or does not yield to my chisel, I am required to shift my perspective and my approach: the stone is not an “inert tabula rasa” (Wallis 2009, 47) that will only acquire substance and meaning through my efforts and I am not the sole creator but rather a co-contributor. From here I am able to view my relationship with stone from a place that Alejandro Haber refers to as “border thinking” (2009, 419): that is, thinking from within the relationship rather than about it. Thus the relationship I engage with stone is not “the object of study [but rather] the place for thinking through” (2009, 429); the place from which to gain understandings *from within* animist relationship rather than *about* animist relationship (Haber 2009, 418).

Ultimately the collaborative relationships I engage with stone challenge traditional understandings of personhood and raise important questions regarding “where the boundaries of ‘the social’ lie” (Wallis 2009, 51). In this I am inspired to examine my own perception of the social opportunities afforded me by engagement, through my art practice, with other-than-human collaborators and with the other-than-human companions and guides I encounter as I move through the natural world.

“The Chinese say that we live in the world of the ten thousand things. Each of the ten thousand things cries out to us precisely nothing” (Dillard 1982, 87).

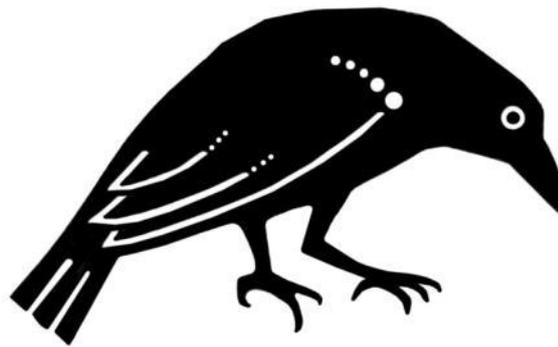


Figure 31: Sandra Adams, *Crow seeking*, 2008



Figure 32: A murder of crows at Newgrange, Ireland, 2008

First encounter, Newgrange

A massive murder of crows suddenly scatters from a nearby tree and circles overhead. I turn to Jim and start to say that the crows want to tell him something but stop, startled by a realisation. It is me the crows are speaking to. I am the one suddenly called to attention by their presence. I have been picking up their feathers from the ground for the last several days. What are they trying to tell me? (Research notes, Ireland, August 25, 2008).



Figure 33: Sandra Adams, *Crow looking*, 2010

The companionship of crows

Before that moment of recognition that I was being called to attention by the crows at Newgrange, Corvids meant little to me. They had simply been part of the background wash of nature and positioned, at best, at the periphery of my awareness. The crow feathers I picked up on my walks were given no special place but lay amongst the scatter on my desk.

However, once I became intent on crows, I began to notice them wherever I went and to make notes in my journal about our interactions. This succession of observations allows me to track the shifts in my perspective about the meaning and purpose of my encounters with crows. They also chronicle the unfolding and deepening of the relationship between us which, for me, began at Newgrange [figure 32] when the murder of crows seemed to demand my attention; then deepened when I started to interpret the appearance of crows as numinous messengers offering otherworldly direction and validation [figure 34]; and shifted again when I realised that I was in relation with *individual* crows who were autonomous, reciprocating and agented companions [figure 40].

Having been raised on a steady diet of dualisms, I have not found it an easy task to resist my own assumption of an unbridgeable distinction between people and things, and my early relationship to crows was no exception to this. It required me to resist my inherited inclination to assume as did Edward Tylor³⁶ that animism is a belief system steeped in superstition; the product of arrested, primitive (or pre-literate), erroneous and childlike processes (Tylor 1920 [1871], 2: see also Bird-David et al. 1999,

36. In his work *Primitive Culture* (1920 [1871]), Edward Tylor argued that what underlies all religion is a belief in the existence of spiritual beings and postulated that this idea first arose as a means to explain the encounters experienced by prehistoric people with the spirits of dead ancestors and zoomorphic beings, deities and demons while in altered states of consciousness, such as in dreams and trance. Despite that Tylor accepted as rational the belief in spirit, beings, he ultimately viewed animism as the attribution of “life to the non-living” (Guthrie 1993, 62) and as, such, as a failed theology.

S67). Despite this, I welcomed the potential that underpinned the challenge crows presented and saw it as a means to redress distinctions that, I sensed, had silenced the voices of Annie Dillard's ten-thousand things. In *Teaching a Stone to Talk*, Dillard draws on the Taoist concept of the ten-thousand things as a way to refer to the material world and phenomenal reality and argues that at the "world's word", the voice of the ten-thousand things is a unified hum, that is, ultimately, silence (1983, 69, 72). I suggest rather that the inability to hear beyond or beneath the silence stems from the fact that we have not been trained to listen otherwise and is fuelled by the belief that there is nothing to hear. Through my growing engagement with crows, I sought to make those voices less mute and the distinctions that separated me from all else – spirits, entities, elements and things - more mutable.

Moreover, the suggestion of such an uncommon relationship fuelled my drive to understand its spiritual significance. I wanted to know what my awareness of the presence of crows meant, particularly insofar as it might relate to my pilgrimage journey. For this, I searched through the annals of world folklore and mythology and discovered a surprising wealth of crow symbolism and lore. I found that crows are often recognised as messengers. Sometimes they are thought to be omens, warning of illness and death, but are more frequently seen to bear news of all kinds and to serve as a source of instruction and prophecy. Often, as is the case with the Japanese three-legged crow Yatagarasu, their presence is interpreted as an expression of the will of heaven and a means through which the divine intervenes in human affairs (Ponsonby-Fane 1954, 146). Most affecting for me were the myths and stories that related to my heritage: the Norse ravens Huginn and Muninn who bring messages to Odin about the whole world (Compte 1988, 143); the pivotal role played by crows in the Norse *Saga of Flóki*;³⁷ and the crow manifestation of the Irish queen Morrigan (Leeming 2005, 86).³⁸ These myths began to tease at the edges of my art practice and

37. The direction and instruction provided by crows can be quite practical as is illustrated in the Norse *Saga of Flóki*. Flóki Vilgerðarson was the first Norse mariner to intentionally set out in search of Iceland. As a means to help him find the correct course, he brought along three ravens and set them free one-by-one to watch where they flew. The first raven flew home, the second flew straight up and then returned to the ship, but the third flew in a straight line from the bow in a north-westerly direction. Following *as the crow flies*, Flóki discovered Iceland.

³⁸ In Irish mythology, the *Morrigan*, translated as both phantom queen and great (cont)

prompted me to begin conceptualising how – and why - crow symbols might be developed and incorporated into my works [figures 35 and 36].

I was particularly inspired by accounts that drew connections between crow sightings and the ancestors, and in the many Native American accounts that cast crows as emissaries whose task it was to “conduct the living to their dead” (Sax 2003, 98), or to bridge the divide between generations and worlds. I felt an affinity for this characterisation of the role played by crows. It reflected the perception I held about the purpose of my pilgrimage and my task as pilgrim: that I stood as a pivot point between the past and the future, bringing stories of our ancestors to my living kin and acting as a conduit for connections between the dead and the living. My sense that crows and I were united by this mutual purpose deepened as the result of an unusual encounter; literally, a sign [figure 34]:

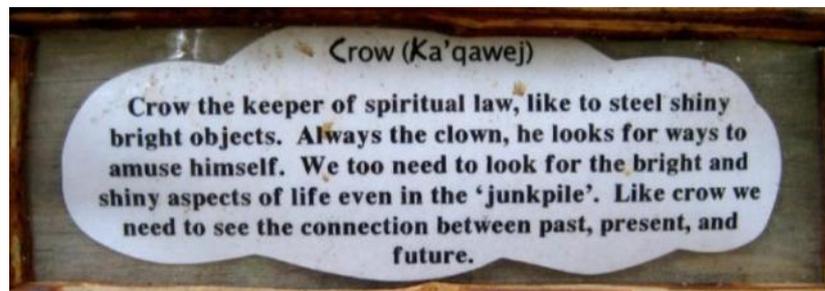


Figure 34: Crow signs, Nova Scotia, 2008

While we walk, Frank asks the purpose of my journey and I tell him that I see myself as a pivot point between my family's past and its future and that I am trying to weave our story together from our ancestors through the present generation and on to our descendants. And then I tell him about seeing crows, how they seem to follow me, speak to me and demand my attention. At the end of the trail, I find a sign tacked to a tree. It reads, "Like crow we need to see the connection between past present and future" (Research notes, Nova Scotia, August 29, 2008).

queen, is a supernatural being primarily related to warfare whose role was often premonitory. Her appearance indicated that a warrior's death was imminent but could also influence the (cont) outcome of battle. She did this by flying as a crow over the battlefield to inspire either fear or courage. She is sometimes depicted along with her sisters Badb and Macha/ Nemain as the triple goddess who appears in the guise of a hooded crow (Davidson 1988, 58, 87, 97; Lysaght 1996, 15).

This *sign* had a significant impact on my perception of my crow encounters. I began to experience their presence as validation, an otherworldly sign that my inclinations and efforts were leading me in the right direction. My sense of crows as signifiers gave weight to our encounters such that each instance seemed neither random nor merely physical, but rather purposed and supernatural. The encounters held aspects that I recognise in Rudolph Otto's sense of the "numinous",³⁹ particularly in relation to an aspect of sacred experience he refers to as the *fascinans*. They were supernatural and transcendent (1923, 37) occasions that were positioned outside "the sphere of the usual, the intelligible and the familiar" (1923, 26). But while these experiences had a concentrated and uncanny feel, they were subtle, almost subliminal encounters. My sense of crows as signifiers of the sacred allowed the experience to have comforting and familiar numinosity. The crows themselves did not exert the sense of terrible and awesome majesty that commonly characterises direct encounters with the sacred and is the result of a confrontation with inconceivable, unfathomable, non-rational *otherness* (Merkur 2006, 206). The idea that crows should act as sacred signifiers was *conceivable*. Moreover, as messengers, they were approachable, conversable.

39. Otto coined the term 'numinous' (derived from the Latin word *numen* meaning "the spirit or divine power presiding over a thing or place") as a descriptor for sacred experience so as to remove all religious, ethical or spiritual overtones. He argues that numinous experience cannot be reduced "to ordinary intellectual or rational knowing" (Harvey 1923, xiv) but rather is "perfectly *sui generis* and irreducible to any other" (Otto 1923, 7).



Figure 35: Study of Celtic crow ancestor and beaded version, 2011

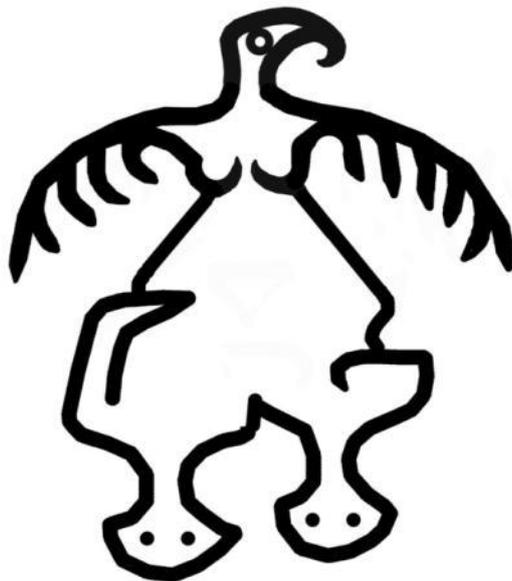


Figure 36: Study of Norse crow ancestor and beaded version, 2011



Figure 37: A disappointing attempt to draw crow glyphs in the sand at Rye Beach, New Hampshire, 2008

Walking along Rye Beach, I become intent on the idea of including glyphs of crows into the design for my first petroglyph. I stop and begin drawing my ideas in the sand. But after several faltering attempts, I feel thwarted and uncertain. Abandoning my work, I walk up the beach. My mind flooded with questions: does this work matter? Am I on the right track? Why am I working with crows?

Looking up, I see what I suspect is an answer. Four crows at the shoreline in the midst of a flock of gulls. “Yes”, they seem to say, “Stick with it. We’re here”. Encouraged, I respond, “Okay, I’ll continue.” Thank you, crows. (Research notes, September 12, 2008).

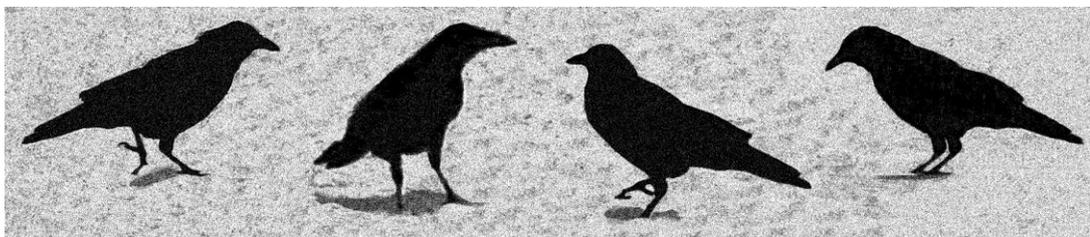


Figure 38: Four crow advisors at Rye Beach, New Hampshire, 2008.

I had been advised by crows and, here, the relationship took an interesting turn. I began to recognise that the crows that engaged me were not simply my companions, I was also theirs. I was neither the driving force, nor the central character in our interactions, rather I was merely one, often of several participants. This repositioning of our roles in relationship brought to light the human-centredness at the heart of my initial assessment of our interactions. I had privileged my own position by assuming that the sole purpose of our contact was so that crows could act as signifiers or intermediaries in service to my causes and agenda. I had not considered that the crows I encountered were motivated by their own set of intentions, nor that they were engaging me according to their own purpose and design.

Though, I was in no doubt that I was engaging in conversation and enjoying the fellowship of crows, the potency and potential of our affiliation was limited until my understanding of personhood (as an attribute of humanness) and of human-animal relationships (as human-centred) underwent a cardinal shift. I realised that I was not the driving force, but was being invited into congress by individual persons who happened to be crows. This shift in my perspective can be understood in the context of Irving Hallowell's discussion of the Ojibwa concept of personhood which, as previously discussed, is not focussed on the attributes of entities, but is realised through the establishment of a dynamic and reciprocal relationship between persons – both human and other-than-human. According to Hallowell, other-than-human persons, is a category that includes all non-human spirits, forces, entities and objects assumed to be both autonomous and agented (1960, 28). As Bird-David notes, Hallowell's work reveals how Ojibwa ontology conceives of personhood "as an overarching category within which 'human person', 'animal person', 'wind person', etc. are categories" (1999, S71). These are not distinctions that mark impenetrable differences, but rather mark the potential for relationship.

As the reciprocal nature of my relationship with individual crows became clearer, I began to experience their interactions with me as directive rather than ancillary.

Crows were not engaging with me simply to validate my efforts but rather, at times, they came to tell me what to do.

I scratched the faint outlines of two crows into the rock surface, but stopped, unsure [figure 39]. There is something unresolved in my understanding about their inclusion, Should I carve two to represent the dead and the living? Three for past, present, future: Five for five generations of ancestors? (Research notes, Fort Collins, Colorado, October 19, 2008).



Figure 39: Carving crows in Fort Collins, Colorado, 2008

Uncertain, I tell Jim I don't know if I should carve a third crow. Later, he calls me outside and pointing to a tall pine says, "Look." I look up to see two crows perched in the high branches and say, "Okay, I get it, two." He looks puzzled and asks, "Why two?" I say, "Because there are two crows." "No", he says, "Look, there are three." I look again, and the third crow rises up from behind a cluster of branches, and frantically flaps his wings. "Okay" I say, "I'll carve three" to which they all start flapping their wings and cawing at me. I laugh and say, "Okay. Okay. I get it now". They scold me some more and then fly away (Research notes, Fort Collins, Colorado, October 21, 2008)



Figure 40: The third crow, as advised, Fort Collins, Colorado, 2008

I did as I was told and carved three crows. Unlike the crows I carved previously, I thought of these crows as specific rather than symbolic, included in the glyph design as an acknowledgement of our collaborative efforts and in recognition of the actual person-to-person relationship between us. As I worked, I invited them to take a look, but none appeared or made comment until after the stone was completed and erected in place.

It is dusk and Jim calls, "Come outside and see this." I look up to see several crows swooping low over the yard while many dozens more circle overhead or caw from the nearby trees. Transfixed, I watch the celebration. As they fly over me one after the other I ask, "Who are you? Who are you? Who are you?" (Research notes, Fort Collins, Colorado, October 30, 2008).



Figure 41: *Wardong* by the Swan River, Bicton, Western Australia, 2009

At home in *wardong* country

While still travelling, I discovered a final and compelling piece of crow lore that suggested a sense of purpose, yet undiscovered, about my connection to my home in Western Australia. Fremantle, where I live, is situated in Noongar⁴⁰ country where the black crow (*Corvus coronoides*), is the totem of the *Wardongmat*⁴¹, one of two Noongar matrilineal kin groups. Coming home would mean finding my place in *wardong* country.

Home at last, I went to see my thesis advisor, Dr. Joan Wardrop, to discuss the findings of my trip and to lay plans for the next stages of my research. It was a beautiful summer day, so we sat outside. I began to talk of a specific concern that had arisen regarding the work I planned to do in Western Australia. Specifically, as none of my ancestors had originated in nor ever lived in or even visited Australia, I questioned whether it was appropriate to for me to work locally with their spirits. Just

40. The Noongar are Indigenous Australians who have lived in the southwest region of Western Australia for more than forty-five thousand years (Noongar Lore n.d).

41. The Noongar word for crow is *wardong* (sometimes spelled *waardung*, *waardong* or *wardung*) while *mat* means lineage, leg or family; the crow family moiety is named the *Wardongmat*. The other matrilineal group is named *Manitchmat* and its totem is the White Cockatoo (Noongar Lore n.d.).

as I said that I felt that this work obliged me to consult with Noongar Elders for permission and advice, a large crow swooped low over us, cawed loudly what sounded to me like, “of course, you fool!” and landed on a low branch behind me. Where, Joan told me, it sat glaring intently at her.

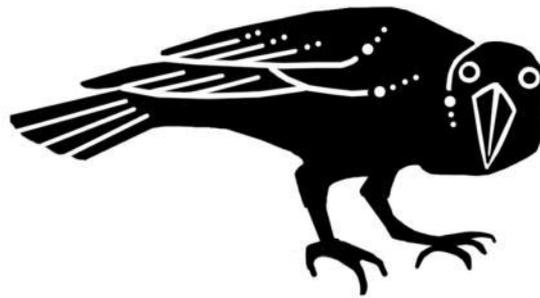


Figure 42: Sandra Adams, *Crow glaring*, 2012

Max's virtual crows

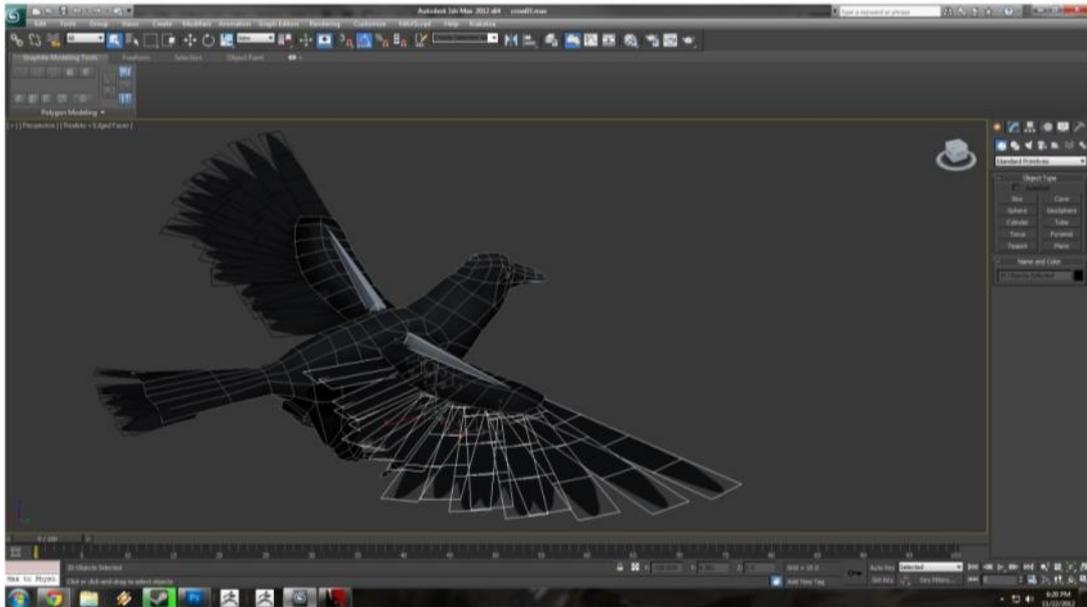


Figure 43: Max Frankel, *Max's virtual crow* (in progress), 2012

Max presents me a gift he has worked on in secret. Virtual crows. Embedded into our virtual landscape, they fly in high, sweeping loops above the ground, calling as they pass. All through the virtual landscape you can hear them approaching and watch them pass overhead. Just as real life crows were companions to my real-life pilgrimage, Max's virtual crows will be companions for all who wander through our virtual world.

I am profoundly touched by this gift, a gesture of appreciation. It signals the attentiveness with which he has listened to and absorbed my stories. My relationship to crows, the way it developed and how I interpreted their presence has now been embedded in the longer narrative of ancestry. It does not end with crows and me, nor with my retelling the stories to Max but has been translated through his gesture to future generations. I imagine it as evidence: how, through it, I might someday become known to them as the ancestor who loved crows.

3

Walking to knowing



Figure 44: *Pilgrim feet in the Indian Ocean, Fremantle, Western Australia 2014*

Walking home



Figure 45: *Pilgrim feet on Tolstrupveien and the pilgrim in tears, Norway, 2008*

The serration of a leaf edge, the rusted grey pitting of the granite overhang, the damp green scent of ferns. A small breeze tickles my shoulder. My senses stirred by the slightest shifts in sensation, I peer at everything, registering each small detail. I am walking down Tolstrupveien Street in Rekkevik, Norway, breathless. Gravel activates the soles of my feet. Warm sunlight bathes the scene in an expectant glow while my heart beats a lifetime of longing. I am on the verge of tears.

Across the street from a row of small, modern houses, a single house, perched into the side of the ledge, calls my attention. It looks older than its neighbours. Charming, magnetic. As I reach it, I notice the mailbox. Magnus Tolstrup, my great-grandfather's name. Did he live here? Did he leave this house and walk this street a last time before sailing to America? Through tears, I look down at my feet to make sure that this is not a dream. I am standing, for the first time in my life, on known ancestral ground [figure 45]. My footfalls echo those of my ancestors.

Landscapes speaking with the voices of ancestors



Figure 46: Sal's mountains, New Mexico, 2008.

I am visiting Sal because he is the only person I know who talks easily about walking with his ancestors. In a canyon near his home, Sal points to a distant mountain and says, "My ancestors lived there until they were driven out by their enemy." Then pointing to another peak he says, "And that's where they lived until the Spanish came."⁴² Listening, I am stunned, almost jealous at the ease with which Sal reveals the depth of his belonging. His words have a rippling effect, like a pebble dropped into a pond; in waves they lap all of the shores of my displacement, from ancestors, from culture, from history, from place. What stories I know of my ancestors are scattered across a succession of places. Many of their names and the places they came from are unknown to me. Compared to Sal's sense of homeplace mine seems thin, a wisp of smoke but I am heartened, remembering Rekkevik. My walk down Tolstrupveien an important beginning (Research notes, New Mexico, October 28, 2008).

42. Sal's ancient ancestors are the Anasazi, who dominated the Southwest region of the United States (parts of present day Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Utah) from AD100 to BC1600. His direct ancestors came to the region during the late 13th century. First contact was made with Spanish Conquistadors in 1541 (Whatley 1993).

Learning to listen for the voice of place

I went to Rekkevik in search of what Sal knows: what it is to walk across a landscape that was known to generations of my ancestors. I wanted to learn its features, to know first-hand its vistas, waterways, woods and fields and to walk the streets my ancestors walked because I *believed* Barbara Bender's claim that landscapes are multi-vocal, that they speak with the voices of



those who inhabit and leave their marks on them (1992, 735). I imagined Sal's landscape as one where the clearest voice emanated from his ancestors and spoke in a language he understood. Its stories were personal. They welcomed and included him.

In contrast to this, I have only known settler landscapes, places that spoke a cacophony of stories, unrelated to me, in a garble of languages I did not understand. They were places, as Barbara Bender notes, that were “tensioned by the contradictory claims [...] made upon them” (1992, 735). As Bender further observes, the depth of connection we experience in specific places can be influenced by whether we recognise that landscape as ancestral. But to this, she notes a danger, one I recognise as situated at the heart of my own alienation: that lacking the “*right* ancestors or the requisite roots” (1992, 738), I am precluded from fully comprehending a landscape's context and meaning and excluded from its power to instil a sense of rootedness and belonging.

Growing up Protestant in post-war American suburbia, I was not trained to listen for the voices of ancestors or the spirits of place emanating from the landscape around me. Rather, raised a “rootless rationalist” (2003, 42) as Peter Read describes, I struggled to hear their whisperings. In those rare instances when something *other* emanated from my surroundings, my first inclination was to resist it; to assume that its call was nothing more than a product of my own desire or imagining. I found it



hard to accept that I was being called to attention by, or invited to converse with the spirits of place because, like Read, “I was taught [...] that there are none” (2003, 21).⁴³ When the inspirited landscape spoke, its voice was barely audible to me.

Yet, despite my habituated resistance I remain enthralled by the idea of a numen-filled, conversant landscape and wish that, like “three quarters of the world’s population [I could] take the inspirited place for granted” (2003, 20). If, as Read argues “I’d been raised as a shaman, a Taoist [...] receptive enough and raised to believe” (2003, 43), I might hear the voice of place as an invitation to belonging. Instead, perhaps because my ear is deafened by the drone of American-Protestant culture, I assume that any voices I hear emanating from place speak messages intended for *Indigenous* recipients; I am, at best, an eavesdropper listening in on a conversation meant for someone else.

I have known rare instances when I experienced a conversant landscape. The first I recall occurred in August 1979 while I hiked the Verde Valley in Northern Arizona. Deep in a sun-parched canyon I discovered a vast array of petroglyphs that broadcasted the presence, the physical exertion and the communicative intent of the people who laboured over the carvings [figure 47].⁴⁴ The human past exuded by the

43. Read asserts that his resistance is a result of his Anglican-Australian upbringing but stresses that similar sentiments and resistances continue to dominate contemporary Australian thinking, particularly in academia. He offers that the response of his tertiary-educated colleagues to his investigations into inspirited places illustrated a deep resistance to the topic of the supernatural/inspirited as the “last great question to be resolutely avoided” (2003, 20). As I explained in the introduction, I experienced a similar resistance from my academic colleagues at my use of the term ‘sacred’, but have found it interesting that this is never an issue, nor does there appear to be any misunderstandings or confusion when I use the term sacred with the Indigenous Australian and Native American elders with whom I have worked.

44. The petroglyphs I viewed were part of the V-Bar-B heritage site, an extensive collection of more than 1000 Sinaguan petroglyphs located in the Verde Valley south of Sedona, (cont)

place had a physicality and specific presence that I had never before experienced. The heat, the red dust, the ringing blows, the stinging sweat, the ache of rock pounding rock all felt accessible and real while seemingly bound to an otherworldly intent that remained elusive to me.



Figure 47: V-bar-V Ranch Heritage Site, 2012, photograph used by permission (Peterson 2012)

Though compelling, the voice of the canyon spoke in a foreign tongue. I had limited knowledge about the people who created the glyphs, and so lacked the means to absorb the implications of their actions and the spirit of their message into my own understandings. Reading the site was like watching a movie, a passive acquisition of the history presented rather than an inclusive engagement in its story. Bourdieu's discussion of *habitus* suggests (1977, 80) that it is the internalised, inherited and transmitted cultural context and values of a community that allows iconography (in this case the glyphs and the impetus that brought about their creation) to impart

Arizona. The glyphs are in the Beaver Creek rock art style and have been dated to between A.D. 1150 and 1400.

meanings that are shared and understood by members of a group. Positioned well apart from the makers' *habitus*, I did not have the requisite knowledge, gained through the transmission of cultural beliefs and practices, to bridge the gap between the experience, intent and mindset of the site's makers and my own. The past of the place was not, as Bourdieu says, "inveterate in [me]" (1977, 79), but rather there stood a gap between the makers' lives and mine, between their intent and my comprehension; a missing text that was more like a lacuna than a palimpsest. There are no recoverable pages from my ancestral past from which I can learn the language of inspirited place.



Walking with ancestors in Rekkevik, Norway, August 2008



On the road to Rekkevik, I see a sign ahead. It shows a man and child, walking together, holding hands. Watching for ancestors, I imagine it is my great-grandfather, Magnus holding my hand, leading me onward. As we walk, he tells me stories about his childhood and shows me where he waited and watched for his father's ship to return to the harbour. I am lulled by the story. Surrendering to the sensation, I allow myself to be led; to be carried along in a current that sweeps from the past to the present, and future. For the moment I relinquish my bravado and resolve. This story of ancestral guidance across a landscape is an invention because I do not recall a real one that might help me find my way along the slopes of my wanderlust or move me beyond restlessness and doubt.

The practice of pilgrimage

Unlike any of my previous travels, the pilgrimage I undertook in 2008 as part of this research was fuelled by a wild mix of longings, suppositions, expectations and ideas and was premised on a transformative intent. I embarked on the journey in search of a goal that Alan Morinis asserts is common to pilgrimage: I was “in quest of a place or state [that embodied] a valued ideal” (1992, 13; see also Coleman and Eade



2004.). The valued ideal I sought was a sense of place-related belonging and I hoped that this would come about through a direct and transformative experience of communion with my ancestors in their native places. I sought an experience I had only ever previously imagined: what it was to encounter a landscape marked by evidence and imbued with the energies of a long lineage of my familial ancestors; and to gain an understanding of how the sacred manifests and is recognised in place. I hoped the journey would change both how I understood the sacred and my sense of place-belonging in the world.

As Morinis states, the essence of pilgrimage is movement, whether through physical or metaphysical realms that propels the pilgrim beyond his or her habitual modes of being into the unknown (Morinis 1992, 20). Though pilgrimage can take different forms and be engaged for a wide variety of sacred and secular purposes, mine took the form known as wandering pilgrimage (Morinis 1992, pg). It was premised on my belief that what lay beyond what I could plan or foresee held the potential for a deeper and more meaningful experience of being; that by surrendering myself to the experience, by suspending my expectations and intentions, relinquishing control of my direction and unfixing my gaze from specific goals, I might be guided to a place, knowing or state of being that would satisfy my cravings (Morinis 1992, 13). Addressing the issues from an anthropological viewpoint, Morinis says that pilgrimages are meant to be transformative experiences and are premised in a faith that what lays beyond the

foreseen holds the potential for a deeper and more meaningful experience of being. They are outward (or inward) journeys that proceed from habitual realms and modes of being through a number of key stages - motivation, setting out, going, arrival, communion and return to new places or ways of being in the world (1992. 20; see also Turnbull 1992; Turner and Turner 1978). Yet, I suggest that pilgrimage is also about the profundity of moments, particularly the moment of impetus, the sense of standing at a precipice in full recognition that the only way forward is to enter into irrational territory and the ecstatic and terrifying experience of stepping off of the edge. It is a moment of quintessential presence – a leap of faith - that sets the tone for what follows and whether the pilgrimage that follows consists of three steps or three thousand, a significant change has already occurred. The going is the goal.

I began my journey with the idea that ancestral places are landscapes dotted with the kind of fixed points expounded by Mircea Eliade. He argues that the sacred manifests as perceivable interruptions or breaks, “fixed points” within the homogeneity of profane space (1987 [1959], 21) and furthers that without such breaks no orientation, whether spatial or philosophical, is possible (1987 [1959], 21). Like Eliade, I began from the premise that sacredness, which for this endeavour I conceived as numinosity, is recognisably distinct from all else. Further, I understood the notion of sacred fixed points as places imbued and resonant with the spirits of my ancestors. My confidence that such fixed points would reveal themselves to me was bolstered by John Preston’s (1992) suggestion that sacred sites exert a kind of “spiritual magnetism” that draws seekers to the source. Further, I was encouraged by Belden Lane’s account of one of his own searches for sacred place in which he reveals that it was only after abandoning his search for an *axis mundi* that it ‘found’ him, sought him out and whispered its existence to him (2002 [1988], 19). I longed to hear a similar whisper but understood that there could be no precise map (either physical or metaphysical) for each journey. If sacred place was to find me, I had to quiet myself and to listen for its call.⁴⁵

45. Though, I adopt the term ‘spiritual magnetism’ from Preston, I do not fully accept his argument that it is not intrinsic to place, but rather is the result of human concepts and values. Rather, like Lane, I understand the magnetism of sacred places as something that

“Every day is a journey and the journey itself is home” Bashō (1998, 3).

Walking with Bashō



Figure 48: Matsuo Bashō, *Kareeda ni karasu* (Kareeda 2011 [1680])

I have been walking for a long time and doubts are starting to creep. My journey begins to feel frivolous, pointless, self-indulgent. I do not know how to move forward without fixing on a goal; do not know how to be where I am without holding a sense of where I will be. My shins ache. A line of knots throb across my shoulders, up my neck. I am tired.

Rounding the bend, I catch sight of an old man. He walks ahead of me slowly, leans on a cane, his gait unhurried. Do I imagine that his posture shows no conflict of desires? I watch as he passes a pine tree. Crows fly out from its branches and head towards me, calling. Hurry. I am enchanted by their conversation, but quicken my pace. I want to catch up with the old man before he descends into the valley ahead, out of my sight. Out of breath, I reach him. It is Bashō on the road north.

emanates in and of itself.

*He greets me as a fellow traveller, as if our journeys are the same. I ask how he remains so at ease when no obvious destination is at hand. He says that uneasiness is as constant as ease, but neither is significant. They are his companions not his master. What matters, he tells me, is the movement between them. Not the roadside inns where we rest, but the paths between them where we walk.*⁴⁶



46. Matsuo Bashō (1644-1694), an acclaimed poet of the Japanese Edo period, was widely recognized as a master of *haiku* and *haikai no renga* or *renku*, a collaborative form of linked verse poetry (Bashō 1996, 1998). At the end of his life, after years of intense self-scrutiny, Bashō spent ten years wandering Japan on a series of pilgrimages. He documented his travels in several prose pieces, most notably, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* which Simon Coleman and John Elsner note is also translatable as *The Narrow Way Within* (1995, 188).

genius haunts
THE PILGRIM'S Footsteps
WHERE uncertainty walks
A Peripheral Geography
AND Hopeful panic awakens
the virtuosity of dilemma

in this mayhem of thoughts
No vacuum of sanctuary
snares the unfinished story

No holy grail blinds
where BEING MAPS a wilderness
of wonder & mystery

Figure 49: Sandra Adams, *The pilgrim's footsteps*, 2011



Figure 50: Entrance to Saint Patrick's Holy Well, Athleague, Ireland, 2008

Saint Patrick's Holy Well, Ireland, 2008

On the road from Roscommon to Sligo, Jim spots a sign to Saint Patrick's Holy Well and says, "Let's go there." I turn onto a side road and drive its length looking for, but not finding any signs of the well. At the far end of the road there is another sign for the well pointed back in the direction we have just come. I turn the car and drive the length of the road again, slower this time, back to where we started but the site still eludes us. Resolute, I turn the car again and drive the road. I begin to say, "Let's park the car and look for the well on foot" when Jim spots the entrance, a barely discernible cut in the stone wall. I wonder if it was always there or if it revealed itself and opened to us only after we proved the seriousness of our intent [figure 50].



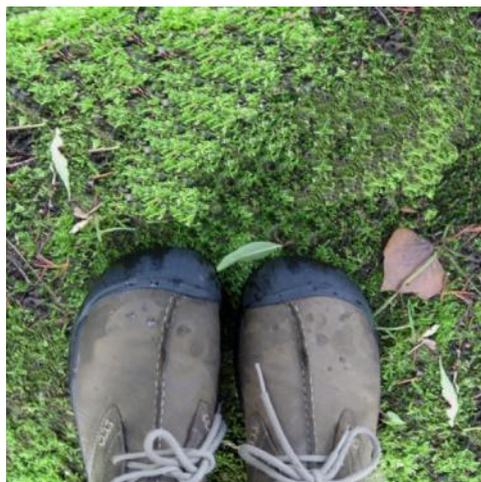
Figure 51: A path through the thicket to Saint Patrick's Holy Well, 2008

Stepping through the cut, we enter a clearing. At the far end, a statue of Saint Patrick stands nestled beneath two huge and ancient yew trees. I explore the surrounds of the statue while Jim follows a path to the right of the clearing that leads into a dense thicket. Saint Patrick feels odd to me, alien, quaint, a gaudy statue amidst a collection of trinkets. I turn away from the icon. Following Jim's path deeper into the woods, I come to a small clearing where an ancient well waits beneath another large, spreading yew tree. Covered in moss and surrounded by a tangle of overgrowth, the well is a quiet and deep place, simmering with magic.



Figure 52: Offerings for our ancestors at Saint Patrick's Holy Well, 2008.

Crouching by the well, Jim asks if we have any food we can use to make offerings for our ancestors. I bring some nuts, dried fruits and a bit of cake and he lays them out in pattern that marks the four directions [figure 52]. Then he begins to sing. First, a traditional Irish lament about the hardships and sorrows of the famine years; and then a Lakota song he has learnt that honours the ancestors and asks them for their guidance.⁴⁷ It is a quiet, impromptu ceremony and, by the end, I am in tears.



47. My cousin Jim Tolstrup joined me during my pilgrimage in Ireland. Of all our family, Jim is most interested in our Irish heritage. He has also been a serious student of Lakota beliefs and traditions since 1977 and since 2006 has served as head of the *Cankatola Ti Ospaye* (flicker clan), a non-Indigenous clan formed at the request of Lakota Elders.

Embodied belongings



I engaged the practice of pilgrimage so as to embody my sense of ancestral belonging. My encounters with ancestral places shifted my settler's sense of old-world connection beyond longing and imagination to one that is visceral and remembered; and served, as Catherine Nash argues⁴⁸ to undo the dissonance between my home, my native place and the places of my ancestry (2003, 179-80). Standing in places my ancestors may have stood, looking at vistas they also may have seen provided me a sense of affinity that went deeper than what I could know from names and dates found in genealogic records (Nash 2003, 188-89). My sense that I was *returning* to the places my ancestors left behind was, as Nash argues, "a process of imaginative repossession" (2003, 188), an overlapping of my experience onto what I imagined was theirs. And my gestures, shifting stones from one place to another, making offerings in place and photographing specific, acute moments of presence were ceremonial in nature, enacted to mark and make real the connections I experienced.

48. Nash's examination focuses particularly on third and fourth generation Irish immigrants to North America, Australia and New Zealand and addresses how the relationships between blood kinship, ancestral place and identity are enacted and reworked through genealogical research, travel to ancestral places and the acquiring of 'new' kin.

Walking with Magnus behind Larvik Kirke



Rounding the corner, I imagine footsteps ahead of me. Behind the church, a rocky path leading downward through a scrub to the coast. Convinced that my footsteps echo those of my ancestors, I am propelled by an acute sensation of what I imagine was the path of their movements. It is as though I am watching a movie; that I am in a movie. I remind myself that it is really me here, doing this, feeling this. I am overwhelmed by a rushing sensation that my great-grandfather Magnus liked this spot and came here often; that he came here especially and for one final time to bid farewell to this harbour and plan his new life in America.

Standing on the rocks at the edge of the shoreline, I experience a new sensation: I am absorbing a mixed DNA of my great-grandfather and stone. As I walk, I imagine my gait following his exact rhythm along the shore. I whisper, "I'm here" in hope that his spirit will carry my greeting to the others so that all of my ancestors will know I am here. The ground seems to whisper stories it has waited to tell me. I pay close attention to the trees, especially the ones so old that they knew my ancestors, heard their stories, watched as they passed by just as I am doing now. Do the trees recognise my ancestry? Do they know I belong here? I look down at the granite beneath my feet. Its ancient hum resonates in me as a harmony.

Walking, wondering, wandering

As an activity that is both embodied and emplaced, walking is complex in the way that it simultaneously engages both inward and outward experiences. While the outer aspect is grounded in the walker's sensory experience of navigating through the physical world, the inner experience comprises the walker's observations, reveries and thoughts. This interaction between the inner and outer experiences instils a

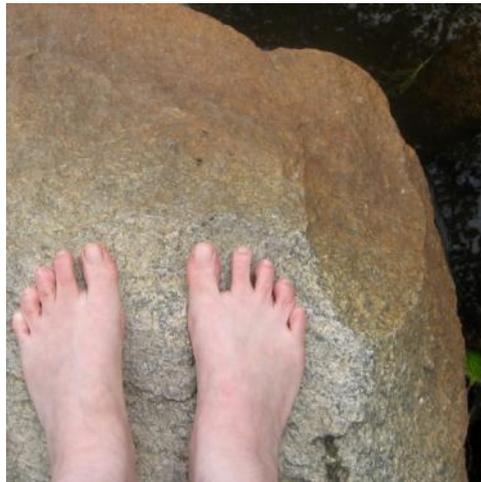


particular quality of directness to thoughts encountered through/while walking (Lee and Ingold 2006, 72). As Tim Ingold suggests, walking engages a form of intelligence that “is not located exclusively in the head but is distributed throughout the entire field of relations comprised by the presence of the human being in the inhabited world” (2004, 332). As the method by which I explored my ancestral landscapes, walking provided me the means by which to meld my outer and inner experiences; to incorporate my familial past and future within a continual sense of the present; and to connect a succession of places into a seamless, uninterrupted flow. Walking is an on-going story.

The underlying continuity inherent in walking, that it begins in one place and flows on to a succession of other places, holds significance for how I came to understand my journeys as part of a longer narrative. As Lee and Ingold argue, the act of walking allows a sense of continuity between places, weaving the “route ahead of us [and the] path around and after us” (Lee and Ingold 2006, 68; see also Ingold 2004). To this, Ben Jacks adds, “[o]n foot everything stays connected” (2004, 5). In the continuous flow of movement, walking occupies both the places where events occur and the spaces and passages that stretch between them. This sense of continuity, enacted as walks across ancestral landscapes, gave substance and physicality to my experience of place and emplacement. Each walk I undertook unveiled moments of unexpected

discovery. Each discovery led indistinguishably to the next like crests on an unending set of waves.

Following even the imagined footsteps of my ancestors provided me the means to walk into and become part of our ancestral narrative; the means by which to combat my sense of alienation and to reconnect to, to literally *ground* myself in, my surroundings. Walking subverted the binaries I held that privileged distinctions between body and mind, here and there and now and then. It allowed moments of recognition in which I felt those distinctions blur; instances of connectedness I experienced as sensing my feet planted firmly on the ground. Each one a deeply substantial experience of being uncharacteristically present in and physically connected to place.



“The thought of some work will run in my head and I am not where my body is – I am out of my senses.” Henry David Thoreau (2010 [1862])

Heels over head



I have often explained my lack of connection to the places I know in terms of how I perceived my position in relation to the ground. I have felt that I am never wholly emplaced but rather I experience a sense of disconnection as if I hovered above the landscape, not quite grounded and never firmly fixed in place. This sense of displacement is a consequence of my thoughts; a matter of mind, not body, an

experiential distinction that, Tim Ingold argues, begins with a specifically western detachment from the ground itself and a disdain for the material environment in which lives are lived (2004, 329).⁴⁹ My thoughts and being were not only distinct but at odds with each other: as Thoreau expressed (above) in his essay *Walking* (2010 [1862], 10), the workings of my mind served to distance me, to pull me out of and away from the actions and experiences of my body.

Walking across ancestral places brought into focus a newly integrated sense of myself, an interplay between and a merging of mind and body, that laid challenge to the idea that knowledge and experience are not only acquired differently, but as well remain as distinct and separate knowings. To this, Ingold states that the idea that there is a separation “between activities of a mind at rest and a body in transit” (2004, 321) is

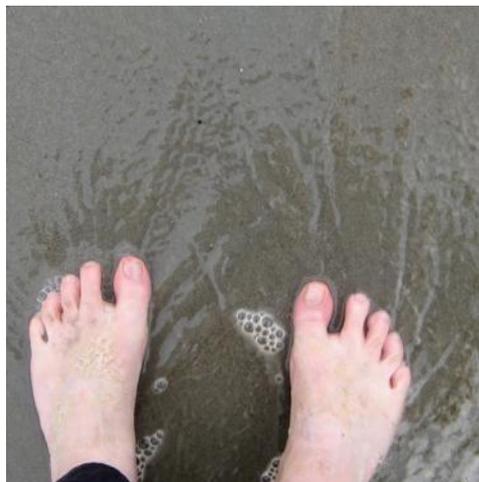
49. Ingold argues that this detachment is furthered by the development of specific technologies: i.e. that “[t]he mechanisation of footwear was part and parcel of a wider suite of changes that accompanied the onset of modernity” (2004, 329). The European preference for heavy soled boots rather than bare feet (and later, their wide-spread use of the chair rather than sitting on the ground) served to separate Europeans from the natural world and marked a change in their perceptions of the landscape as an inclusive supportive environment to one that is alien and adversarial.

imagined and further asserts that our alienation from the physicality of movement across the landscape and the idea that sensate and cognitive knowledges are acquired separately and function independently are not hard truths, but rather are learned, culturally specific notions. Yet, walking has the power to subvert the learned binaries of mind/body, here/there and now/then. As Rebecca Solnit asserts, “[w]alking, ideally, is a state in which the mind, the body and the world are aligned as though they were three characters finally in conversation with each other” (2001, 5). In its ability to incur a sense of holistic engagement through which both inward and outward experiences are merged, walking can be understood as an *intelligent* activity. It engages a form of intelligence that, in being both embodied and emplaced, is not solely situated in the head, but stems from the entire body that Tim Ingold allows is “distributed throughout the entire field of relations comprised by the presence of the human being in the inhabited world” (2004, 332), thus merging disparate parts of the self and relocating sites of knowledge throughout and beyond the mind and body.



Moments of presence

As someone who has spent a good deal of her adult life ‘living in her head’, I have only known rare instances of experiencing the physicality of my self in place. But my pilgrimage brought many such moments which I felt compelled to capture as photographs I have since titled *Feet on the ground*. They mark my recognition of physical connectedness to the surrounding landscape which, for me, was a rare and unfamiliar state of being. These are moments in which I was not, as is my usual mode of being, preoccupied by thoughts and out of my body, nor ‘out of my senses’, but rather I was fully and physically sensate, attuned to my environment. The sense that I was being absorbed into my surroundings was entirely new to me. As Thoreau wrote in *Walden*, I felt “befriended” by my environment and aware of its presence as “something kindred to me” (2008 [1854], 81). In contrast to my usual alienation from my physical surroundings, there seemed no barriers between my physical presence and those of the elements, energies and forces of the world around me. I felt that for the first time I knew what it meant to be saturated by a sense of being present in place.



A pilgrimage to Mosman Park



We are on a pilgrimage to Kate's childhood. I follow, uncertain in this foreign place, while she leads me to the details of her belonging. Unlike Kate, I have no history here. Her attachment to this place - where she was born and raised - always seemed especially rich, grounded and affectionate. That's why we've come. I want to her to show me how this place is loved. What it is to love place.

Along the banks of the Swan River, we walk the trail of Kate's memory, my attention piqued by what comes to hand: memories of diving, hiding, smoking, dreaming, a layering of narratives that make clear how her sense of belonging is bound here.

I follow Kate because I am alien to this environment, deterred from intimate engagement with the Australian wilderness by its alienness. What I think I know is tinged by a sense of alarm: the desert centre, an unrelenting adversary; the waterways filled with murderous crocodiles; the beaches haunted by great white sharks. Kate turns to me, holding out a large brown jellyfish, its body glutinous and glistening, its long tentacles trailing the water. Alarmed, I ask, "Doesn't it hurt?" and she answers, "Only a little." No such jellyfish swam in the North Atlantic waters of my childhood, yet I knew they were creatures whose sting should be avoided. Her nonchalance reminds me of the ease I feel in the wilds of New England - my own childhood place - despite its deadly aspects. I know the difference between wintergreen and baneberry; blueberries and pokeweed. I know where snakes are likely to hide, but also that most of them are entirely harmless. I know that the scent of sweet fern means that I am likely to find blueberries growing nearby. I know the scent of approaching snow and when darkening snow-laden skies give warning that it is time to head for home. I know that moss grows on the north side of trees and can find my direction by the Big Dipper and the North Star.

I do not know where moss grows in the Southern Hemisphere or how to find north in a moss-less desert. I do not know how to find home by following the Southern Cross. Still, as we walk, I relax, trusting Kate will show me what to touch and what to avoid and that she knows her- our - way home.

While Kate leads me deeper and deeper into her sense of this place, I snap photographs and gather souvenirs of our adventure: the detritus of childhood memory – sticks, shells, bits of shiny plastic, feathers – treasures of all kinds. I do not know why I want them but gather them anyway. They feel essential to my understanding; a material reminder of this pilgrim’s adventure (Tuan 1980; Coleman and Elsner 1995).⁵⁰ By day’s end I have pocketfuls of mementos, a wealth of new knowledge and a stockpile of Kate’s stories.



50. see discussion of the meaning of souvenirs and artifacts on pages 119-120.

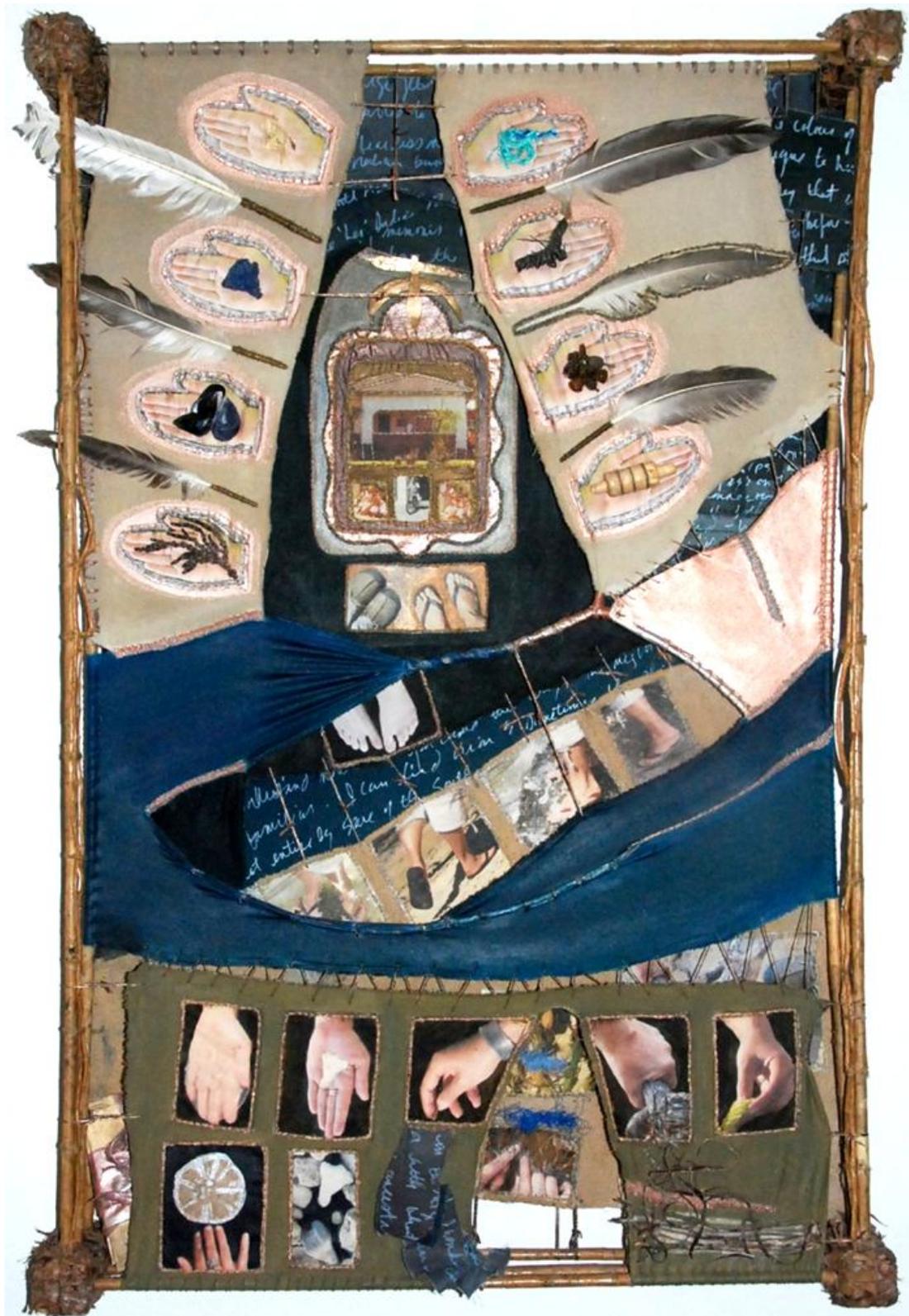


Figure 53: Sandra Adams, *Pilgrimage to Mosman Park: stitching experience to memory, binding memories to place*, 2009



Figure 54: Objects in place, Mosman Park, Western Australia, 2009



Figure 55: Souvenirs of pilgrimage, Fremantle, Western Australia, 2009

The threaded needle's journey

Back in my studio, I sit amongst the bits and pieces I have gathered; each photograph and object evocative of the moment it captures or of its retrieval. I examine them one at a time, group and regroup them by colour, texture, *affect*. I do this to understand what they mean and how they are related. The things act as the focus for recall, a material record of the ephemeral. As Yi-Fu Tuan says, “experience is fleeting, elusive, and chaotic [but can be] captured in a thing” (1980, 466). Each object, a souvenir, holds the memory of a specific pilgrimage moment such that it bridges the time between then and now and forms a link the between the pilgrimage site and home (Bonner 1913). Tuan adds that “artifacts have the power to stabilize life. Transient thoughts and feelings gain permanence [...] in things” (1980, 463) and I recognise in this, my own inclinations to collect souvenirs in the form of natural (and other) detritus from the places where I practice pilgrimage. Coleman and Elsner claim that pilgrimage “is as much about returning home with the souvenirs and narratives of the

pilgrim's adventure" (1995, 6) than it is about the journey itself. Such objects forge links from one place to another and from the pilgrim/traveller, through the journey to the return. I further see Tuan's assertion that "experience is fleeting, elusive, and chaotic [but can be] captured in a thing" (1980, 466) as an apt explanation for my own inclination to collect bits and pieces along my pilgrimage route and for the fact that, for years hence they continue to provide a material/permanent records and trigger acute recollections of specific moments and encounters.





Figure 56: Sandra Adams, *Pilgrimage to Mosman Park: stitching experience to memory, binding memories to place* (detail, centre), 2009

The work I engage is, itself, a pilgrimage: the transformative means through memory to knowledge, my means of binding my new ways of knowing with the old. The process of transformation offered by pilgrimage occurs in the liminal territories of uncertainty and unknowing, the progression though which resembles Lee and Ingold's description of wandering. Their "free-flowing movement...through an unfolding landscape" (2006, 76) demands an unusual level of alert awareness, readiness and flexibility which I recognise as an experience and a landscape I frequently visit through my art practice. Like a pilgrimage, each new work requires that I let go of the safety and comfort of the known in order to move towards an entirely unfathomable and unpredictable open-ended consequence.

I lace canvas onto a frame and begin to stitch an image to its surface. It is a photograph of Kate's family home, where we began and ended our journey, the centre of her belonging. My stitches enshrine the image, make it holy [figure 56]. Each stitch an act of binding experience to memory: the sensations - sights, scents and sounds - of the places where each element was gathered; the feelings of nostalgia, pleasure, sorrow engendered by Kate's stories; the knowledge Kate shared as a bridge across which the foreign became familiar to me.

I stitch as a way to focus my thoughts, to counteract my sense of alienation, as a defence against my own estrangement (Bain 2005; Sturgis 2006; Wilson 2006).⁵¹ Through making I remember how things are connected and so shift my focus from

51. The alienation I experience as an artist in contemporary culture has a number of separate yet interrelated causes. First, is the persistent idea (a holdover from the nineteenth century) that artists are uniquely gifted individuals who, because of their gifts are the disinterested in day to day concerns and practicalities that absorb the attentions of ordinary folk. (Sturgis 2006, 4; Wilson 2006, 7): the true artist is, by nature, a visionary outsider who is able to see through society's illusions and delusions to its fundamental truths, yet the price for this is melancholy, isolation, suffering and non-belonging (Wilson 2006, 7). In her examination of how the work of art is seen as different from 'regular' occupations, Alison Bain notes that separateness is seen as an essential condition (2005, 28) of artistic life and belonging is thought to have a detrimental effect on the clarity of vision and insight required to produce important works. Though the manifestations of an artist's work are understood to benefit society, the working *process* involved is largely misunderstood which adds significantly to the sense of isolation such endeavour creates. Furthering the isolation is the way non-creatives rarely recognise the work of creating as 'real' work, but rather assume that art is the product of talent rather than training or effort (2005, 25).

the objects of memory to the connections between them (Gablik 1991, 7). As I stitch or walk, there can be no mistaking how I am bound to a landscape or a surface. Each step is a stitch. Each stitch is a step. Both are means of actualising my connection through here and across there, across knowings, experience, intentions and memory. They are the methods through which my concentration is not fixed on the realisation of works, but rather on the transformational aspects of making.



I experience all forms of pilgrimage as subversive engagements. Its practice necessitates that I surrender to the liminal to allow myself to become *unfixed*, swept up or along in an expatiating creative *flow*. It is a mode of working that entails, as the poet Rainer Maria Rilke advised, a willingness to “live the questions” (1984 [1929], 34) and to sit comfortably with paradox: that is, as Morris Berman explains, to allow ambiguities to remain unresolved (2000, 16-17).⁵²

While I like the romance of Rilke’s suggestion, I am alerted to our different perspectives on what living the question means. Where Rilke concludes that by living with the questions we might live our way to an answer (1984 [1929] 34-35), suggesting that such practice is a means to an end, I see it as a means to itself, as a way of experiencing a shifted perspective that incurs (for me) new ways of being in the world. Berman’s discussion of how the notion of paradox correlates to a number of theories is more resonant with my own experiences and understandings. Amongst the theories, Berman notes Delueze’s suggestion that creativity occurs on lines of flight

52. In *Wandering God*, Berman argues that humankind’s turn from nomadism to sedentism instigated a change of perception in relation to paradox – from the sense that it is a natural (and welcome) state of being to one in which it is seen as problematic, a condition that needs to be addressed, resisted and, ultimately, overcome.

and “do[es] not begin to live except in the middle” which I understand in relation to the power of the creative process to engage the liminal. Referencing Bataille, Berman insists that answers are not places of autonomy, but rather they are the means through which human autonomy becomes subordinated (2000 191-195). They become the fixed truths that underpin all manner of ‘isms’ and ‘ists’ and though they seem to offer a relief from struggle, they ultimately serve to oppress and inhibit. In this I cannot help but relate to my preference for the idea that my creative works remain forever “finally unfinished” (Duchamp quoted in Paz 1978, 3). The power of my art practice is not inherent in its result, the objects produced, or the spark of inspiration that preceded the creative act, but in the passages between inception and conclusion and in the collaborative relations engaged between the medium, the place, the context, the numen and me. It is located in the liminal space of unbounded possibility.

In relationship to rituals of passage, Turner argued that liminality is a key phase characterised as the place between ceasing to be and becoming; of being in suspension, attuned to and integrated in the moment. As it relates to the process of ritual, liminality is the place where transformation occurs (Turner 1969; van Gennep 1960 [1919]). Contemporary understandings of liminality are largely drawn from the work of Arnold van Gennep (1960 [1909]) and Victor Turner (1969) both of whom conceived liminality as a passage (based on the Latin word *liminalis* meaning ‘threshold’) and explored the concept as an essential stage in ritual processes of becoming. The word first appeared in this context in Van Gennep’s seminal work, *The Rites of Passage* (1960 [1909]), to define the mid-point in coming of age and other initiatory rites, the period of ambiguity between what the initiate was and what he or she becomes. Furthering Van Gennep’s concept, Turner determined that the liminal phase contains a number of sub-stages that include the pivotal moments of ceasing to be and of becoming but also incur an in-between, amorphous *expanse* of time and experience that is characterised by profound *potential* and during which the initiate is unclassifiable – neither this, nor that. It is the neither/nor stage that inspires my engagement with the practice of pilgrimage, but more, I am inspired by Edith Turner’s assertion that pilgrimage is “a kinetic ritual” (1978, xiii), particularly as this

privileges movement, not arrival, as the ground of transformation. This is reminiscent of the practice of moving meditation which utilises familiar motions such as walking so as to step the practitioners away from their habitual limitations and shift their perceptions (Perez-De-Albeniz and Holmes 2000). I have come to understand all endeavours of my art practice as pilgrimages that I undertake so as to unloose myself from the constraints of arrival, to transcend boundaries of difference and to make my way through a disenchanted world (Gablik 1991; Morgan 2009, 16).

As an experience that is both pivotal and profound, liminality defines an amorphous expanse of experience that lies *between and around* static states of being - of wandering lost, between here and there, as neither this nor that. It is a place of awareness, readiness and flexibility where boundaries drop away and any outcome is possible. Liminality is the passage within which transformation occurs.



The points between



Figure 57: *Blank canvas*, studio Vadim Vosters, 2011, photograph used by permission (Eechaut 2011)

“There are no blank spots on the map anymore. You want a blank spot, you leave the map behind.” Jon Krakauer (Berlinger 2007)



Figure 58: My first childhood home, Beverly, Massachusetts. The window, just visible on the second floor, was in my bedroom. Photograph taken by David de la Barre and used by permission

Sitting in a car with Berman and Bhabha

Sitting in a rental car, across the street from my first childhood home, I am surprised to realise that I feel entirely alien [figure 58]. I cannot see, but sense, or maybe I imagine, suspicious eyes peering out from behind closed curtains. The street is lined with silent houses, pretty enough but closed and airless. Locked doors. Shuttered windows. No children ride their bicycles up and down the street. Neighbours do not sit on the front steps gossiping and drinking coffee. This is not the neighbourhood I remember. There is nothing but silence. My presence here is an act of transgression.

I would like to knock on the door, not the front door, not as a guest, but the door at the side, the one for family. It leads into the kitchen. I would like to walk through the kitchen and up the steep stairs, and turning right at the top, to enter my old bedroom. I remember that it was pink. There was no other choice in 1959 for a six-year-old, middle-class American girl like me living in Beverly, Massachusetts.

I look up at my bedroom window and remember lying in bed at night, wakeful, on edge. From across the landing, the watchful eyes of my sister's favourite doll, illuminated by

light reflected from the lamp in the hall, stared at me until I fell into uneasy sleep. Suburban nights filled with disapproval. Menace. I think of Morris Berman (2000) and realise that I had every reason to feel ill-at-ease. The world of this neighbourhood is, and I think now always was, populated by capital ‘T’ truths, answers to every question, particularly the big ones: what is the meaning of life? Who is God? How do I fit his vision and his plan? What does it mean to be a good citizen, a good little girl? I feel suddenly grateful to have left here, grateful that in leaving I began to learn, as Berman describes, to recognise the power and freedom inherent in movement, change, paradox (2000, 220); in all that is unfixd. I imagine Morris Berman smiling at me. “Yes” he says, “now you’re on to something.”



Berman’s argument, a big claim, is that the western privileging of that which is fixed over that which is in motion is not only unnatural, but dulling and serves to inhibit and limit human experience. I recognise now that such privileging has undermined my own experience; the joys of leaving, the potentials of process; the inherent gifts of disruption, discoveries made from within the unexpected, unscripted, unmapped and unknown. Arguing that nomadism is humankind’s natural mode of being, a state of being he describes as an acute and attuned awareness of one’s relation to the natural environment, Berman says that the turn to sedentism resulted in boredom and a sense of dislocation and alienation. My life lived in middle-class suburbs.

Here, Homi Bhabha joins the conversation. “Unpacking [his] library again”, he remarks that transition offers him relief from the “mild boredom of order” (1995, 5) and notes a tension in the transition. Disorder to order. Order to disorder. I recognise that tension, the dual pulls of fixity and freedom, but now understand it differently. It is thrilling to stand at the threshold of possibility. In transition, I am jolted from my boredom. It is only when my day-to-day habits are disrupted and I am free to move across spaces and through phases that the perimeters circling my life’s possibilities find room to expand. It is from within transition that I feel my soul breathe.





Figure 59: Sandra Adams, *I once was found but now am lost*, 2010

Lost in the blank spaces

In Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the protagonist Marlow says:

When I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all look that) I would put my finger on it and say, "When I grow up I will go there" (1989, 22).

When I was a girl, I did the same thing. I looked at maps and imagined adventure but with a difference: I could never quite imagine myself as a real-life explorer, confidently navigating the blank spaces of the world. My craving for exploration and adventure was complicated by the conflicted messages of 1960s white, middleclass American culture. Its primary drone was that what made America great was the intrepid, pioneering spirit of its people, past and present, who founded a new world, tamed a wilderness and were poised to conquer space. Our heroes did not simply wander the blank spaces they named, mapped, claimed and tamed the unknown wilds of the world.



The legacy left by America's pioneering heroes also held a challenge. Their adventuresome spirit was not a thing of the past, but a model to which I was meant to adhere. To reach my fullest potential, I had to be willing, like all pioneers before me, to cast myself beyond the borders of the safe and familiar. Beneath Neil Armstrong's "giant leap for mankind" (July n.d.), I could hear the echoes of my Pilgrim *forefathers* stepping onto Plymouth Rock but their tread was so deafening, it obscured the footfalls of my Pilgrim *foremothers*.

No women populated the list of great American heroes whose stories I learned one after the next in school. No epic adventure was told that had a woman as its central character. Our heroes were invariably white European or Euro-American men⁵³ and this caused me an unconscious alienation from my own pioneering spirit and love of adventure. The absence of feminine exemplars from the list of American heroes left me suspicious that my own yearning for adventure was somehow unnatural. It left me at war with myself and with little reason to believe that I, like Marlowe, would ever be capable of negotiating my way through the world's blank spaces.

The conflict between my longing for exploration and the cultural limitations imposed on me due to my gender forced me to reimage where and how blank spaces are encountered and to adopt subversive means of negotiating the unknown. I now recognise the gap between how I wanted to navigate through the world and the lack

53. The list of American heroes began with the European explorers who 'discovered' the Americas including Leif Erikson (Viking, 11th century), Ferdinand Magellan (Portuguese, 15th century) Christopher Columbus (Italian, 15/16th Century), Sir Francis Drake (British, 16th century), Hernán Cortés (Spanish, 16th century); and again with the explorers who 'tamed' the American continent including Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett (American, 19th century); and culminated with the astronauts who first landed on the moon - Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin (American, 20th century).

of adventuresome female archetypes or role models as the first of the blank spaces I was forced to navigate. It is a blank space I re-enter every time I attempt to ford the swirling rush of cross-currents made up of familial, societal and institutional, gender-based constructs - about who I am, where I am placed and what are the values and limits of my abilities - that stand between me and the vision I hold of myself.

My ability, like that of many women, to stay the course of my own life while remaining responsive to the opportunities, exigencies and *appeals* that present themselves along the way, exemplifies what cultural anthropologist Mary Catherine Bateson refers to as an “improvisational art” (1989, 3). She argues that the lack of role models that acknowledge and are capable of containing the complexities of women’s lives has forced women to “rethink [...] the concept of achievement” (Bateson 1989, 5) such that it is not the single-mindedness of our ambitions – or our ability to conform to or rebel against the paradigm - but our willingness to navigate the blank spaces between what is said about us and who we know ourselves to be. How we navigate the blank spaces between what we are told we cannot do and that which we suspect, imagine, or know we are capable.

Unlike Marlowe’s approach to the blank spaces, mine, though determined, is sometimes apologetic, often conflicted, and almost always terror-laden because I walk beyond archetypes without a guide.

Finding myself lost



Despite my lack of adventuresome outlets, the allure of the blank spaces never left me and it is this precise engagement that thrills me most about making art. Each work begins as a blank space and the process of creation is one within which I often find myself wandering, deliciously lost. The more unfamiliar the territory and the more lost I become, the more satisfying the experience.

As Rebecca Solnit explains the word 'lost' derives from the Old Norse *los* meaning the disbanding of an army (2005, 7). I understand this - especially in relation to my art practice - to mean that it is only through letting go of what I think I know, the 'disbanding of my armies', that I can ever hope to go beyond the limits imposed on me and also the ones I place on myself. Yet, contrary to Solnit's further suggestion that artists engage their practices so as to discover that which is as yet unfound (2005, 5), I engage my practice as a means of becoming lost.

Lost in Academia

During much of 2010, while I was engaged in this research, the Art Department at Curtin University was physically cut off from the rest of the university campus due to the construction of a new building. Large chain-link fences blocked the normal pathways that led from the main campus so that students and staff were forced to walk a bewildering labyrinth of often muddy dirt tracks and to make their way through a gap in a large hedge in order to gain entrance to the art area. Access was finally gained through a self-closing, unmarked exit door, blocked permanently open with a brick, in one of the buildings and a long final walk down a darkened hallway. No signs marked the way over these paths or through the hedge. No sign acknowledged that this was, indeed, the Art Department door. Neither was there any

sign of welcome or orientation once entry to the art area was gained nor signs that apologised for any inconvenience, disorientation or alienation suffered.



The situation served as an apt metaphor for how the study of Art seems always to occupy a strange (and estranged) position within most universities and how art students are often seen as outsiders to the core research community. Despite the relatively recent inclusion of degree programs that privilege practice-based research (Elkins 2009), there persists a debate as to whether or not artists know things differently from other researchers and whether that knowledge is similarly valid and valuable. James Elkins states that the relationship between studio art departments and other university departments is generally vexed, under theorised and unresolved and argues that while theory is coherently addressed and articulated across most disciplines –as discussion, knowledge, research, and method – it is distorted in its application to studio art (2009, 111; see also Holert’s (2009) discussion regarding what knowledge is and how research is situated, politicised and contained by the university systems and extended to incorporate practice-based research; and Jones 2009). Art still sits to one side of the field of scholarly inquiry as if it were entirely something else.

Within art institutions, female artists are often further marginalised, as my own experience attests. During my Master of Fine Arts studies,⁵⁴ my work prompted one of my (male) professors to remark in apparent appreciation, “not bad for a girl”. I was (and have been) continually challenged to articulate how my work intersects with feminist thought, art and tradition; and invited numerous times to participate in ‘women’s only’ art exhibitions. I have resisted the classification because I understood

54. I was enrolled in Master of Fine Arts degree studies at the University of Arizona in Tucson from 1979 -1981 and was awarded an MFA degree in 1981.

this assumption of difference art/women's art as a trap: a presumption of its underlying meanings, experiences and intents that limited how I and others understood the meaning of my work (Pollock 1987, 1999). As Griselda Pollock argues, there is little if any Art Historical gender-reference made in relation to *male* artists or male art, its use in relation to female artists and their work is marginalising and furthers the idea of



women artists as other and as secondary to their male counterparts. She notes that, the feminine, as a structuring category in the discourses of Art History is a “foil against which a never-acknowledged masculine privilege can be maintained” (1987, 3). Moreover, women's art, when classified as such, is understood one-dimensionally, as a product of “a single, sex-derived attribute – femininity” (1987, 3). The use of the term implies not only that there is a difference, but that “we know what that difference is” (Pollock 1999, 33). The lack of complexity suggested by this has devastating effect – not simply in terms of how women's art is viewed, but also in relation to how women artists understand their own work and experience their own practices. Yet as limiting and alienating as such imposed categorisations of my art practice might have been, they prompted me to think of my relationship to the field art and how I see myself as an artist.

Similarly, my intention to make art that addresses sacred content and as a form of sacred engagement is added to the list of hurdles my art practice must vault in order to find its place as a contemporary practice in the university/art institutional context. James Elkins' claim that contemporary art and religion do not mix and that “[w]herever the two meet, one wrecks the other” (2004) is generally reflective of the present institutional stance which stems from a particular, western-secular perspective about a specific characterisation of art: those objects chosen by the art

institution to grace the walls of museums and galleries of contemporary art.⁵⁵ According to Elkins, the institution's demand that art be "committed, engaged, ambitious, [and] informed" is incompatible with the "dedicated, serious, thoughtful, heartfelt" expression of religious (spiritual/sacred) sensibilities (2004, 115). The art that is most privileged by the institution is critical, doubtful and reflects the wider, pervasive disenchantment, alienation, damage and spiritual ennui of contemporary culture. It is an idea that is bound to the idea that art is the critical expression of the avant-guard, though, as David Morgan argues, "the avant-guard is no longer a compelling reality...the symbolic capital of the idea has not deflated" (2009, 17). The idea that artists serve as critical opponents of bourgeois, middle-class authority, particularly the church and state, and stand at the forefront of change continues to have purchase as regards how artists view themselves and their place in society. As such, works that express spiritual or religious devotion are seen to be "at peace with the enemy" (2009, 17) and represent the failure of the artist to see beyond the confines of institutional authority. These same sensibilities are encouraged and perpetuated in countless studio art programs in universities world-wide whose job it seems is to not necessarily to make artists but rather to prepare art students to succeed in the art field. Yet, I cannot locate my practice or my sense of myself as an artist in this discussion. Its focus is entirely fixed on the *products* of artistic practice. There is – or can be – a vast difference between works that are motivated by spiritual intent and practices that are driven by spiritual necessity: that art practice, in and of itself, is a form of spiritual engagement.

I understand Elkins' edict as one more stipulation in the list of art-world 'thou shalt nots' - *Thou shalt not make 21st century sacred art* - and, if I let them, his words might wound me and deflate my sense of myself as an artist. They could leave me winded like when, at age nine, I caught my foot on the top rail of a fence while trying to leap from the confines of our backyard to the neighbourhood beyond and fell knocking the

55. This is distilled from the definition of art crafted by Elkins for the sake of his argument that "art is whatever is exhibited in galleries major cities, bought by museums of contemporary art, shown in biennales and the Documenta and is written about in periodicals such as *Artforum*, *October*, *Flash Art*, *Parkett* or *Tema Celeste*." (2004, 1) This includes all forms of manifested, performed or exhibited works.

wind from myself. It did not occur to me then, but it matters now that I fell beyond, not inside the fence. This is how I see my current creative *and* spiritual practices; they are the means by which I hurtle myself well past what I know and across and beyond what any institution tells me I should want to know. Ultimately, as with my attempt to leap the fence that kept me inside our yard, it is the escape that matters.



Linda Nochlin suggests that displacement can be a productive place from which to generate work (1996, 318). Exploring the situation of artists in exile, she notes that the situation of being alien or marginalised often leads to new ways of seeing and experiencing the self, the jettisoning of old, outmoded ways of being and the creation of new, more authentic ways of working. My senses of dislocation led me to re-write myself as artist and to find the strength, validity and authenticity of my art practice from outside the contexts and theories defined by the art establishment. I choose not to find a place within the binaries imposed between artist/female artist, painter/sculptor, knowledge/practice, and artist/seeker rather I allow all aspects of my art practice and artistic identity to hover, as Anne-Marie Priest describes, “in the ineffable ‘space’ between an assertion and its negation” (2003, 5).

Drawing on the work of Luce Irigaray, Priest argues that ‘woman’, like ‘God’ is a concept that cannot be adequately contained by the language of binaries because it is an unknowable category and unrepresentable as a distinction from something else. To have meaning, the term ‘woman’ must indicate everything known, applied to and/or inhabited by *all* women, including me. We are neither self nor other but rather an amalgam of both; something other, something more than what is described. In this idea I also recognise the underpinnings of my relationship to my creative practice. I have left it to others to debate the validity and parameters of my artistic place, while I

pursue my practice through its blank spaces, away from confining influences and across the borders of otherness. It is here that my creative practice allows me to know a sense of wholeness, clarity and integration and to begin to engage with the sacred *other*.

Bartleby and me

I first read Herman Melville's short story *Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street* (2007 [1853]) when I was eighteen and ever since have identified with its title character. The story told through the voice of a narrator documents Bartleby's increasing refusal to perform the professional tasks required of him (ultimately failing to perform the personal tasks required to live) and the effects of this refusal on his associates. Bartleby is cast as a tragic, melancholic figure, an outcast whose way of being in the world is so disconnected from the social norm that it disrupts the equilibrium of everyone around him. Bartleby's resistance is absolute, unapologetic and unmovable:

"Bartleby! quick, I am waiting."

[...] "I would prefer not to," he said, and gently disappeared behind the screen.

[...] Recovering myself, I advanced towards the screen, and demanded the reason for such extraordinary conduct. "Why do you refuse?"

"I would prefer not to."

[...] I began to reason with him [...] It is common usage. Every copyist is bound to help examine his copy. Is it not so? Will you not speak? Answer!"

"I prefer not to," he replied in a flute-like tone [...]

"You are decided, then, not to comply with my request—a request made according to common usage and common sense?"

..."I would prefer not to."

"You *will* not?"

"I *prefer* not."

(Melville 2007 [1853], 12-16)

Though Bartleby's refusal is often interpreted as a self-negating act, a manifestation of his alienation and depression (see Beverungen and Dunne 2007; Hans 1995; Pinchevski 2011; Stempel and Stillians 1972), I interpret it differently. I read Bartleby's refusals as an indication of a level of subversive, self-awareness to which I can relate. Robin West (1996) likens Bartleby's otherisation to that of the modern-day housewife: both Bartleby and the housewife recognise the arbitrariness of the demands made upon them and know that these demands are the product of a system and world-view that are designed to keep them locked into place. I have further interpreted Bartleby's response as an indication that he understands the futility of engaging in a debate over whether his refusal (to conform to the protocols of the social norm) is reasonable and that such debate perpetuates his enslavement to a worldview he does not share.

Bartleby's simple refusal seems the most self-affirming and productive response possible and it is one to which I feel a strong affinity. Like Bartleby, I have been expected to adhere to protocols and inhabit roles that seem similarly arbitrary, constraining and delimiting. My attempts to argue my position have only served to keep me locked in a never-ending battle for my rights. When told that I should curb my curiosity, resist my longing for the bank spaces or conform to societal dictates about the limitations of my age, my position or my gender, I believe that my best response, like Bartleby's, is a firm and resolute "I prefer not to": to ignore that which confines my practice, the series of descriptors I refer to as the 'isms' and 'ists',⁵⁶ and to let it lead me beyond what I know of myself.

57. In *Wandering God*, Morris Berman quotes the writings of Spanish priest, Jose Maria Arizmendiarieta, that "Isms imprison and oppress us. To live is to renew one's self" (2000, 236).

I prefer not to



Like many women makers before me, I responded to the confines and hurdles of the art institution by “developing alternate areas of art practice” (Parker 2010 [1984], 120). To all demands that my art conform to contexts that are incongruent to my intents and experiences, my response has been, “I prefer not to.” This defines a stance that accounts for the ways that I have situated, or more precisely *resisted* situating my art practice.

As evinced in this research, I choose to work across many forms of practice. This affords me the freedom of scope to address the ideas and gain the experiences that impel me to work. The results here have included stone carving, walking, various forms of needlework, graphics, digital art, conceptual practice, storytelling and poetry. I have never been wedded to one form or the other but prefer to move across practices as the work dictates.

It has always been so, though I had to learn to become comfortably lost between classifications. I earned Bachelors and Masters Degrees in painting, for which, both times, I produced sculpture. My designation as painting student was a nomination imposed on me by the Universities where I studied, not how I saw myself, nor was it an indication of the work I produced. I am neither a painter nor a sculptor. Rather, I am an artist who prefers not to map my artistic course, nor to orient myself through a fixed alignment to specific forms, movements, histories and contexts.

Given the freedom of exploration (across forms and through mediums), my art practice allows me to engage and explore questions that spring from a variety of discourses and I have come to understand that my resistance to the idea of locking my art practice to a particular ideology; or consigning my efforts to the perfection of a specific form; or aligning my efforts with those of the art community is a statement of

my position. I prefer not to be entangled, as Judith Butler prompts, in the “ontological thickets and epistemological quandaries” (2004, 16) posed by questions about how my work and practice relates to the field of Feminist Art and other contemporary movements. My sense is that such questions hold an oppressive edge and threaten to engulf both my gender and my art. Rather than encouraging me to see beyond the borders of my own experience and imagination, such labels force me to fix my gaze on one of the bars of my societally imposed cage. I understand its constrictive feel in relation to Marilyn Frye’s (2000) deconstruction of the word ‘oppression’ which, she notes, contains the word ‘press’. As Frye says, presses are used to flatten and mould things and to be pressed is to be “caught between or among forces and barriers”, restrained, restricted immobilized, reduced (2000, 11). Thus, such labels work in opposition to the sense of expansive, unbounded experience I seek through my practice.





Figure 61: Phrases form

Each phrase surprises and reminds me. It is not my place to control this process, to move the work towards a prescribed outcome. There are limits to what I know. Deeper meaning can only reveal itself if I do not get in the way.

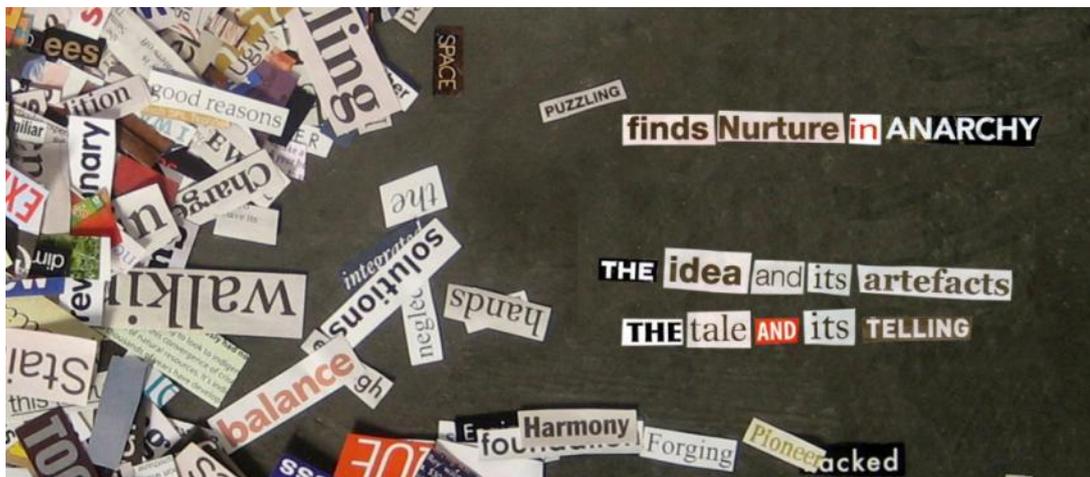


Figure 62: Stanzas build

Stanzas build in attitude and rhythm. The words I have painstakingly cut and collected now speak in their own language (not mine). I grow impatient for hints about their unfolding message. Whose words are these? Will the story they tell be lyrical or sharp; angry, hurt, reverent, joyful? I wait, listening, lost in the moment between the tale and its telling for the message I hope will come.

here **BELOW** everything
THE MUSIC of **SPHERES**
spreads **AN** Unconscious euphoria
No weathered rhapsody
this Native tune
awakens a **journey** of dreams
from within its own dreaming

An ephemeral harmony
this Music of risk
finds Nurture in **ANARCHY**
AND A sense of place
in The movement **BETWEEN**
THE idea and its artefacts
THE tale **AND** its **TELLING**

Figure 63: Sandra Adams, *Between the tale and its telling*, 2011

Refusing redemption

Immersed in the work of stitching feathers to leather [figure 64], I imagine myself a colonial girl chafing at the restrictions imposed on me by virtue of my gender: I cannot read, nor study, nor roam the woodlands but am required to tend to domestic duties none of which, but one, suits my disposition. I take secret pleasure in my needlework, the only place I can be alone with my dreams, but am devilled by an urge to embellish my samplers with the strange designs I have seen on the Mi'kmaq trade goods that make their way to our village. The objects are a collision of Native artistry and European industry; quillwork baskets, conical beaded hats and wampum belts of intricately woven quahog shell beads rest amongst the Colonial samplers and embroidered pouches.⁵⁷ Their strangeness seems to promise adventure; a journey beyond the borders of town or encampment to where knowledges collide and differences diffuse; a place where I might talk with the Mi'kmaq girls who wander the woods.⁵⁸

57. Quillwork and wampum belts are traditional crafts that were well established by the time of European contact. Venetian glass seed beads, first brought to North America by Christopher Columbus in 1492, quickly became a highly prized trade good and were readily incorporated into the embroidery techniques used for quillwork and the weaving developed in the production of wampum. (Crabtree and Stallebrass 2009)

58. It is difficult at this time to unravel the realities of women's lives in Mi'kmaq society as most accounts of their roles and experience come from what Gail Kelly describes as an "imperialist, capitalist, nationalist, patriarchal" (2000, 3) framework. According to Georges E. Sioui, Coordinator of the Aboriginal Studies Program, at the University of Ottawa, the Mi'kmaq social structure was patrilineal, but their worldview was matriarchal and women held a central place in both the spiritual life of the society and its everyday activities (Sioui 2003). The Nova Scotia government archives outlines the differing gender roles as follows: men hunted and fished, made weapons, fish-traps, snowshoes, cradle boards and tobacco pipes, learned how to prepare food, make clothing and construct shelter. Women and girls transported game and water to the camps, cared for the children, made birch-bark dishes, wove mats, made clothing and corded snowshoes, prepared and preserved food, and set up the wigwams (Family n.d.).



Figure 64: Sandra Adams, *Ancestor Beadwork Panel 3*, 2012

I could be that girl, thrilled by the richness and promise of unfamiliar symbols. Like a bowerbird stealing bright blue bits and pieces with which to feather its nest, I gathered inspiration from whatever catches my eye, draw to things that are unfamiliar.

Or I might be Eunice Williams who, in the winter of 1704, was captured along with most of her family during a French and Iroquois raid on the town of Deerfield, Massachusetts. For weeks the captives were marched north from Massachusetts through Vermont to Québec and those who could not keep pace, including Eunice's mother, were killed by their captors. The surviving captives met a variety of fates. Some were adopted into tribes, others were held as slaves, while others were 'redeemed', a religiously loaded term that simply meant that their release was negotiated through official channels and they were allowed to return to their English Protestant communities.

All of the surviving members of the Williams family, except Eunice, were redeemed "out of the hands of the heathen" (Demos 1994, 35).⁵⁹ Only Eunice remained in captivity, lost to her family, as an adoptee in the Mohawk settlement, Kahnawake, a community historian John Demos describes as "Mohawk, Iroquois, Indian, in ascending order of generality; Christian, to a degree; French, in a limited sense; 'brethren' to some, allies of others, and, of course, enemies of still others" (1994, 120). A place where borders and differences were bridged and blurred, where Eunice was adopted as a beloved member of a Mohawk family, converted to Catholicism and later married a Mohawk man.

Over many years Eunice's father, the Reverend Williams, made repeated attempts to secure his daughter's release, but was unsuccessful. It was not, as assumed, that her captor-family refused to release her but that Eunice herself refused to leave her Kahnawake family. Though Eunice's father considered her lost, she was not lost but rather as Rebecca Solnit suggests, had found "a kind of resilience of the psyche, a

59. John Demos' *The Unredeemed Captive* (1994) delves many of the complexities of Eunice's story, but focuses on the various factors that may have influenced her choice not to return to her family of origin, particularly on the stark differences in worldview and lifestyle that separated English colonial and Native American culture in the early eighteenth century.

readiness to deal with what comes next” (2005, 80) that allowed her to be not this or that, but to find her place across borders of difference.⁶⁰

The needle pricks my finger and I am snatched from my daydream back to the present. I could easily be a colonial girl stitching wool across a sampler or a captive learning to stitch beads and quills into leather. I might, like Eunice, learn to live unattached in a world that is unsettled. I might also refuse redemption.

60. In *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* (2005), Rebecca Solnit cites Eunice as just one example of people who, having been lost to one culture find an expanded sense of self in the spaces outside of or between cultures.

Mapping the liminal

Aware of how I am poised between the past and the future, I hand Max the map I made to plot the birthplaces of our forebears [figure 65]. Its practical purpose is to help him determine the placement of ancestor stones across our virtual landscape, but its deeper meaning is what excites me. A 21st century, digital-age version of geneonymy, this naming of ancestors gives each one of them a substantive presence using the tools and languages Max understands. It is my tentative attempt to implement a practice, that of naming and honouring the spirits of our lineage of human ancestors (see Forte 1976; Zerubavel 2011), that was neither part of my – nor Max’s - upbringing.

In making the map, *for* my (sole) descendant and *of* my forebears, I am alerted to a new sense of my own position. I occupy the space between generations, an exponentially expanding sense of connectedness: the pivot point between the people and places that make up our lineage and forward into the generations stretched into the future; those who follow me, my son his progeny, their progeny.

But I am also mindful of how Max’s and my combined efforts position us in relation to the stones in the landscape; how we are fixing the stones in place but must not fix the way they are experienced. We are crafting an open-ended landscape, with no set paths or goals, but know that by dotting the landscape with virtual petroglyphs I am once again addressing the order and chaos described by Eliade; disrupting the homogeneity of profane space by creating fixed points of orientation within it (1987 [1959], 21). Every instinct compels me to resist concretising this essential and hierarchal distinction: the transitory from the fixed, the sacred from the profane but I am cautioned by Edward Casey’s claim that wanderers “cannot wander amid nothing [that] to wander is to roam *between* places of some kind” (1997, 8). I want the landscape we build to mitigate and reconcile the tension between these ideas; a place to wander without fixed destination.

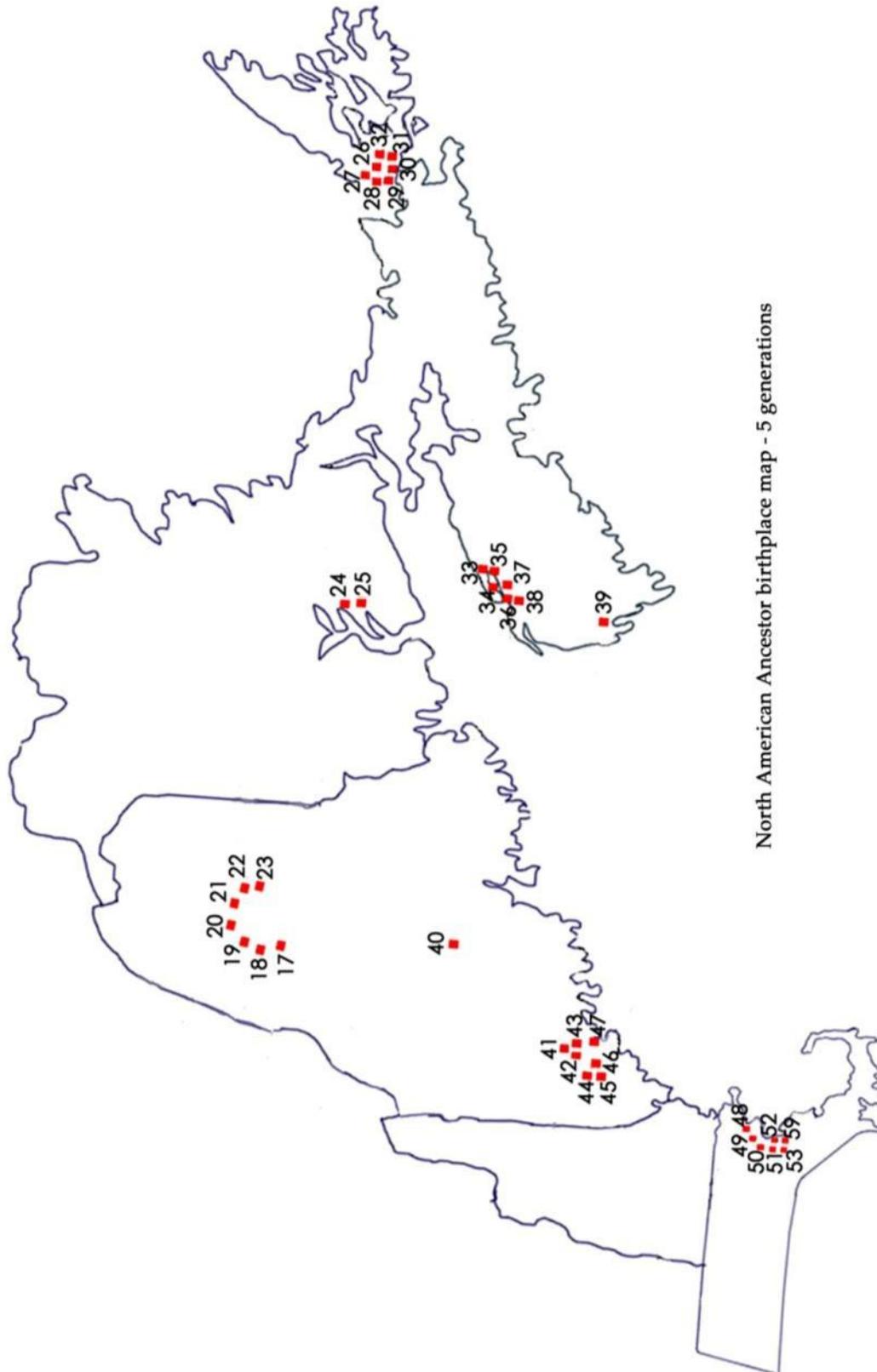


Figure 65: Mapping the stones for the virtual pilgrimage, 2010-2011. During our work together, I made a series of maps for my son Max to plot the placement of ancestor stones in the virtual landscape. This map shows the birthplaces of all of our known ancestors who were born in North America.

Though we mark faint paths through virtual grasslands, not all lead clearly from one stone to the next. We do not set specific start and finish lines, or mark directions, neither do we program a set or succession of goals. Each virtual wanderer can move as they like seeking ancestor stones, exploring the parameters of the landscape or following an unscripted course across the virtual world we are making. Or, like Matsuo Bashō, they might think of this pilgrimage as a perpetual engagement, a means of inhabiting the experience of impermanence.⁶¹ The stones we dot across our virtual landscape, like the traveller's inns where Bashō stayed, provide momentary places of stasis, but also articulate transience. Seen in succession, each stone and each overnight stay in turn represents both the destination of one journey and the beginning of the next. Thus, the "destination is [also] a place of departure" (Casey 1993, 282), a duality that marks how each occupies both a fixed and a liminal place. Because the stones are conceived as a continuum, one stone to the next, the scattering of stones requires movement on the part of the wanderer, a progression across the distances between them, (Casey 1993, 280). No particular stone is privileged, no set path or order between them is devised and there is no clear moment to mark each journey's completion; the arrival at one stone also marks the beginning of the next journey onward [figure 66].

61. Impermanence, or *mujo*, is one of the three essential doctrines of Buddhism. The lesson inherent in the doctrine is that because conditioned phenomena are impermanent, attachment to them causes suffering. Explaining Bashō's practice of pilgrimage, Casey writes that "[f]or an adherent of *mujo*, such as Basho, not to keep moving on [...], is to risk being bound to a false and delimited ego-self that is the personal expression of being stuck-in-place" (1993, 308).

"It is not down in any map; true places never are." Herman Melville (2003 [1851]).



Figure 66: Max Frankel and Sandra Adams, *Virtual Pilgrimage* (screenshot, petroglyphs and paths), 2011

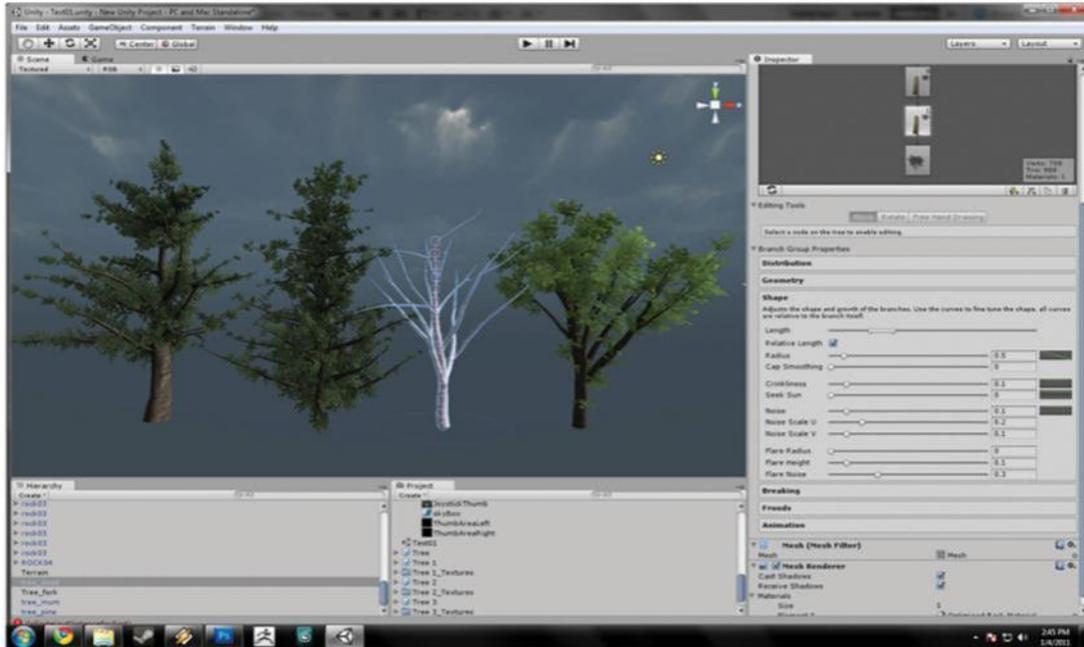


Figure 67: Crafting virtual trees, 2011

Bittersweet memories

Max and I are working together to build trees for our virtual forest. As we craft each tree, we confer over their shapes, size and texture and the palette of colours that make them feel familiar. While we work, we talk about the New England woodlands we have both known all of our lives and admit to each other that our preference is for the shape and texture of the trees that grow there, the feathery maples, tall oaks, graceful white pine and delicate birch. The trees we now make are the product of memory, born of nostalgic longing for the landscape we know best.

While Max models forests, fields and paths, I tell him about the day I spent with his great-grandmother cutting branches of bittersweet⁶² in the woods behind the New Hampshire house where we lived when he was born. As we worked, my grandmother told me that, when they were girls, she and her sisters also gathered bittersweet from the woods near their home in Massachusetts and would bring it to Boston to sell to the wealthy ladies in Beacon Hill at Christmas time. They were poor, she said, and the

⁶² American Bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*) is a woody vine native to North America.

money earned was used to buy holiday treats they could not otherwise afford –presents for their mother and little brother and candy coated almonds for the whole family. I could picture my grandmother standing on a cold, grey Boston corner handing bunches of rusty-red bittersweet to a crush of warmly-swathed Boston dowagers. I think they must have been charmed by the bittersweet girl, my grandmother flushed with the adventure of it all.

As I share the story with Max, I sense how my story bridges time and distance as did my grandmother's: her telling bridged the distance between our day together and the days of her childhood, mixing past into present so as to include me. Her story now sits in my memory as a rewoven narrative through which events that occurred eighty miles and eighty years apart are merged. This story now retold to Max, is expanded yet again and reminds me how stories are not static, but rather are continually reshaped, renewed and modified with each new telling. The moment is bittersweet and inspires an idea. I ask Max to craft some virtual bittersweet to set in place near my grandmother's petroglyph. The past, present and future linked together through this gesture.



Figure 68: American Bittersweet

Moving forward, working backward, sitting still



Figure 69: Offerings for my mother, Fremantle, Western Australia, November 6, 2013

Fremantle, Western Australia, February 2012

We are seated around a campfire in a grove of Balga trees, listening while Noel Nannup⁶³ tells a story. It is about how this place came to be, how the actions of Creator Beings formed the features of the land, how spirit became the stuff of nature and how human beings became its custodians. Listening, attentive, we might be a clan ten thousand years and ten thousand miles from here. Rather we are a varied group, some Indigenous, some native-born, and others, like me, who are foreigners. It is 2012 and our campfire is set in suburban Fremantle.

Time dissolves and I am at once suspended in the Noongar Dreamings Noel relates, held both in the moment of creation and this one, absorbed in the sacred ordinariness of place. It is something I have never known before now.

The sacred

Ordinariness

Of place.

The dark sky above us blinks a wash of faint stars. The leaves of a eucalyptus, stirred by a breeze, whisper, calling my attention. I look up to see, in its branches, a crescent moon filled with time. Here the snapshot of memory, sweeps me to another night. Bali, 1993. There, looking up. I saw another crescent moon tangled in the fronds of a palm tree and caught my first glimpse of the Southern Cross. Under that alien sky, I heard crickets tick my life's passing seconds. Directionless. Far from home. I once was lost.

I ask Noel how those of us who are not Indigenous can find which place is our home and he answers, that home is where we gather around a fire.

63. Dr. Noel Nannup is a Noongar elder from the southwest region of Western Australia.

Where is home?

This concept of home does not privilege the fixed address⁶⁴ nor rely on a static assembly of people, but rather it defines a fluid arrangement of successive locations and varied re-groupings. It is a way of knowing a sense of emplacement that Michael Jackson explains as 'sitting'. He says that the Warlpiri⁶⁵ word "*nyianami* means both 'to sit and 'to be' [and] *ngurrangkalipa nyinami* means literally 'where your kinspeople are sitting', which is to say 'your homeplace'" (1995, 19). Home, then, is where your kinspeople sit and I have since come to understand this as the root of my sense of being at home whether I was sitting with kin who are close and well-known to me or with others who are newly met or barely known. From within this understanding I can begin to imagine what it means to feel attached to, rather than alien in, multiple places while unfixed to any one of them; to experience an evolving sense of homeplace as one that exists wherever I sit with my kinspeople; to experience belonging as an underlying and constant current; a moveable circumstance that is as portable as my suitcase.

64. Michael Jackson argues that the western preference for that which is fixed – timetables, routines, schedules, boundaries and addresses (1995, 87) - come from a Eurocentric bias that views "all human existence from the perspective of the sedentary cultivator" (1995, 86). He also notes that while engaged in fieldwork with the Warlpiri, he felt at home in the 'makeshift' life he led amongst them and in the way men "circled around a point" when responding to his questions (1995, 87).

65. The Warlpiri are a group of Indigenous Australian people who live in north and west of Alice Springs in the Northern Territory region of Australia.

Moving forward, working backward, sitting still.

Rekkevik, Norway, August 2008



I am standing in front of a mailbox inscribed with the name 'Magnus Tolstrup' and I am at a loss, unprepared for the magnitude of this discovery. I hesitate, pace back and forth in front of the house, but cannot make myself walk away. Instead, though unsure of what I will say, I knock on the door, my mind scrambling for something more than a blunt observation.

"Hello, I think that my ancestors may have lived here."

No one answers the door. I wait a moment, agitated and indecisive, jangled by the sense of a task unfinished, and then scribble a note to the occupants of the house:

Hello, my name is Sandra, my great-grandfather was Magnus and his father was Mathias. Could it be that we are related?

For now it is all that I can do. Walking away, I am tired, almost dazed, a little sad. Against all logic and possibility, some part of me hoped that at the end of this walk, I would find my ancestors waiting for me. My disappointment collides with a rising elation. I may have found family.

“[...] I’m writing this to you because of the note you left at my house. I believe my wife would be your third cousin. We would like to arrange to meet with you before you leave Larvik [...]” (private email, August 2008).

Sitting with kin in Rekkevik, Norway, August, 2008.

I have been invited back to Rekkevik to meet my Norwegian family, a prospect, so moving and unexpected that I am struggling to recognise it as more than just coincidence. I made it happen, came to Norway without knowing that this would be an outcome, but set events in motion that led to this opportunity. Amongst the family members I am about to meet is my grandfather's niece and my oldest living relative. The family matriarch.

As I am introduced one-by-one to each family member, I recall a scrap of paper known to me in my childhood and rediscovered, quite by chance, only weeks before travelling here. It was note written in my grandmother's hand and addressed to my mother that listed the names and birth dates of our Norwegian relatives. The people listed are the parents and grandparents of the cousins I am now meeting. I cannot remember how the list came to be in my possession but it occurs to me that finding it was an omen of this moment.

Dear Margie:
This information
on Norway is dated
1946.

Dagmar Thompsen age 32
Husband Thorolf
Girl Ase Reidan 2 yrs
Boy (in Sept) Jan Åge
Address - Fagerheim Gamble
Pr. Lange Sund Norway

Grotz Andreassen age 28
Girl Anne 6 1/2 yrs
Boy 3 mos.

Address
Repe)ane GT. 2
Larvik Norway

Rake) Andersen 26 yrs
Husband Olag
girl Kari - 4 1/2 yrs
Boy
Jegens bong GT 33
Larvik Norway

Figure 70: Note written by my grandmother, listing our known Norwegian relatives, 1946

Across the past and present, Norway, August 2008.

We are seated around a table where my eldest cousin has arranged a large stack of photographs, letters and documents. She hands them to me one by one. The first, she tells me is a wedding photograph of my great-grandparents, Magnus and Louise. I have only ever seen photographs of them taken in old age, so their young and smiling faces are new to me, precious. I search the eyes of young Magnus for evidence of the affinity I have sensed between his journey and way out into the world and mine.

Sitting in the company of my newly-met family, though unfamiliar, is not uneasy and the evening has a soft, inclusive glow: like I have always been part of this, like I belong here. There is a sense of mutual delight at the occasion and the opportunity it affords. We are unifying family bonds and adding storylines, characters and missing tracts to our shared history. Ngurrangkalipa nyinami, where my kinspeople are sitting.

Another cousin hands me a letter. Dated October 1888, it was written by Magnus, just four months after his arrival in Boston, to his younger brother who remained in Norway: my great-uncle and the forebear of the cousins I am now meeting. The letter is written in Norwegian, so my cousin translates. It is chatty, full of excitement and bravado, rich with detail about his voyage across the Atlantic and his first impressions of his new life in Boston. Moved by the letter's physicality, I can barely retain the smallest details of my cousin's translation. The soft, smooth, almost suede-like feel of the letter in my hands offers a tangible sense of my great-grandfather's presence,⁶⁶ a distillation of my great-grandfather's essence, his longings, hopes and his dreams that bridges the tracts of time and the differences in knowledge and experience that have separated us.

The letter, which first crossed the distance between my great-grandfather in America and his brothers in Norway, now forges a material connection between my Norwegian kin, their great-grandfather, my great-grandfather and me. Handling it now, I

66. This experience relates to the ways that migrants create various experiences of co-presence with distant kin as a means to maintain a sense of closeness and connection. I will discuss co-presence in depth on pages 163 – 167.

experience a momentary wash of guilt at the realisation that, of all my American family, I am the only one who has been privileged to know of – to see and to touch – this remarkable object. I ask permission to photograph the pages and, focussing carefully, I take several shots to ensure that I have sharp, readable images. A cousin in America, an avid genealogist, is learning Norwegian. I will send him a copy so that he can translate and transcribe the content for the rest of the family.

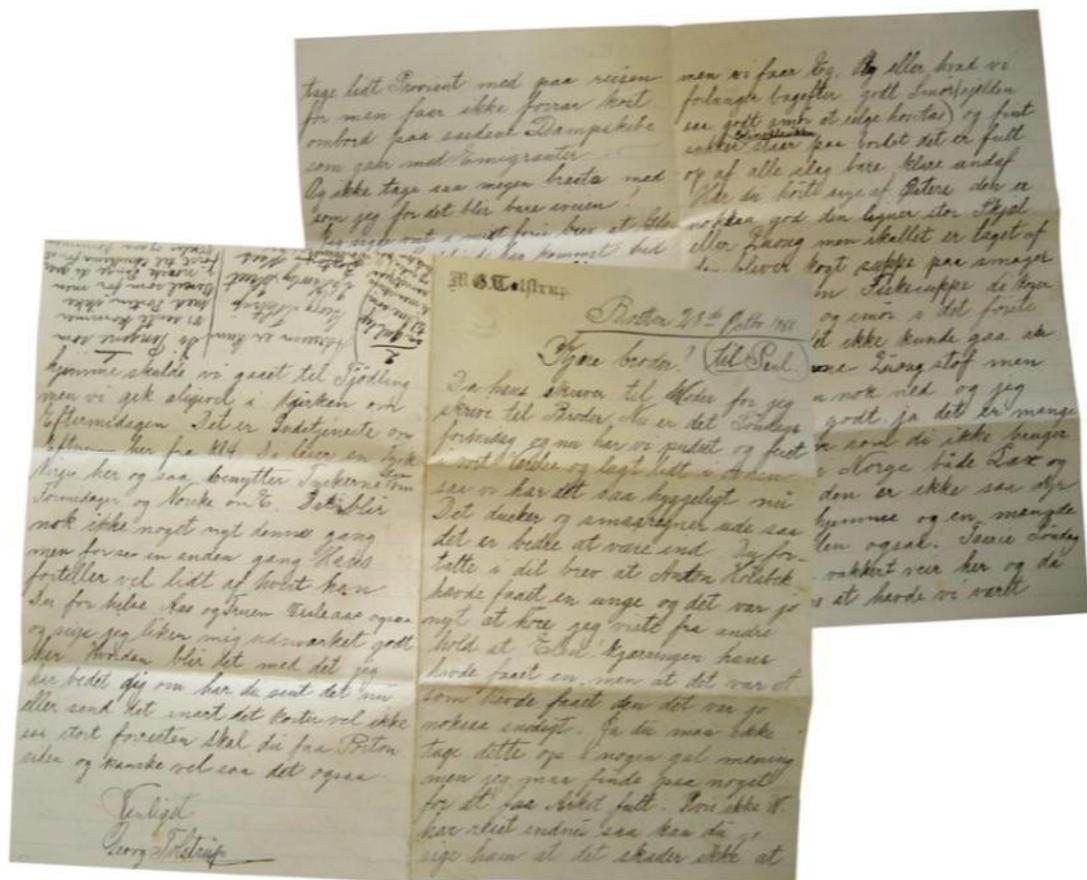


Figure 71: Magnus' first letter home, 1888

While my cousin continues her translation, the letter's casual air and the ordinariness of its contents strike an unusual, but familiar chord. Beneath its easy tone, I sense my great-grandfather's excitement at the adventures already embarked and the ones still ahead of him but there are also hints of his homesickness and longing. I am moved by how we are kindred in this: that our experiences of migration are steeped in complex, sometimes contradictory emotions. I imagine him crafting this first letter home, his

efforts bent on gathering together the disparate pieces of his experience so that they make sense to his family left behind. I think of my own attempts at this: my telephone call from Sydney, Australia to my sister still residing in the United States and how our conversation made clear that she now saw me as lost to a foreign environment.

Magnus and I both know something that his brother and my sister could not know: what it means to leave the country of one's birth and to try and make our peace with the incongruous mix of exhilaration, terror, freedom, loss, hope and sorrow that underpins our and many migrant's lives.⁶⁷ Our letters (email and telephone calls) home are our way of transcending the incongruities. They are the means by which we create a sense of togetherness, a sense of co-presence⁶⁸ with family left behind despite the distances that separate us.

67. Despite that migration studies addressed a wide range of circumstances (voluntary, involuntary, economic, diasporic, regional, transnational, and etcetera) and are approached from a variety of disciplines (Anthropology, Ethnography, History, Economics, Political Science, and Philosophy amongst others) they are usually premised on the assumption that migration incurs a sense of dislocation, alienation and loss and, as Glen, Fouriani and Bouvet assert, incurs a sense of biographical trauma (2011, 1. see also Baldassar 2008; Dahinden 2012; Nash 2003).

68. Loretta Baldassar argues that the emotions underpinning the sense of longing, experienced by migrants in relation to family left behind, manifests in four ways: discursively, physically, practically and ideologically. These differences, in turn, characterise four types of co-presence that migrants utilise as a way to mitigate their longings. They are 'virtual co-presence', which is achieved through the use of the various ICTs; 'co-presence by proxy' which is achieved indirectly through objects, such as letters, photographs and mementos; 'physical co-presence' which is achieved through actual visits home and with kin; and 'imagined co-presence' which is achieved through an intentional focus that Baldassar explains as holding family in one's heart, daily prayers or thoughts (2008, 252).



Figure 72: Barb Hunt, "*...and the rocks knew us*", 2004-5

Working into co-presence

I recognise the desire to create co-presence as the core impetus of many of the works I created for this research: in the way my practice of needlework invokes a sense of my mother's continued presence; how stitching a map of my father's life bound me to an imagined sense of mutual journeys; how the carvings I made with my grandfather's chisel allowed a sense of co-presence by proxy. I also recognise this as an impetus underlying the work "*...and the rocks knew us*" [figure 72] by Canadian artist, Barb Hunt. It is a work, Hunt says, that like many of her recent works focuses on rituals of mourning, and employs the repetitive nature of textile work as a way to cope with grief and loss.

Hunt created "*...and the rocks knew us*" in memory of her father. The work consists of many small quartz beach stones that have been sewn into netting pockets. These are affixed to a backing cloth in patterns that spell out a stanza of poetry in Morse code. She began collecting the quartz stones soon after her father's death and recalls finding the first stone which, she says, immediately brought her father to mind and "seemed

to be shining with an unearthly light” (B. Hunt, personal email, June 19, 2013). As she grieved, she continued to collect quartz and eventually decided to use them in a work dedicated to his memory. Her choice to use Morse code is also reflective of the way her practice relates to her sense of loss: it references a memory she holds from childhood of her father who, having learned Morse code in the Merchant Marines during WWII, would later ‘translate’ the signals for her as they drove along the eastern seaboard at night listening to the radio for signals coming from the ships out at sea (Hunt n.d.).

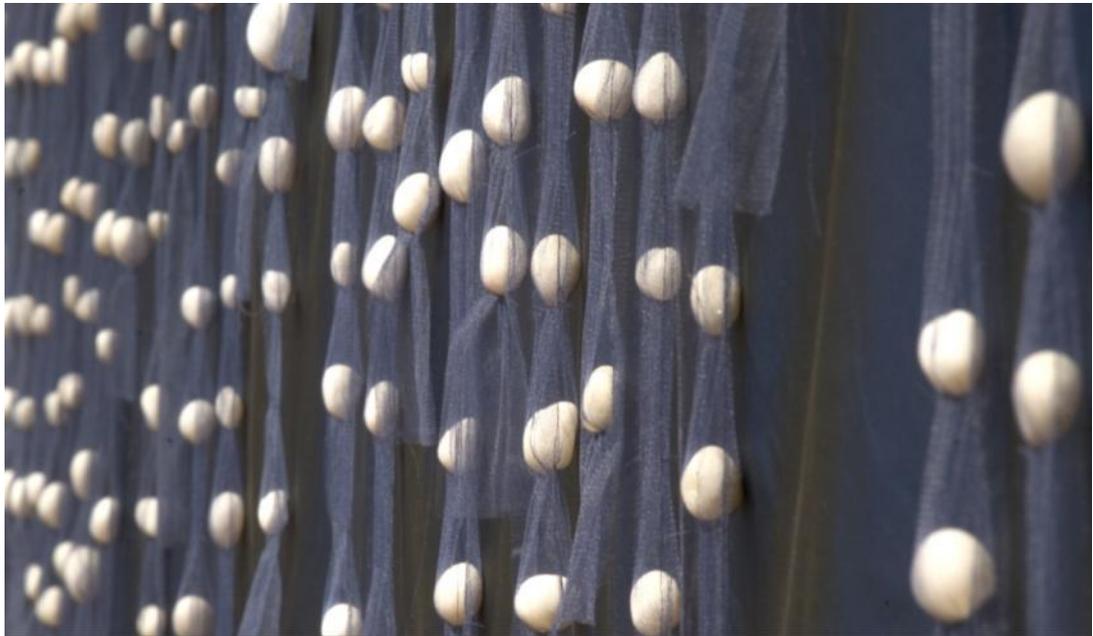


Figure 73: Barb Hunt, "*...and the rocks knew us*" (detail), 2004-5

I interpret Hunt’s choices, to use quartz pebbles and to arrange them into Morse code, as ways of creating a sense co-presence with her father’s memory or spirit. The stones provide a tangible, co-presence by proxy and their arrangement into Morse code patterns gives physical shape to her memory. Hunt also states that stitching is her means of mending separations and says that its repetitive nature “fills empty space [and adds] there was nothing I could do to bring my father back [...] repetition defers death – if a project is never-ending then we can keep postponing death” (private email June 19, 2013). Each of her stitches is a focussed intent, like a prayer, that brings her a sense of imagined co-presence and brings her father’s spirit nearer. I have known similar moments, particularly while working on my *Map of my father*.

Virtual co-presence and twenty-first century sitting

The post I am about to upload to my blog is unlike any I have posted previously.⁶⁹ It unfolds a sequence of events that I have purposefully kept secret until the story could be told in its entirety. My family in America and Australia do not know that we have close Norwegian relatives still living in Larvik, nor that they responded to my note I left for them, nor that I was invited to meet them. I have finished writing the story of our meeting and know that it will serve as an introduction and the beginning of bonds that extend beyond me.

COMMENTS:

 said...

Sandy, that brought tears to my eyes... how amazing!
Let's invite them ALL over for a great big BBQ!!!

AUGUST 17, 2008 4:58 PM 

 said...

Wow.....wow!!!! This must have been an awesome
experience and I can't wait for you to tell me more about
it when you get back.

How long have you been away? You could have filled all
the experiences you've had into a year long trip.

AUGUST 17, 2008 6:50 PM 

 said...

That
is
utterly
am
azing!

AUGUST 17, 2008 9:16 PM 

 said...

The second I started reading this my face just split with
ridiculously large smile. Just insanely awesome.. Talk
about a dream come true!

AUGUST 17, 2008 4:21 AM 

 said...

Good grief. This is too much to absorb from a sofa in
Connecticut! And yes, to whomever noted that there is
a nose connection--I thought so too--particularly 
has the same cheeks/nose as my dad and his dad and
..... I don't know what to do with myself right now!
Hello long lost family!

AUGUST 18, 2008 6:50 AM 

 said...

The Norway leg of your journey seems to have been an
enormous success! We're really excited about all your
discoveries.

More please!

AUGUST 17, 2008 AT 7:20 AM 

 said...

every time I read your blog my mind is totally blown.
wow. wow. wow.

AUGUST 18, 2008 AT 5:32 PM 

 said...

speechless.

AUGUST 18, 2008 AT 6:10 PM 

My family's response to the post delights me and I am deeply affected by the realisation that the blog has become the place where my family and I gather together despite the fact that we are physically separated by thousands of miles: it is the context and the location, a 21st century version of the family hearth, where we 'sit' and share our stories.

69. Throughout my pilgrimage journey, I documented my progress on a blog entitled *A 21st century pilgrim's progress*. New posts were added often, when time, circumstance and Internet access allowed, and several family members kept current with and responded regularly to my posts. The original posts were uploaded to <http://21stcenturypilgrimsprogress.blogspot.com>. They are now compiled and archived on www.virtualkindred.com.

“If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them away where they are needed” Barry Lopez (1990, 60).

Creating virtual co-presence

Unlike my ancestors whose migrations from Europe to America⁷⁰ separated them by weeks, months or years from contact with the family they left behind, I am separated from mine only by an instant.⁷¹ This advantage, born of being a 21st century migrant, was brought sharply into focus for me as a result of the *21st Century Pilgrim’s Progress* blog. Though its express purpose was to document my journey, it was motivated, in no small part, by my need to ease the angst of distance I experience when removing myself from easy contact, particularly, with my son, Max. Mine is an angst born of the conflict that results from the various ways I am drawn to be in the world: simultaneously as a mother and an adventurer; a homebody and a vagabond; fully ensconced in the communal centre and free to observe from the societal margins.

Like many present-day migrants, I am reliant on technologies that allow me easy contact with family around the world to solidify my senses of belonging and place. My daily habit of accessing and maintaining real-time contact via the Internet is an attribute that is increasingly common to the migrant’s experience (see Bacigalupe and Cámara 2012; Nedelcu 2012; Oiarzabal and Reips 2012; Turner 2008; and Wilson and Peterson 2002). Like many others, I begin most days by checking my email and Facebook page for news of my family. Each month includes at least one Internet video chat with my sister, my uncle or one of my cousins in America.

⁷⁰ The first of my family to migrate to North America arrived on the Mayflower in 1620 and the last in 1888.

⁷¹ Since leaving North America, I have used several different Internet Communication Technologies, or ICTs, to maintain connection with and help secure my sense of place within my extended family. The immediacy and ease allowed by recent developments in Internet formats – blogging, social media and Internet Telephony, particularly – have been essential for me in my efforts to maintain close ties with distant members of my family and are key to my sense of belonging and place.

The continued contact I make via cyberspace is characteristic of what sociologist Mihaela Nedelcu refers to as the “new transnational habitus” (2012, 1340), a concept that emphasises the way ICTs allow present day migrants a sense of simultaneous, multiple belongings. I perceive the role played by ICTs in my daily life as being crucial to my sense of on-going connection and belonging with distant family. The immediacy of connection allowed by ICTs counteracts the sense of multiple losses reported by pre-Internet age migrants, the “double absence” of being neither here nor there (Nedelcu 2012, 1340) and diminishes the perception of distance separating migrants from their families. The ease of 21st century transnational contact allows migrants to meet with family in the space between here and there.

Stories told in multiple voices

Throughout my pilgrimage travels in Europe, my family’s keen responses to my blog posts revealed the depth of their interest and appreciation for what I was discovering about our mutual ancestry. Yet, when I reached Massachusetts, a place that is woven into much of our immediate history, some family members expressed concern about what my stories and my research might reveal. Their wariness reminded me not only of my responsibility as storyteller but also that the stories were not mine alone to tell. This, I understand in relation to the film *Rashōmon* (Kurosawa 1950) in which four divergent versions of the same series of events are recounted (a possible rape and a death that is variously cast as the result of battle, a murder or a suicide). Each of the accounts (including one version told through a medium by a ghost) is presented as the singular truth, albeit contradictory to the other truths presented. I understand the film’s premise as one that holds significance for the crafting of family stories; that the truth about events in which multiple people take part (or through which they are affected) is both complex and relative. My family holds multiple truths and many versions of a single story, all valid and essential to the accuracy and richness of our history.

The idea that there can be multiple, sometimes contradictory truths is the basis for a concept developed by anthropologist Karl Heider called the Rashomon Effect (1988).⁷² Applying this to what I understood about the multiple accounts of my own family's stories, I realised that each version, including my own, was founded, as Heider argued, in a mix of "influences, biases or predilections" (1988, 74) including the many shifting loyalties, roles, positions and relationships that make up family life. Ultimately, what *Rashōmon* and the Rashomon Effect underscored for me was that, though many of our stories told by members of my family recount events where others of us were present, most are told from an entirely subjective perspective. They are not stories about what happened to *us* but rather they impart singular, parallel experiences, almost as if told to and by strangers.

Telling *our* story at the virtual hearth

Finding the means to tell our collaborative family story is fraught with difficulty. We are a far-flung group⁷³ and we have little present opportunity to spend time together. Our reunions do not occur as part of the natural flow of our day-to-day lives, but exist as acute, out-of-time events that have a manic edge. This has led to the gradual attenuation of our stories, a depletion of their depth and richness. Though we all have stories, we have lacked opportunities for discovering how our truths overlap and also have lacked a context through which each of our stories is weighed and balanced against (and finds its place within) all of the other versions our family has to tell. We needed a place – accessible to all of us – where we could come together and share, contradict, reframe and amend our stories until they gained a comprehensive voice.

Inspired by the way my pilgrimage blog provided a context through which my family shared and responded to my stories, I began to imagine how I might craft a gathering place where we could begin to collaborate on *our* story. This took the form of a

72. The term 'Rashomon Principle' is first attributed to Valerie Alia who argues that "truth is really *truths* and is always based on multiple realities" (2004, 23). Heider developed the idea of the Rashomon Effect as a way to explore how disagreements between ethnographers arise and may be resolved.

73. Living in Australia since 1996, my son and I are flung the farthest.

website conceived as a “performative liminal space” (Madge and O’Connor 2005, 83)⁷⁴ where the comprehensive family narrative I hoped to facilitate might evolve from the “substantially different but equally plausible accounts” (Heider 1988, 74) of the influences, people and events that had shaped our lives in common. My intention was to create the platform for an on-going, participatory, collaborative work that depended on my family’s willingness to engage and contribute. The result was the Virtual Kindred website that forms part of creative component of this research. Its location in cyberspace is one that I understand as embedded within the broader context of our daily lives and continuous with the other social spaces we inhabit (Wilson and Peterson 2002, 453). It is not intended as a replacement for our face to face family gatherings, but as a means to allow our interactions to occur more fluidly and without the gaps and ruptures that is wrought by the geographical distances that separate us.

74. While Madge and O’Connor discuss cyberspace as a liminal zone in relationship to online communities where young mothers are able to try out different versions of motherhood on their way to becoming new selves, I recognise the space where this occurs as one where not only identities but also stories can be reshaped and refashioned (see also see Kisau and Hunger 2007; Turner 2008).

Resisting the ownership of family narratives

My uncle reaches into a crevice between stones in the wall of the basement and retrieves a bundle of papers. It is a stack of letters written while my grandfather fought in France during World War I. There are eleven in total; written from son to mother, mother to son, brother to brother.

The paper is brittle, spotted with mildew, water stained. Most of the writing is faded, but legible while others are written on paper so darkened that I cannot make out any words. I begin to open the first, but the paper is so stiff and fragile that it starts to crumble. I put it aside and carefully open the next. It is a letter from my grandfather to his mother. I begin to read it out loud.

Its tone is chatty; army life, bad food, wet boots. He asks about events back home, talks about foods he misses. Sunday roasts. Apple pie. I read another letter and another. They are the same. Dear mother, I am okay. Dear mother, I miss your apple pie. I smile at my uncle, remembering my grandfather's love of simple plain foods, a hearty New England meal. I open another letter and begin to read. Dear brother. It is dark with descriptions; the horrors of battle, losses witnessed close at hand, brutalities he claims he will inflict on the enemy if he has the chance. Its tone is vengeful, brutal, harsh with hatred. In it I hear a hard-won bravado. As I read, my uncle becomes agitated. The room seems to darken. The light from the hanging lamp burns a harsh halo over our heads.

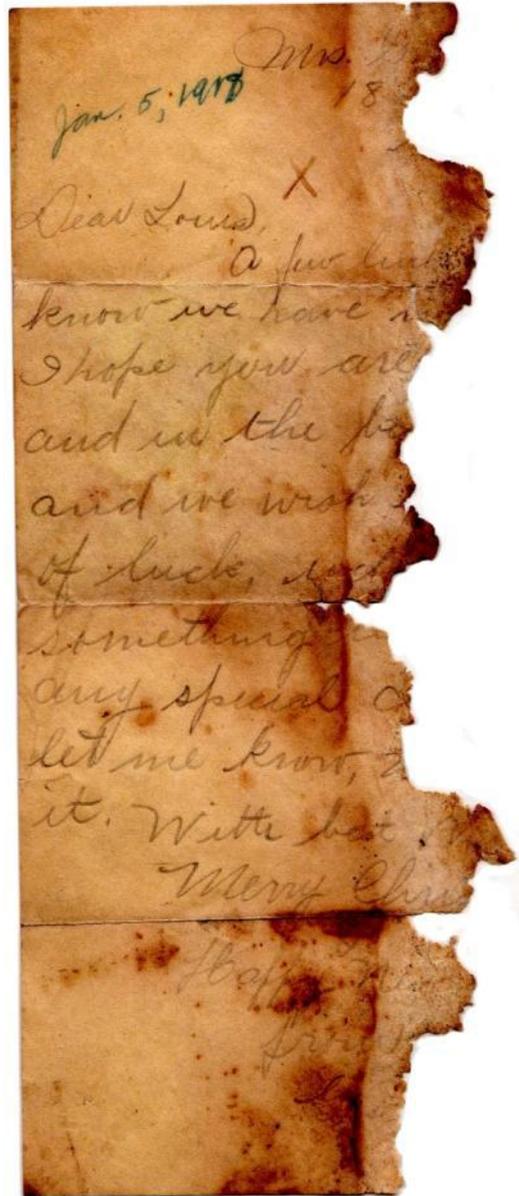




Figure 74: My grandfather (left) and son (right) as young men both approximately twenty years of age.

In the morning, my uncle solemnly asks if the letter makes me think less of my grandfather. I tell him that it has had a quite opposite effect; my grandfather's words bring him closer, give shape to his fears, courage, vulnerabilities and loyalties. His bravado, a shield, leapt across two generations to remind me of my son and trigger a well of motherly empathy in me for all young men whose view of the world is tainted and darkened by war. I see them, side-by-side, my twenty-year-old grandfather and my twenty-year-old son. I understand both what may have prompted my grandfather to write an unflinching account to his brother. The brutalities he witnessed meant as a warning not to hurry to enlist. I also think I understand why he spared his mother from any such account. I feel quite certain that Max would do the same for me.

Concerned with what will become of the letters if they are returned to their basement crevice, I ask my uncle for permission to take them to a conservator. I am not sure if they can be saved, but feel compelled, for posterity's sake, to make sure that we do whatever is necessary to preserve them for future generations. My uncle agrees and I

Moving forward, working backward, sitting still.

promise to return the letters once the conservator is finished with them. To this, my uncle replies, “You don’t have to return them. They’re your legacy, too.”

Though I am touched by this gift of my grandfather’s letters, I am uneasy. I do not want; do not know how to own a legacy.⁷⁵

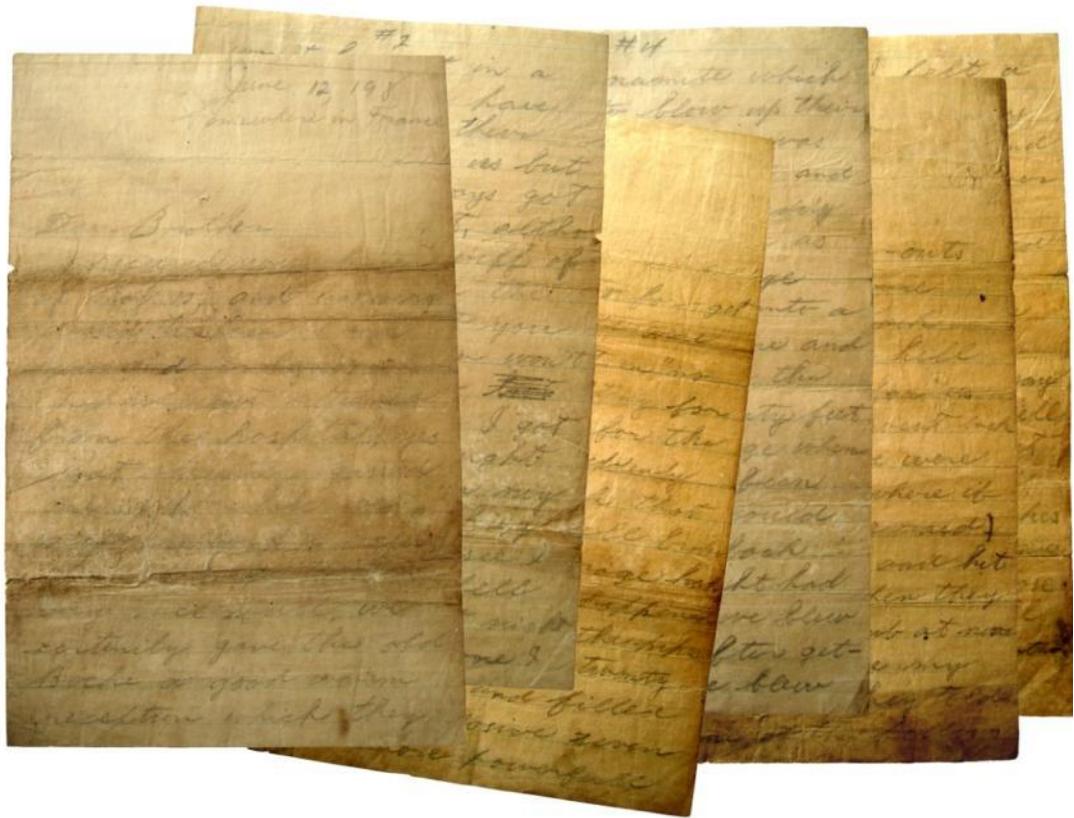


Figure 75: Letter from my grandfather to his brother, dated June 12, 1918.

75. The letters have since been conserved and I have photographed each one and compiled them all in a book which I have made available to my family as a printed copy and also in digital form.

Epilogue: Home where we belong

I ask Noel how those of us who are not Indigenous can know where we belong and he answers that we belong to the place where we are born. Our spirit comes from the land and enters us at the moment of our birth. Like everything that exists or has existed, grows or has grown there - the grasses, animals, rocks and trees - we are part of that place, a continuation of its story and its story is part of us. The land of our birth, our birthplace, knows us and recognises our belonging.

His words undo a long-held sorrow that my scattered, alien ancestry meant that I was born not belonging. Noel says that spirit is carried through the ground by water and this means that the same spirit that is in me permeates the entirety of the catchment (watershed) area⁷⁶ that surrounds my birthplace. Rivers, particularly, are the home of spirit. Offering examples from his own history, Noel says that rivers are where the Noongar go to visit their ancestors; standing at a river's edge, they throw sand into the water to let the ancestors smell us; and it is where they go when someone dies to sing them home. Then he says that the only way I will know the story and spirit of my birthplace - its Dreaming - is by wandering its waterways and the contours of its catchment.

Now I know how the event of my birth binds me to the place where it occurred and how I am congenitally linked to all else that began there. I share its spirit and am added me into its creation story - a story that stretches back to the dawn of time. The place I hold in this story is as absolute as my place within my human ancestral lineage. I am from - and of - Melrose, Massachusetts, the place of my birth. This shift in my perspective is a small thing. None-the-less, I am made substantial by the weight of Noel's words. Now, I am found.

76. From the Tufts University Institute of the Environment website (<http://environment.tufts.edu>) I learned that catchment areas in the United States are referred to as watersheds and that Melrose sits within an area known as the Mystic Watershed - a series of ponds, brooks and rivers that lead from the area around Melrose to the Malden and Mystic Rivers, to Boston Harbor and out into the Atlantic Ocean.

I think of the places that I have loved, where underneath the cacophony of everyday life, there is a discernible strum of spirit; places where realities overlap. Bali, Avebury, Dartmoor. They are places where the sacred is a dramatic presence: old, persisting and deep, where the undertow of spirit is palpable. Everything is drenched in sense of simultaneous sekala and niskala: the seen and the unseen, the material and the spiritual both tangibly present in every moment, every action, and every thing (Eiseman 1990). And I recall the softer hum of Larvik, where ancestral spirit seemed to flow into my feet from the ground. I wonder, did my Norwegian ancestors also sense this current? Did my migrant ancestors miss its lull?

I think of Massachusetts. Though it is the place of my birth, I never thought to watch for signs of the sacred in its landscape, in the curves of its coastline and the shapes of its hills; nor listen, as Noel does, for its voice and the stories it tells about the Creator beings who formed its contours. But I think now of the stone, carved in situ in my uncle's yard that called us to itself and how I learned to feel and hear how it vibrates with ancestral energies. It is a beginning.

I ask Noel if Dreamings, that have been lost can ever be recovered. He smiles. "Yes", he says, "If the land recognises you and you sleep in that place, its story might come to you in dreams." And I am seized by a new longing to return to my birthplace and search for its Dreamings, to recover its myriad of stories from the dust beneath the dust of rational explanation. I think of them now: the creation stories, stories of pre-contact, colonisation, migration, diaspora and modern development that sit juxtaposed and at odds with the each other as if lined up on a library shelf in volumes that are forever and irrevocably separate.

Here, I am encouraged by the knowledge and understandings I have gained through this research. I can work my way into knowing this landscape by walking its contours. I can undertake the work of exploring the Mystic Watershed as a way to know my place in a story. The work will include a series of journeys (on foot and by paddled boat) along the course of the waterways from Melrose to the Atlantic (at Boston

Harbour), covering as much of the terrain as I can.⁷⁷ This aspect of the work is fuelled by the same impetus that led me to undertake pilgrimages in Norway and Ireland (ancestral homelands) and is now underpinned by the experiences I gained through these experiences. This includes the power of sensing my ancestors in place, and the moments of emplacement gained by wandering – of being acutely present in place. I am confident that walking the area will bring similar moments of belonging though I am sure that I cannot predict (nor do I want to try) where or how those experiences will occur.

As I walk, I will gather the stories of place. These, I expect, will come through conversation, a collaborative engagement with other persons – both human and other-than-human – that acknowledges that the creation story of this place can only be told in numerous, equal voices. Some of the stories, will be gleaned from historical record and from the evidence provided by the growth patterns and the detritus of both the natural and built environments that make up watershed area. Others, as Noel suggests, may have to come as messages in dreams. I can use what I have learned through this research to listen for its stories and to read messages in the signs offered me, to gather all of the overlapping and intertwined lives, histories and stories together. Then I will stitch them together into a unified whole: a creation story enacted and made substantial through my art practice which, in the process, will give greater substance to my own belonging.

My journey begins at Ell Pond in Melrose, Massachusetts just outside Melrose Hospital where I was born [figure 76]. Home.

77. According to the Mystic River Watershed Association website (<http://mysticriver.org/>), the watershed comprises approximately seventy-six square miles.

Moving forward, working backward, sitting still.



Figure 76: Sandra Adams, *Pilgrim feet in Ell Pond*, Melrose, Massachusetts, 2013

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Appendix 1: 21st Century Pilgrim' Progress Artworks on CD

Folder 1: Petroglyphs

subfolder 1: petroglyph, Malden, Massachusetts, 2008, granite, 77 cm (h) x 51 cm (w), imbedded.

Image 1: Malden petroglyph 2008

Image 2: Malden petroglyph 2008

Image 3: Malden petroglyph 2013

subfolder 2: petroglyph, Fort Collins, Colorado, 2008, ironstone, 108 cm (h) x 57 cm (w) x 20 cm (d).

Image 1: Ft Collins petroglyph 2008

Image 2: Ft Collins petroglyph, 2008

Image 3: Ft Collins petroglyph offering, 31-10-2008

Image 3a: Ft Collins petroglyph offering, 31-10-2008 (detail)

Image 3b: Ft Collins petroglyph offering, 6-11-2008

Image 4: Ft Collins petroglyph, 2010

Image 5: Ft Collins petroglyph, 2013

subfolder 3: petroglyph, Fremantle, Western Australia, 2009, Kimberley sandstone, 50 cm (h) x 51 cm (w) x 14 cm (d).

Image 1: Fremantle petroglyph offerings, 2009

Image 2: Fremantle petroglyph first offerings, 2009

Image 2a: Fremantle petroglyph offerings, 2009

Image 3: Fremantle petroglyph offerings, 2010

Image 4: Fremantle petroglyph offerings, 2012

Image 5: Fremantle petroglyph offerings 2013

Image 5a: Fremantle petroglyph offerings 2013

subfolder 4: petroglyph, Fremantle, Western Australia (Gosfield), 2012, Kimberley sandstone, 126 cm (h) x 58 cm (w) x 15 cm (d).

Image 1: Gosfield petroglyph

Folder 2: Pilgrim feet montage, 2013, digital photo montage, A3

Folder 2a: *Pilgrimage to Mosman Park: stitching experience to memory, binding memories to place*, 2009, mixed media assemblage, found objects, cotton canvas, digitally printed cotton, bamboo, twine, thread, acrylic paint, graphite, ink, 93cm x 153cm x 17cm.

Image 1: *Pilgrimage to Mosman Park*

Image 2: *Pilgrimage to Mosman Park* (detail)

Image 3: *Pilgrimage to Mosman Park* (detail)

Image 4: *Pilgrimage to Mosman Park* (detail)

Image 5: *Pilgrimage to Mosman Park* (detail)

Image 6: *Pilgrimage to Mosman Park* (detail)

Image 7: *Pilgrimage to Mosman Park* (detail)

Folder 3: Needlework

subfolder: Beadwork

Image 1: *Ancestor Figures* (study), 2008, leather, glass seed beads, 17.5 cm x 9 cm and 16.5 cm x 9 cm.

Image 2: *Ancestor Beadwork 1*, 2009, cowhide suede, glass seed beads, thread, 58 cm x 25 cm.

Image 3: *Ancestor Beadwork 2*, 2010, cowhide suede, glass seed beads, thread, 69 cm x 36 cm.

Image 4: *Ancestor Beadwork 3*, 2013, cowhide suede, glass seed beads, punched metal charms, metal crow feathers, 108 cm x 48.5 cm.

Map of my father, 2012, digitally printed cotton muslin, digitally printed organza, embroidery floss, twine, graphite, ink,

Folder 4: *Virtual Pilgrimage*, produced in collaboration with Maxwell E. Frankel, 2010-2012.

subfolder 1: *Virtual Pilgrimage*

Windows version (PC compatible)

MacOS version (Macintosh compatible)

subfolder 2: *Work in progress screenshots*

Image 1: Modelling the ground

Image 2: Constructing stones

Image 2a: Crafting trees

Image 3: Setting stones in place

Image 3a: Plotting the soundscape

Image 4: Viking mounds

Folder 5: *Virtual Kindred* website www.virtualkindred.com, constructed in Joomla with the help of Andrew Johnson at Foote-Francis Pty. Ltd., Leederville, Western Australia.

subfolder 1: Public pages

Image 1: Virtual Kindred homepage

Image 2: Pilgrimage landing page

Image 3: Pilgrim landing page

Image 3a: Walks landing page

Image 3b: Walks page

Image 3c: Works landing page

Image 3d: Works page

Image 3e: Writings landing page

Image 4: Project landing page

Image 5: Kinfolk landing page

Image 6; Ancestor landing page

Image 7: Login/logout page

subfolder 2: Private pages

Image 1: Kindred private pages welcome

Image 2: Ancestor landing page – private

Image 3: Ancestor page

Image 4: Kindred page

Image 5: Photographs landing page

Image 6: Virtual Pilgrimage map page

Folder 6: Dada Poetry

Image 1: *Ancestor*, 2009

Image 2: *Art of evolution*, 2009

Image 3: *The pilgrim's footsteps*, 2011

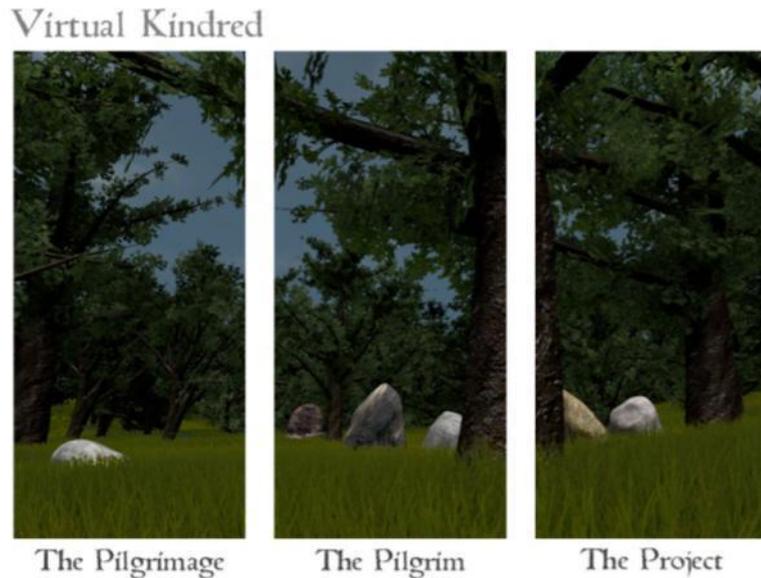
Image 4: *Paradox at risk*, 2010

Image 5: *Between the tale and its telling*, 2011

Image 6 *Ancient shapeshifters*, 2012

Appendix 2: Accessing and Navigating the *Virtual Kindred* Website

The *Virtual Kindred* website is located at www.virtualkindred.com and opens on a homepage that provides three portals into the website content as shown below. These are titled *The Pilgrimage*, *The Pilgrim* and *The Project*.



Each denotes a separate section of the website content (explained below) which can be accessed in any order by clicking on the titles or the images situated directly above them. Once you have entered the website, access to the other sections can be gained by clicking the relevant tab at the top of the page or on the section title listed in the left hand menu [figure 77].



Figure 77: The *Virtual Kindred* section tabs, menu and user login.

The website is further divided into two levels of content. The first comprises public content that is available to anyone who visits the website. The second level contains private information comprising a series of pages each one containing detailed information about an individual ancestor in my lineage or a member of my living kin. These pages are accessible by login only. The login page can be accessed by clicking on the Login/Logout link to the right and above the top menu bar. For the purposes of examination, I created temporary user names and passwords for the examiners. These have since been deactivated.

The *Virtual Kindred* website by section

1. *The Pilgrimage*

This section houses the *Virtual Pilgrimage* and all related instructional content.

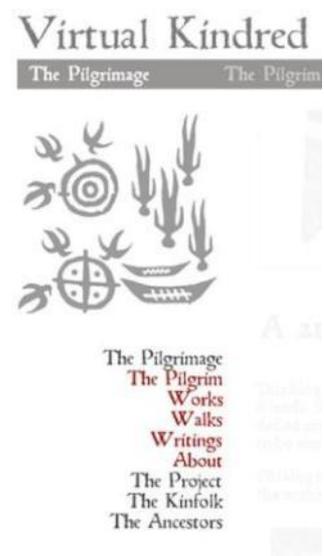
2. *The Project*

This section introduces the project and explains its parameters and contexts, including why various parts were created and how my family (identified as kinfolk) can participate in its further development.

3. *The Pilgrim*

This section houses archived copies of the 21st century pilgrim blog, compiled by location, in pdf format and in chronological order. Each of the pdfs is accessible by clicking on the small photograph positioned above it.

This page also opens a secondary menu of pages (visible in the left-hand menu) that opens to images and text about the practice-based works created for this research. These are titled: *Works*, *Walks* and *Writings* [right]. There is also a page titled *About* that comprises a brief tract of my biographical information.



Two further sections titled, respectively, *The Ancestors* and *The Kinfolk* are not available from the homepage, but are accessible through their respective tabs at the top of all internal web pages or via the related link in the left-hand menu. These pages provide an overview of how ancestors and kinfolk are positioned in relation to the project but also serve as portals to the private content. Once authorised users have logged in, these pages contain lists of names (ancestors or kinfolk) and each name is hyperlinked to a corresponding page. Clicking on my father's name, for instance, will bring up his content page including biographical information, photographs and stories about him submitted by kinfolk.

Appendix 3: Exploring the *Virtual Pilgrimage*

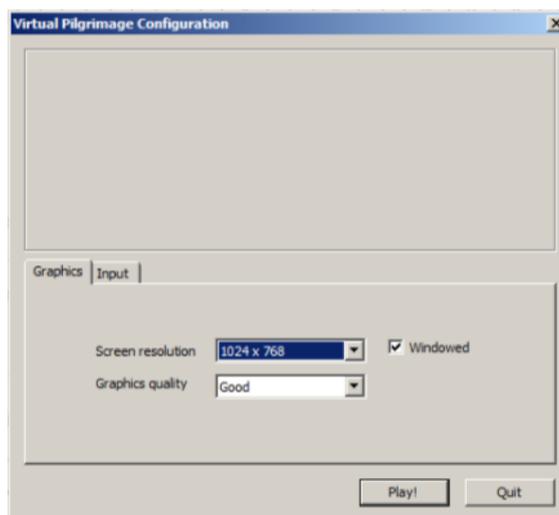
The *Virtual Pilgrimage* is built into the 3D computer game platform, Unity and is navigated in the same manner as many current computer games. It was designed as a virtual landscape that ‘players’ can wander through. The *Virtual Pilgrimage* can be downloaded from the *Virtual Kindred* website or may be played directly from the CD provided. Please note that playing the pilgrimage from the CD may slow the speed and smoothness of in-game movement.

Prior to play

- Before loading the *Virtual Pilgrimage* file, log in to the *Virtual Kindred* website at www.vitualkindred.com. This allows players to access the *Virtual Kindred* ancestor pages from within the *Virtual Pilgrimage* landscape.

To start

- Open the *Virtual Pilgrimage* folder and select a format – Windows (PC) or MacOS (Mac).
- Open the folder and double click on the pilgrimage.exe (or pilgrimage). This opens a ‘Graphics’ dialogue box.

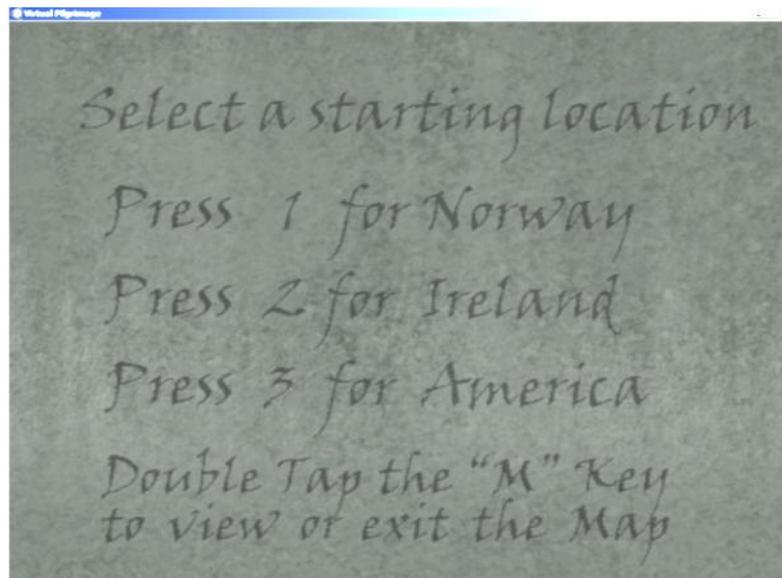


The graphics configuration is preset to a screen resolution of 1024 x 268 and graphics quality set to good. Please note that this is a standard setting that will work well for most systems, but can be changed for optimal experience. Selecting a smaller screen resolution and lower graphics quality allows smoother and faster movement through the virtual landscape. The ‘Windowed’ box should be checked.

- Click ‘Play!’ to load the pilgrimage (depending on the processing speed of your computer, this might take a minute).

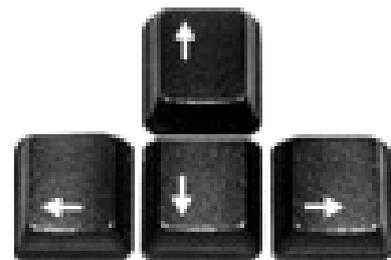
Select a start point

- Once loaded, the pilgrimage will open to a start menu that offers a selection of start points.
- Pressing any of the numbers 1, 2 or 3 will start the pilgrimage from a different location.



Move through the Pilgrimage landscape

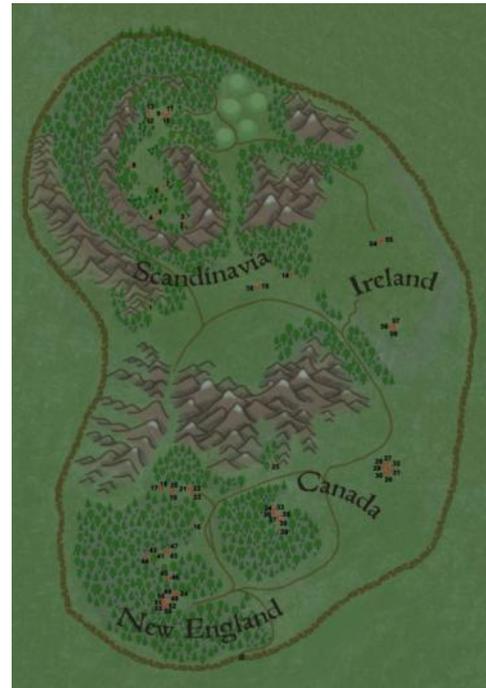
- To move forward, backward, right or left press the arrow keys on your keyboard. Your movement in game will follow the direction of the arrow pressed.



- At any point as you move through the virtual landscape, you can change location by typing 1, 2 or 3.

Access the map (PC only)

- Double-tapping the ‘M’ key on the computer keyboard reveals a map that shows all of the features of the virtual terrain and also the location of specific ancestor stones. The placement of the red arrow on the map shows a player’s present location and direction. You can return to the pilgrimage by double-tapping the ‘M’ key again. The map is also available via the login *Welcome* page on the *Virtual Kindred* website.



Click on Petroglyphs to access the Ancestor pages

There are several petroglyphic markers placed throughout the virtual landscape and each one relates to a specific ancestor.

- Click on an ancestor stone to open their corresponding page on the *Virtual Kindred* website.
- Each time a stone is clicked, a new browser tab is opened. This allows players to keep track of the ancestors they have viewed and navigate easily back and forth between their pages.

Follow the trail or wander as you like

- There are several trails marked through the landscape and many lead from one stone site to another. However, you are encouraged to wander through the landscape as you like.

To exit pilgrimage (PC only)

- Click the **X** in the upper right corner of the *Virtual Pilgrimage* window.

Appendix 4: Feet in Place photographs



page 10
Upper Clements, Nova Scotia
2008



page 109
Dublin, Ireland
2008



page 96
Rekkevik, Norway, 2008



page 110
Larvik, Norway, 2008



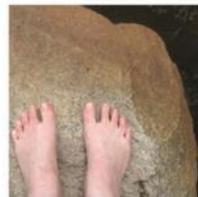
page 97
Lincoln Memorial
Washington D.C., 2008



page 111
Tobemalt Holy Well
County Sligo, Ireland, 2008



page 99
County Antrim,
Northern Ireland, 2008



page 112
Ell Pond,
Melrose, Massachusetts
2008



page 101
Loveland, Colorado, 2008



page 113
Smithsonian American Art
Museum,
Washington D.C., 2008



page 104
Annapolis Royal,
Nova Scotia, 2008



page 114
Oslo, Norway, 2008



page 108
Saint Patrick's Holy Well
Athleague, Ireland, 2008



page 115
Old Orchard Beach, Maine,
2008

Appendix 4- Feet in place photographs



page 116
Mosman Park,
Western Australia
2009



page 133
Fort Collins, Colorado
2008



page 117
Odiorne Point,
New Hampshire
2008



page 134
Ballycraggan House
Roscommon, Ireland
2008



page 120
South Fremantle,
Western Australia
2009



page 135
Malden, Massachusetts
2008



page 123
South Fremantle,
Western Australia
2009



page 137
Kulturhistorisk Museet
Oslo, Norway
2008



page 128
Smithsonian American Art
Museum,
Washington D.C.
2008



page 141
Ell Pond,
Melrose, Massachusetts
2008



page 129
Parson's Beach
Kennebunk, Maine
2008



page 142
Rye Beach, New Hampshire
2008



page 131
Boardwalk,
Old Orchard Beach, Maine,
2008



page 159
Tolstrupveien, Rekkevik,
Norway
2008



Subfolder 1, image 1: petroglyph, Malden, Massachusetts, 2008, granite, 77 cm (h) x 51 cm (w), imbedded.



Subfolder 1, image 2: Malden petroglyph 2008



Subfolder 1, image 3: Malden petroglyph 2013



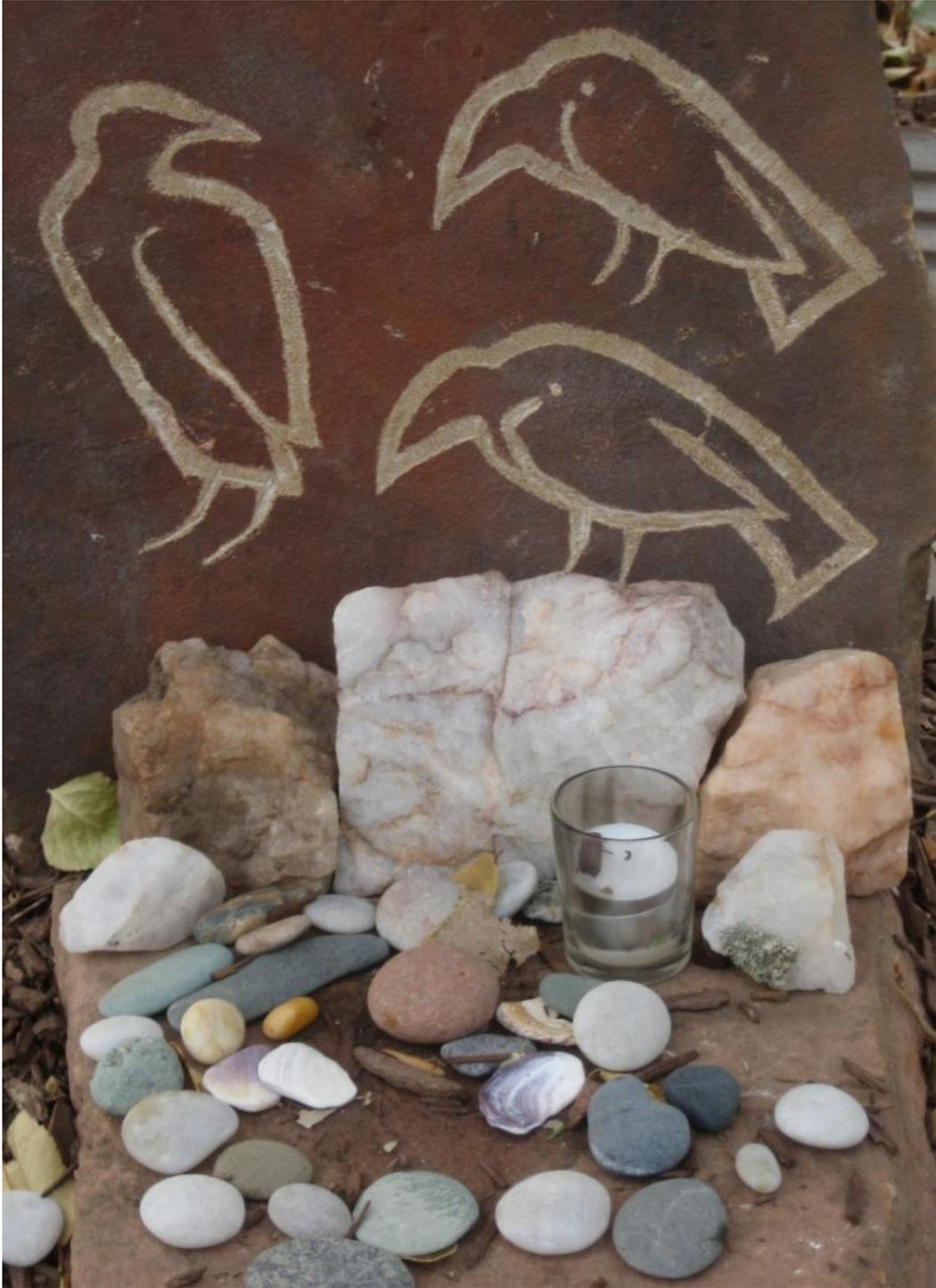
Subfolder 2, image 1: petroglyph, Fort Collins, Colorado, 2008, ironstone, 108 cm (h) x 57 cm (w) x 20 cm (d)



Subfolder 2, image 2: Ft Collins petroglyph, 2008



Subfolder 2, image 3. Ft Collins petroglyph offering, 31-10-2008



Subfolder 2, image 3a. Ft Collins petroglyph offering, 31-10-2008 (detail)



Subfolder 2, image 3b. Ft Collins petroglyph offering, 6-11-2008



Subfolder 2, image 4: Ft Collins petroglyph, 2010



Subfolder 2, image 5: Ft Collins petroglyph, 2013



Subfolder 3, image 1. petroglyph, Fremantle, Western Australia, 2009, Kimberley sandstone, 50 cm (h) x 51 cm (w) x 14 cm (d).



Subfolder 3, image 2: Fremantle petroglyph first offerings, 2009



Figure 10: Subfolder 3, image 2a: Fremantle petroglyph, offerings, 2009



Subfolder 3, image 3: Fremantle petroglyph, offerings, 2010



Subfolder 3, image 4: Fremantle petroglyph, offerings, 2012



Subfolder 3, image 5: Fremantle petroglyph, offerings, 2013



Subfolder 3, image 5a: Fremantle petroglyph, offerings, 2013



Subfolder 4, image 1: petroglyph, Fremantle, Western Australia (Gosfield), 2012, Kimberley sandstone, 126 cm (h) x 58 cm (w) x 15 cm (d).



Folder 2: *Pilgrim feet montage*, 2013, digital photo montage, A3



Image 1: *Pilgrimage to Mosman Park: stitching experience to memory, binding memories to place*, 2009, mixed media assemblage, found objects, cotton canvas, digitally printed cotton, bamboo, twine, thread, acrylic paint, graphite, ink, 93cm x 153cm x 17cm.



Image 2: Pilgrimage to Mosman Park (detail)



Image 3: Pilgrimage to Mosman Park (detail)



Image 4: Pilgrimage to Mosman Park (detail)



Image 5: Pilgrimage to Mosman Park (detail)



Image 6: Pilgrimage to Mosman Park (detail)



Image 7: *Pilgrimage to Mosman Park* (detail)



Subfolder 1, image 1: *Ancestor Figures (study)*, 2008, leather, glass seed beads, 17.5 cm x 9 cm and 16.5 cm x 9 cm.



Subfolder 1, image 2: *Ancestor Beadwork 1*, 2009, cowhide suede, glass seed beads, thread, 58 cm x 25 cm



Subfolder 1, image 3: *Ancestor Beadwork 2*, 2010, cowhide suede, glass seed beads, thread, 69 cm x 36 cm



Subfolder 1, image 4: *Ancestor Beadwork 3*, 2013, cowhide suede, glass seed beads, punched metal charms, metal crow feathers, 108 cm x 48.5 cm

Subfolder 1: *Virtual Pilgrimage*, produced in collaboration with Maxwell E. Frankel, 2010-2012.

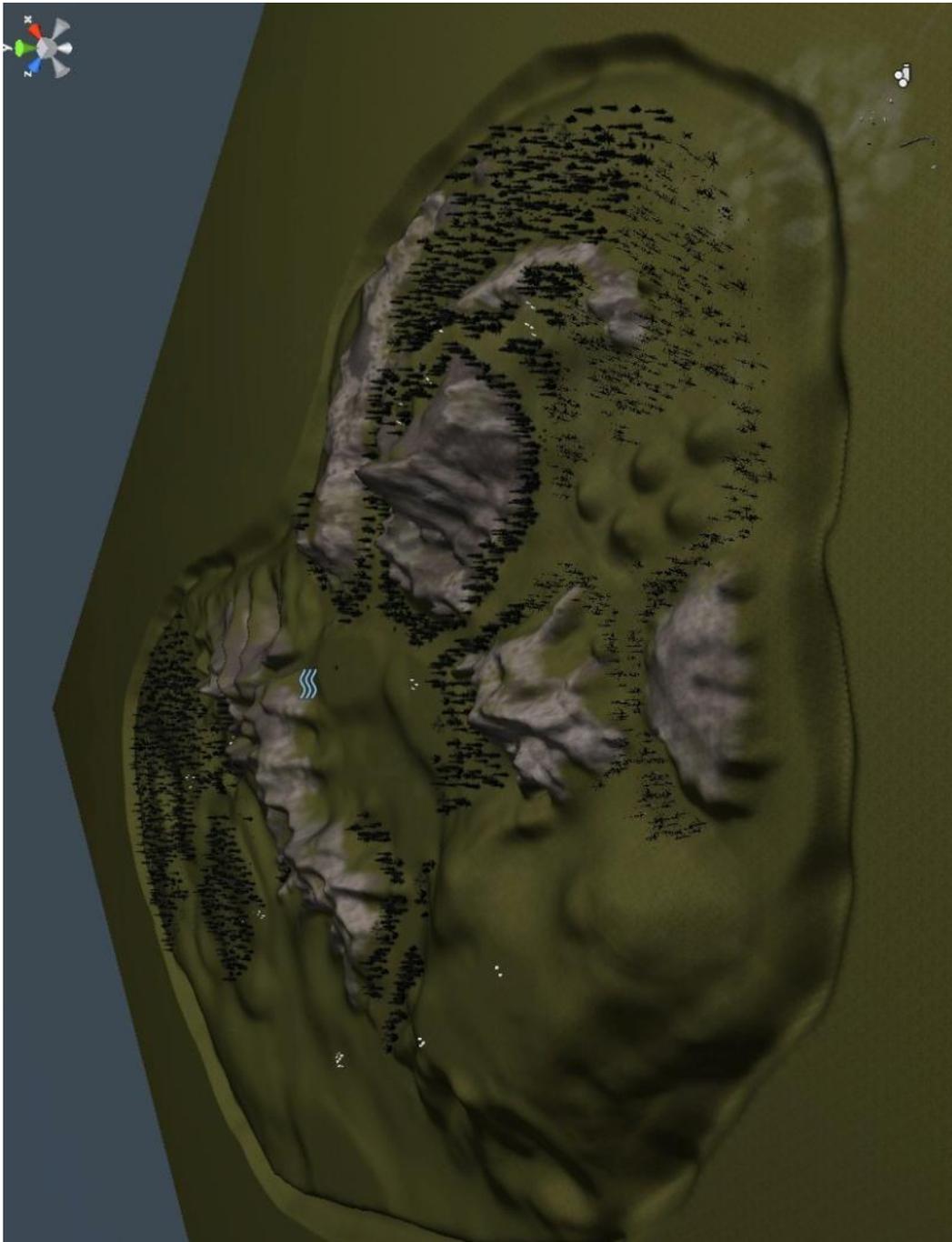
Windows version (PC compatible)

MacOS version (Macintosh compatible)

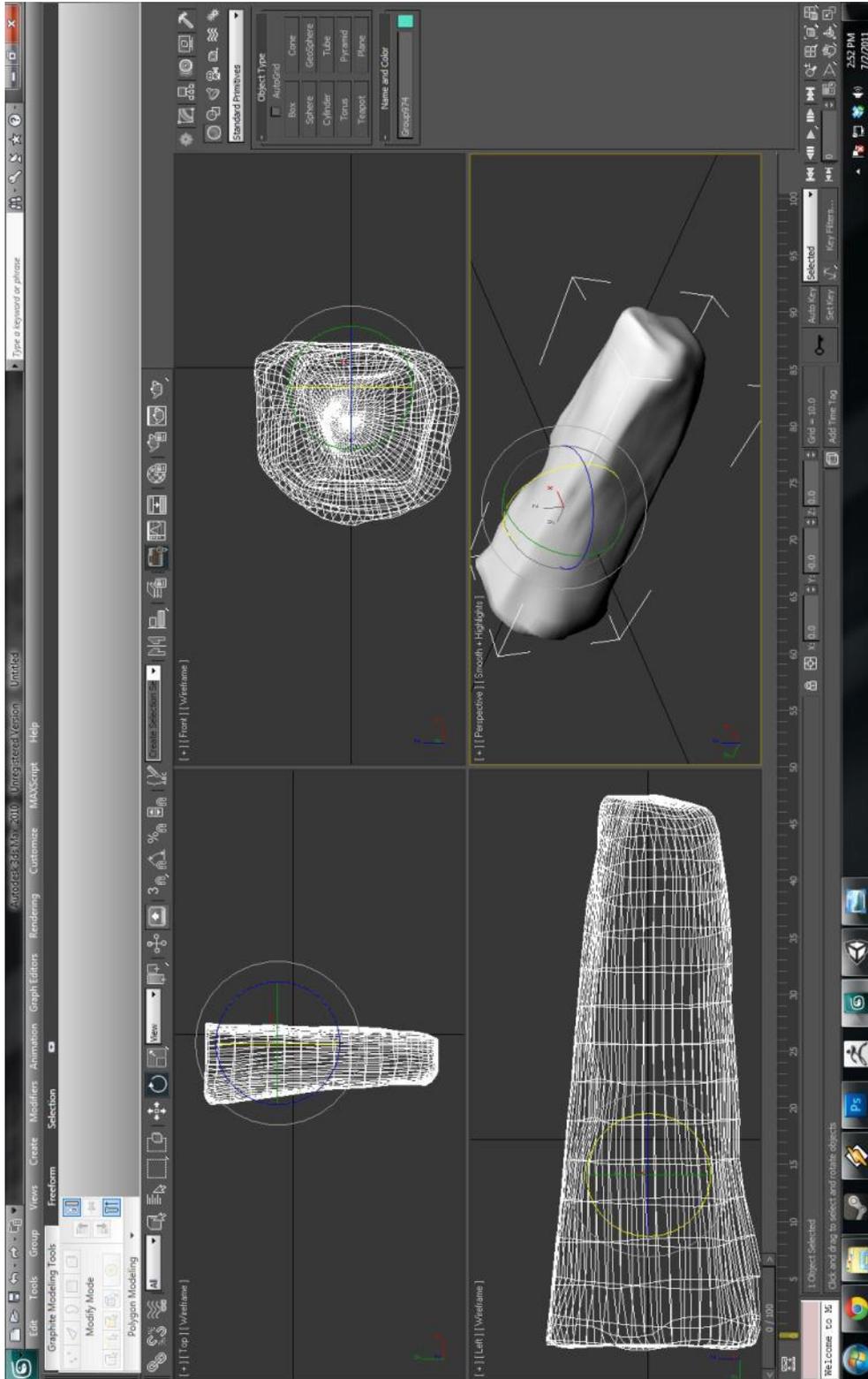
Available on 21st Century Pilgrim's Progress Artwork CD or via the download link found here:

http://www.virtualkindred.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5&Itemid=101

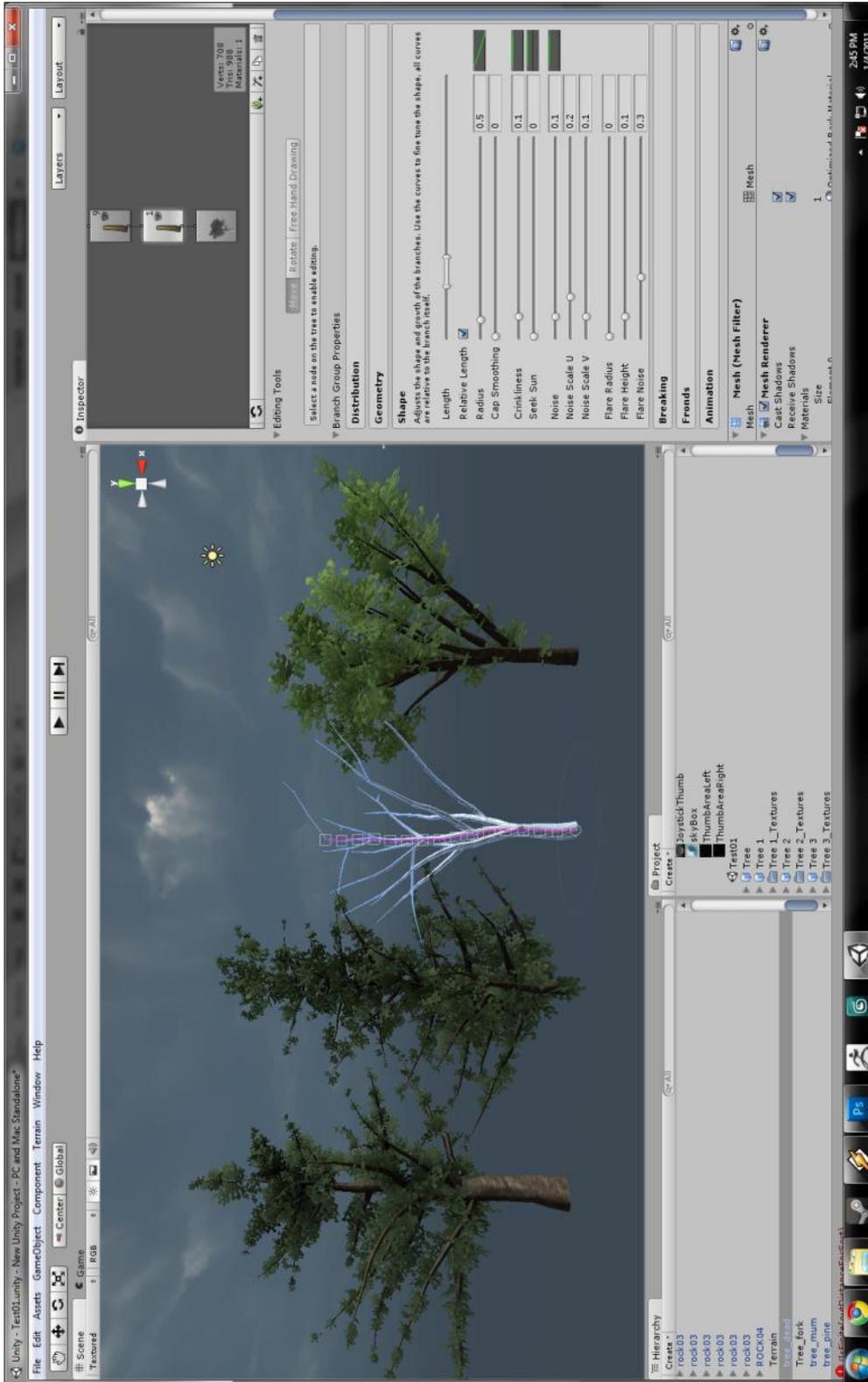
Work in progress screenshots



Subfolder 2, image 1: Modelling the ground



Subfolder 2, image 2: Constructing stones



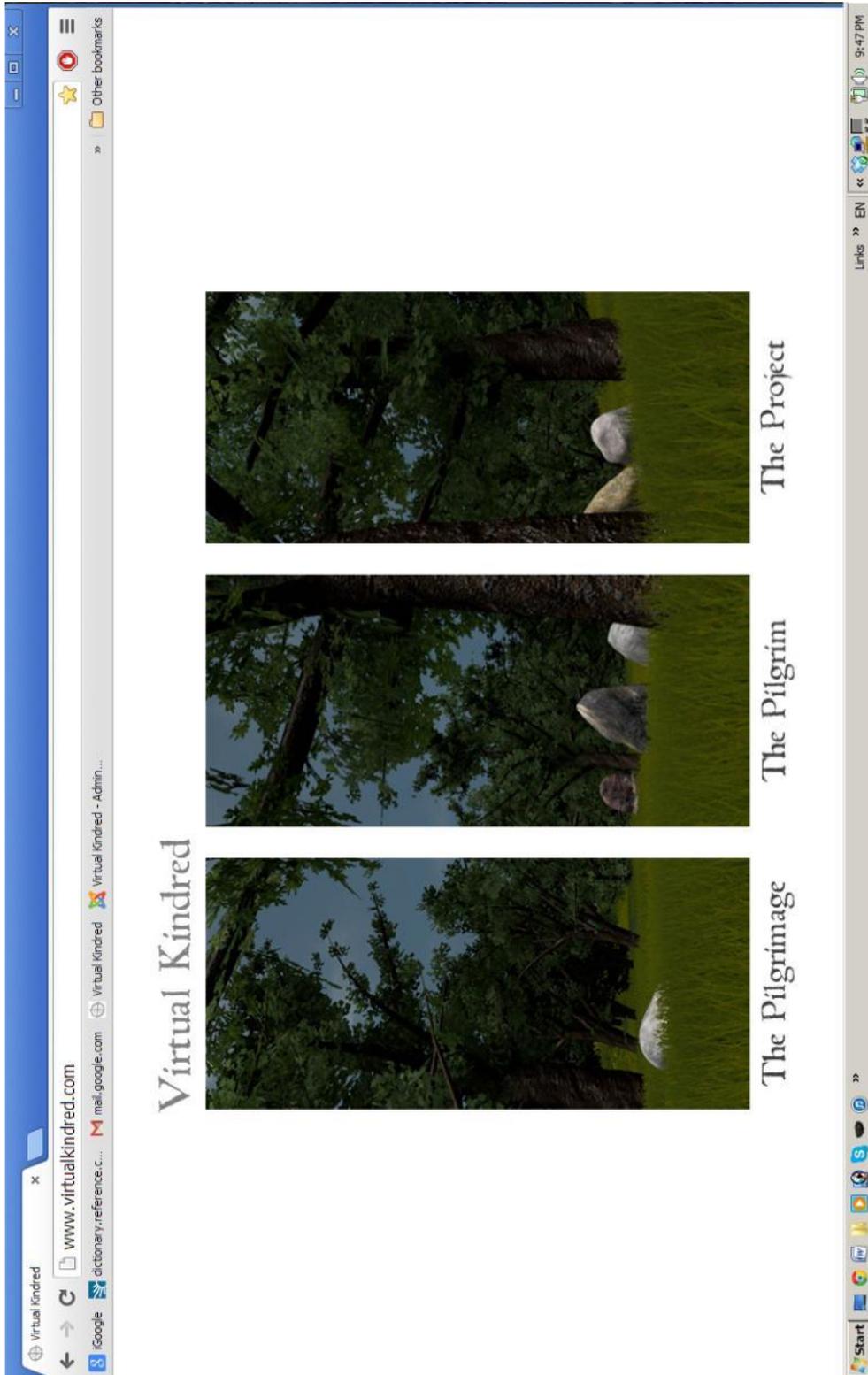
Subfolder 2, image 2a: Crafting trees



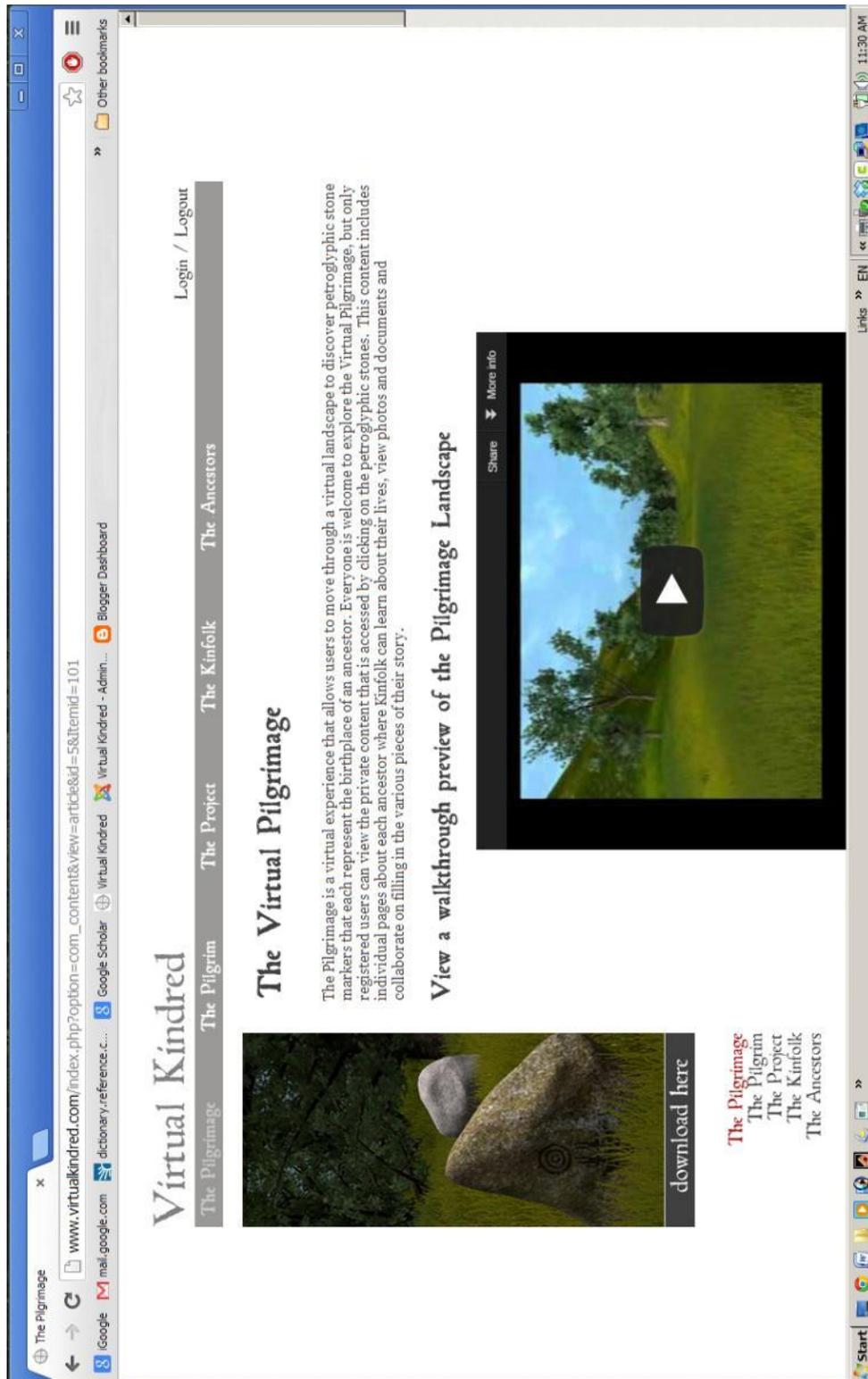
Subfolder 2, image 3: Setting stones in place



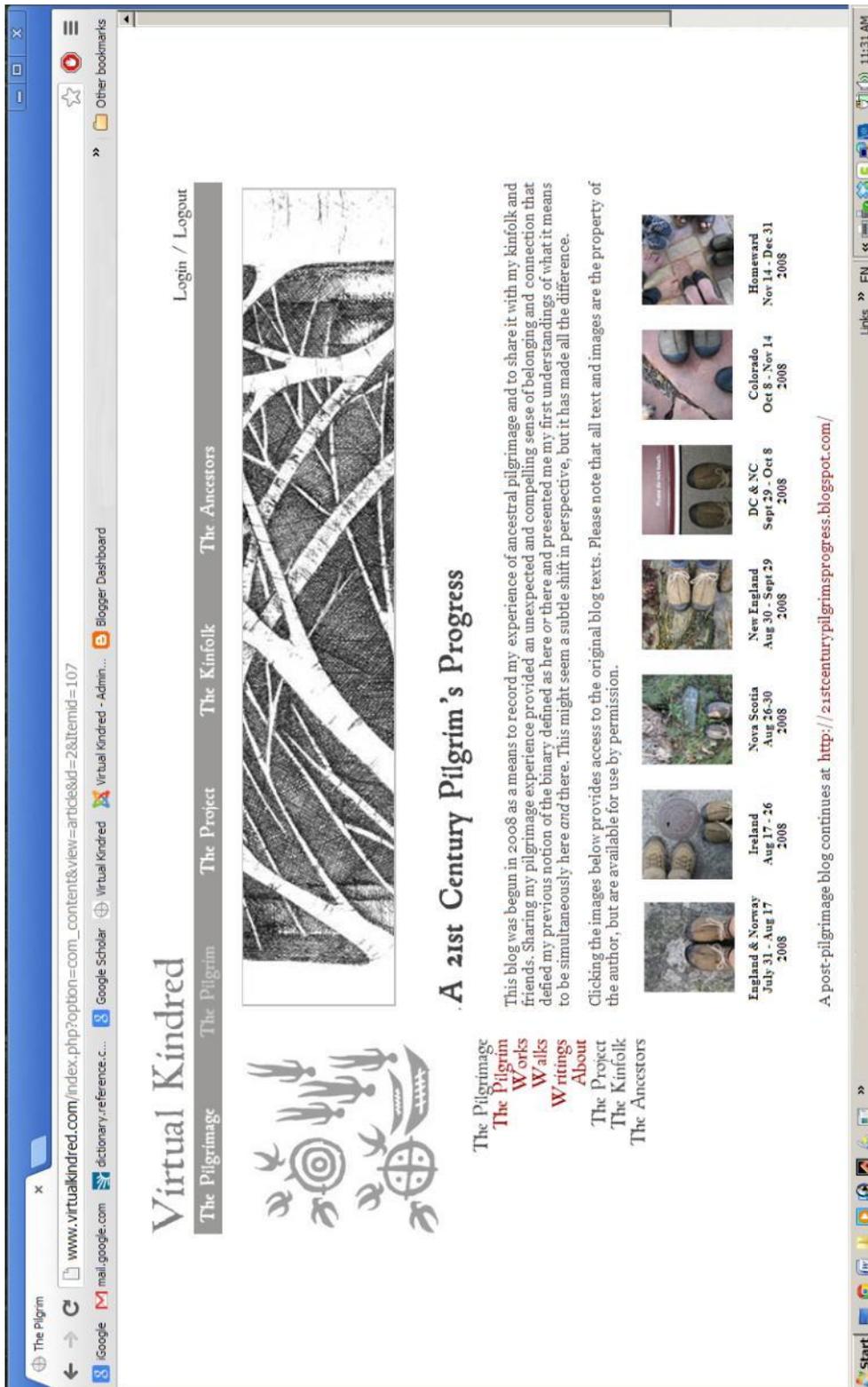
Subfolder 2, image 4: Viking mounds



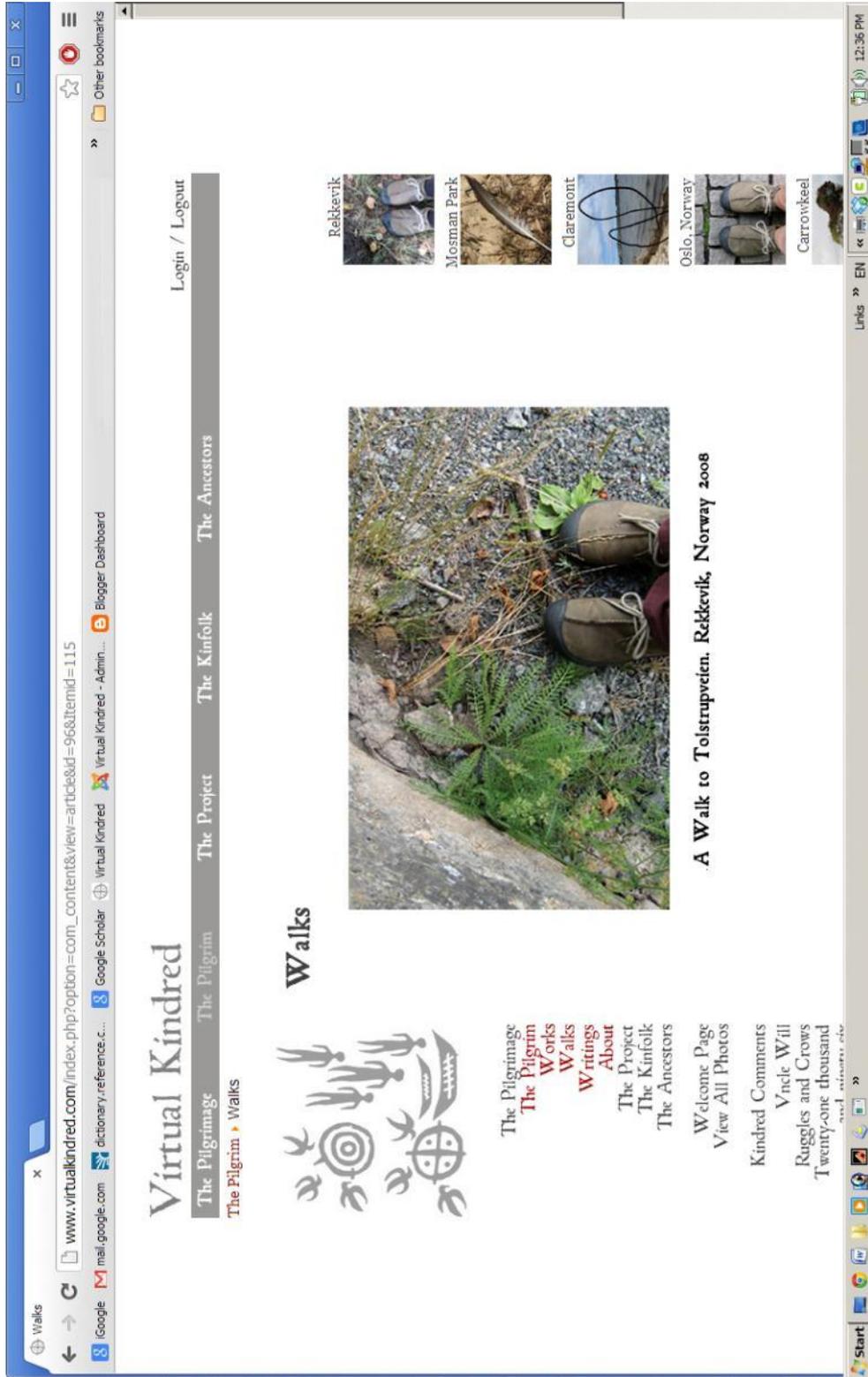
Subfolder 1 - Public pages, image 1: Virtual Kindred homepage



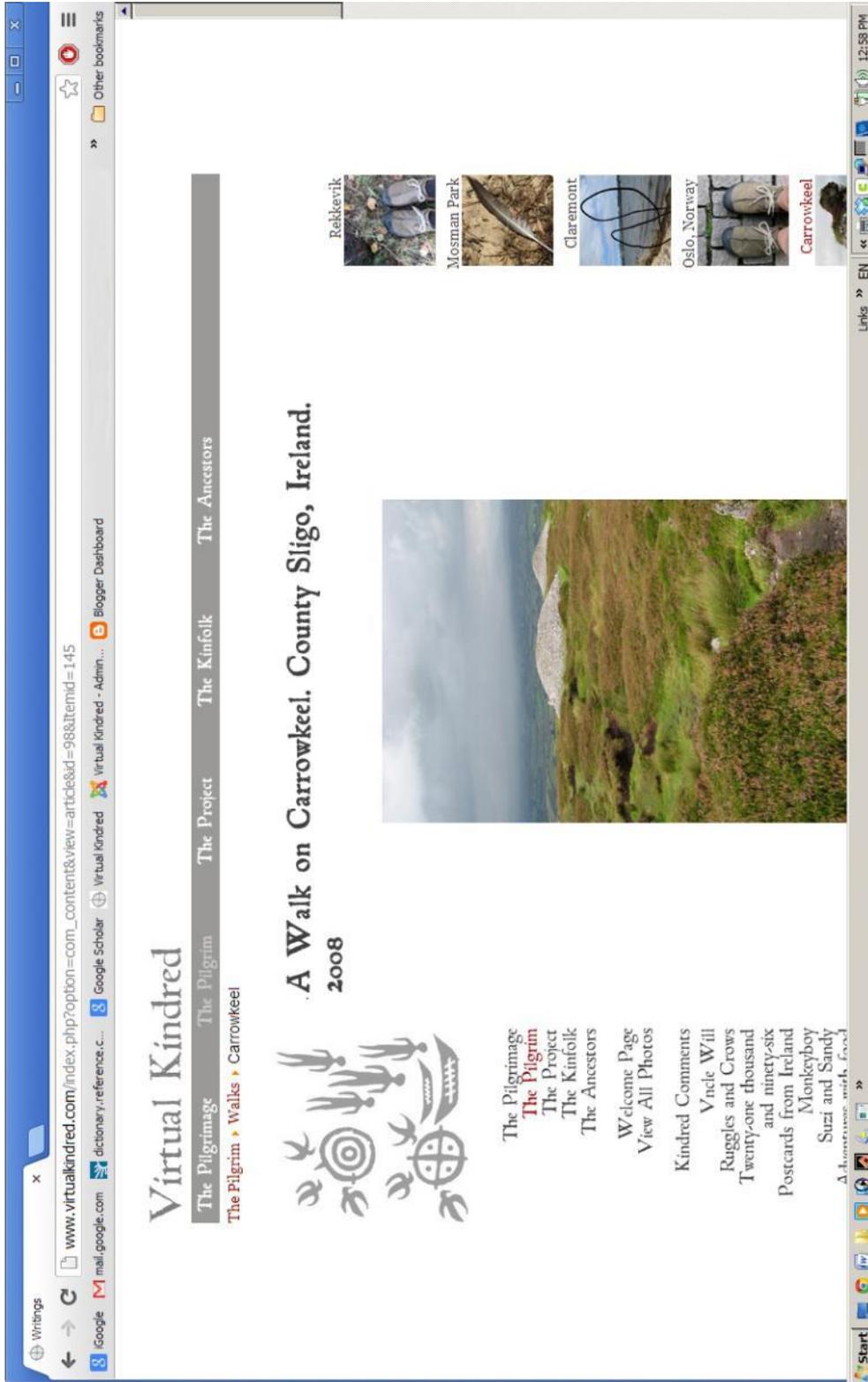
Subfolder 1 - Public pages, image 2: Pilgrimage landing page



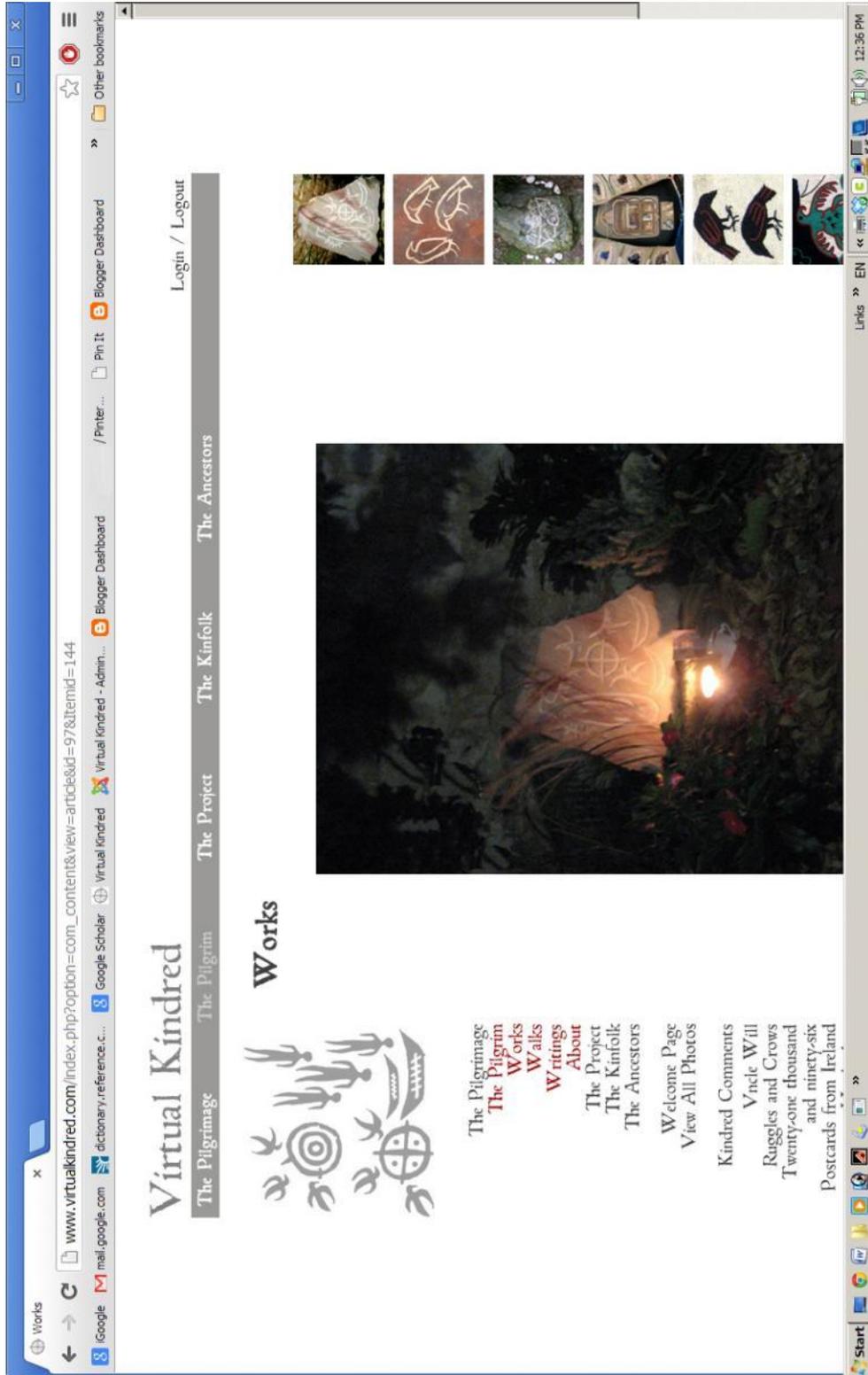
Subfolder 1 - Public pages, image 3: Pilgrim landing page



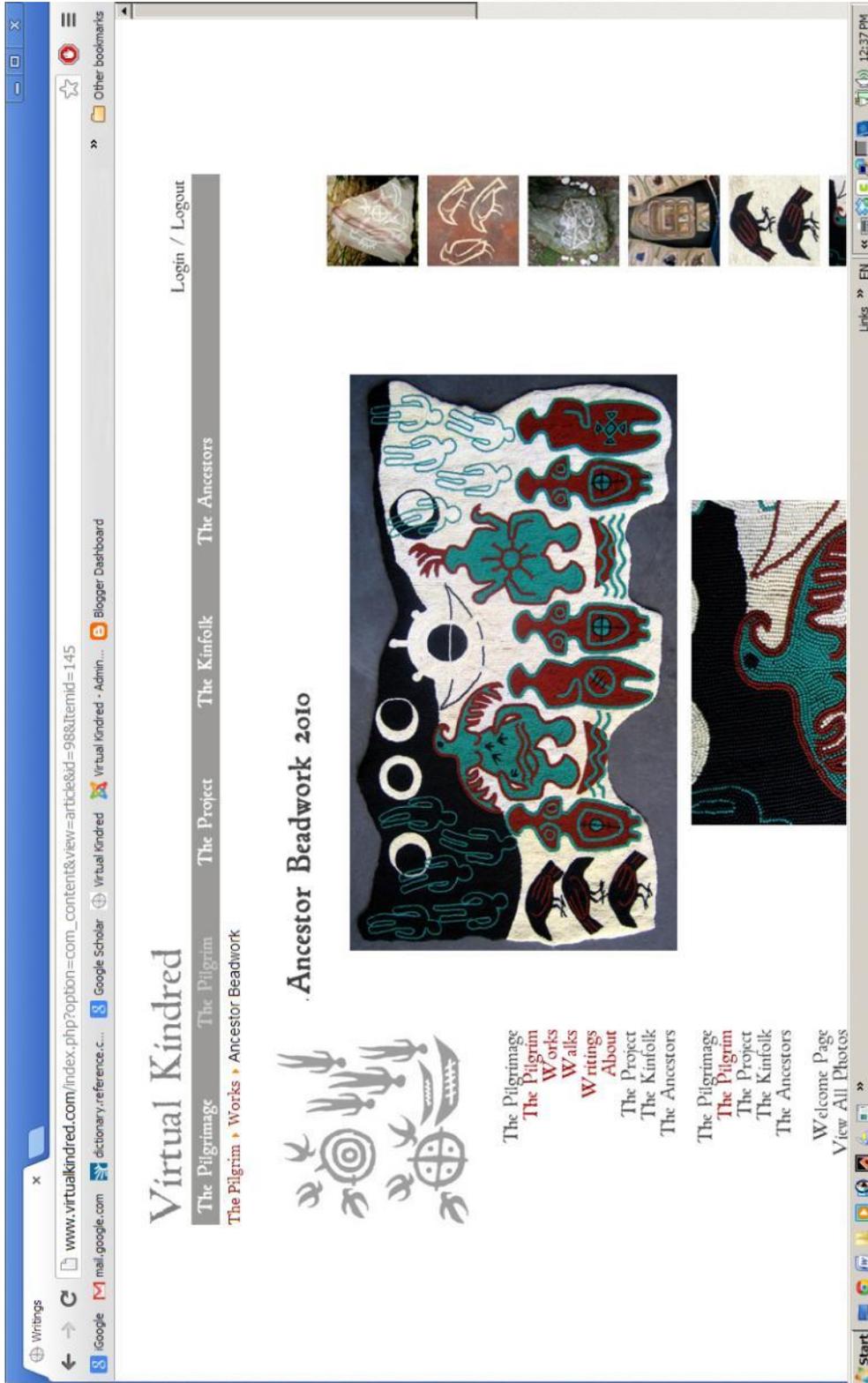
Subfolder 1 - Public pages, image 3a: Walks landing page



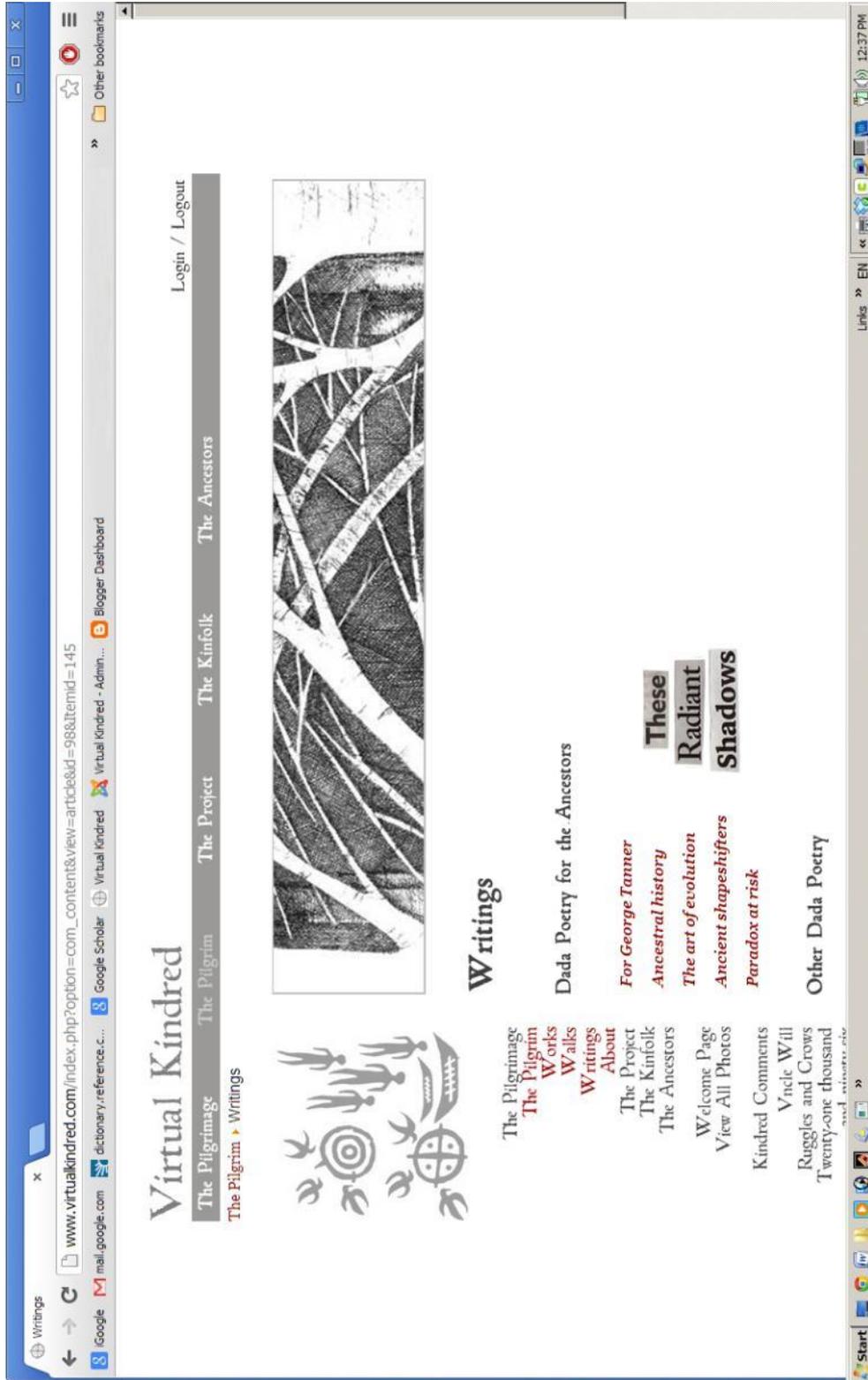
Subfolder 1 - Public pages, image 3b: Walks page



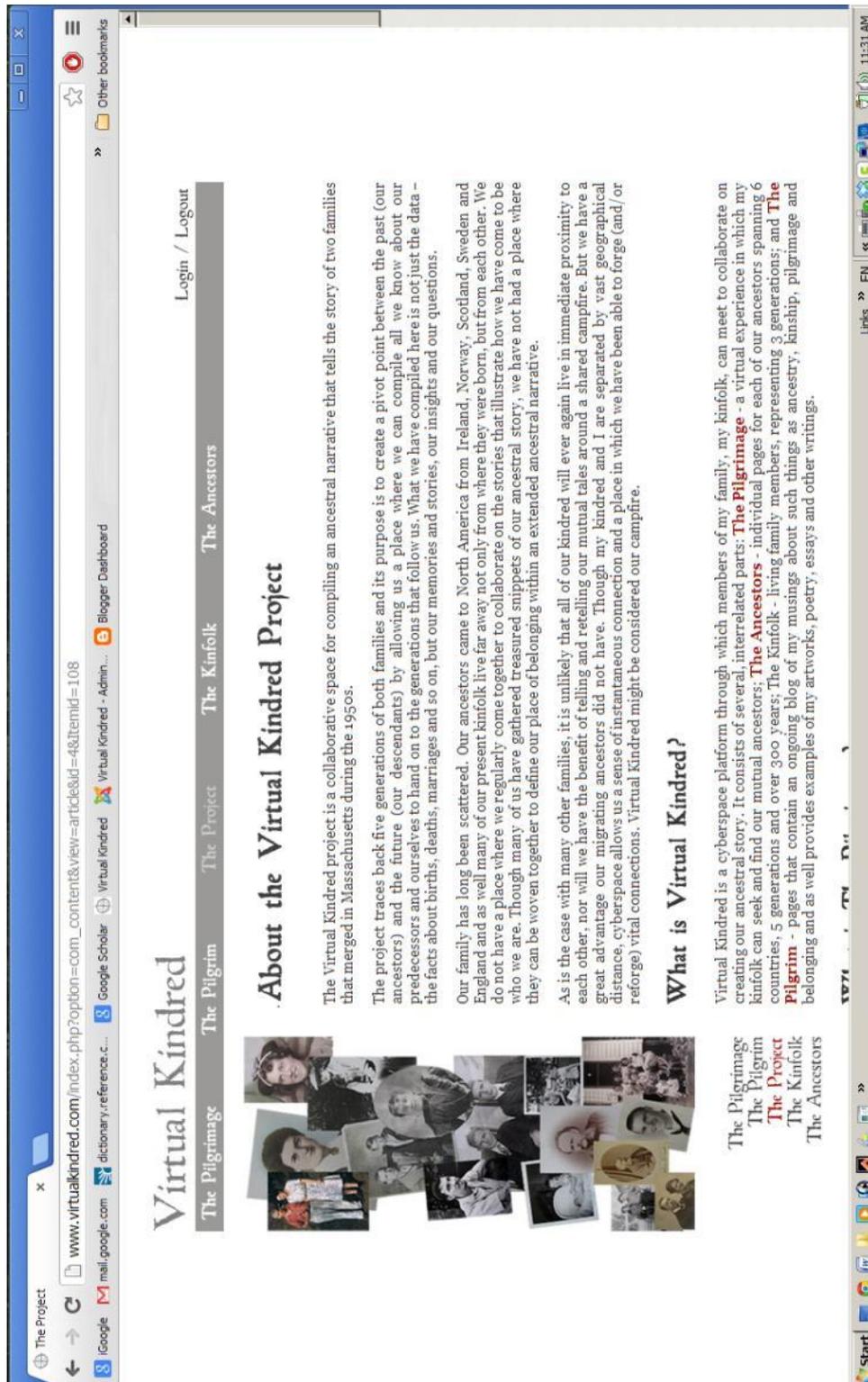
Subfolder 1 - Public pages, image 3c: Works landing page



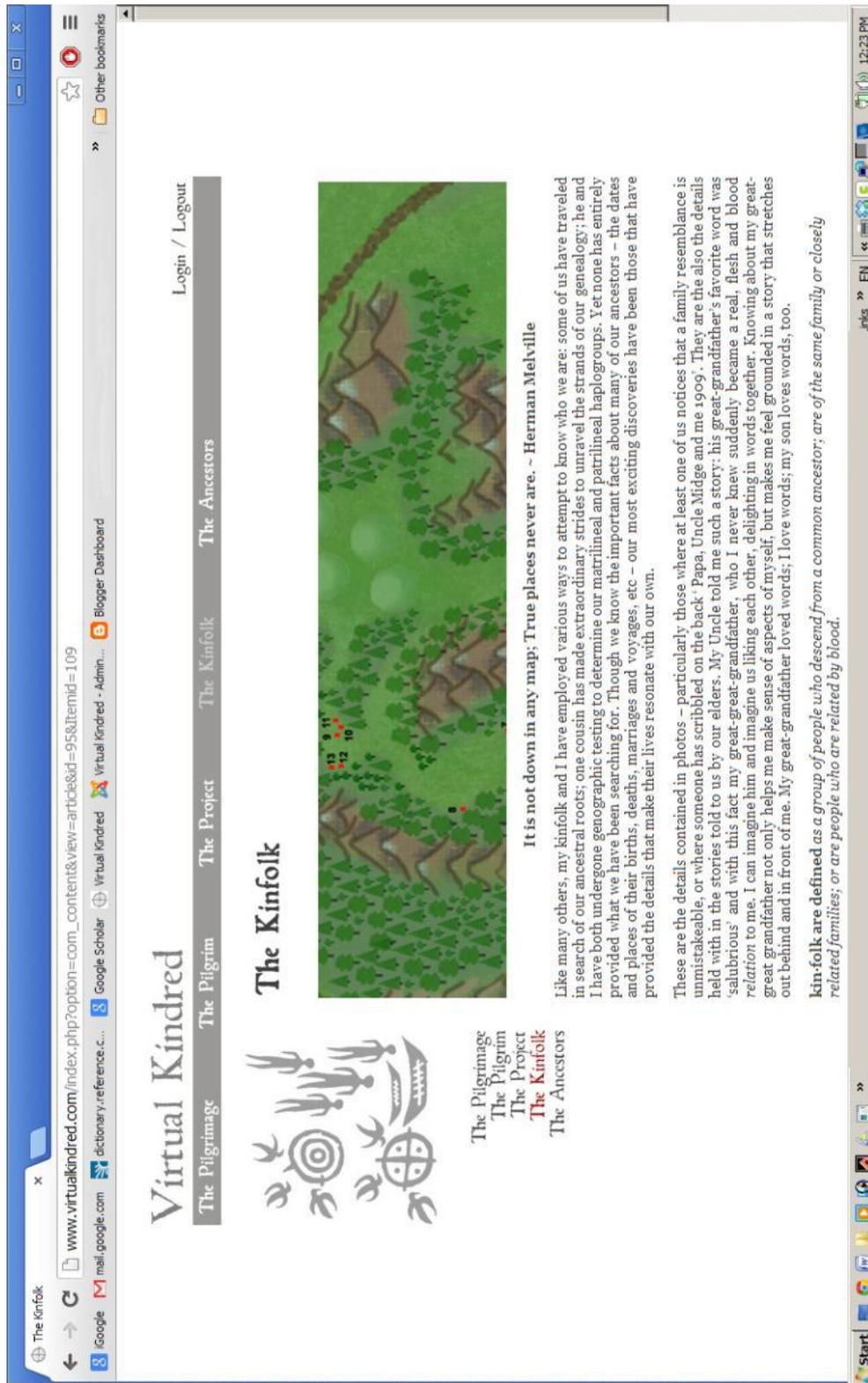
Subfolder 1 - Public pages, image 3d: Works page



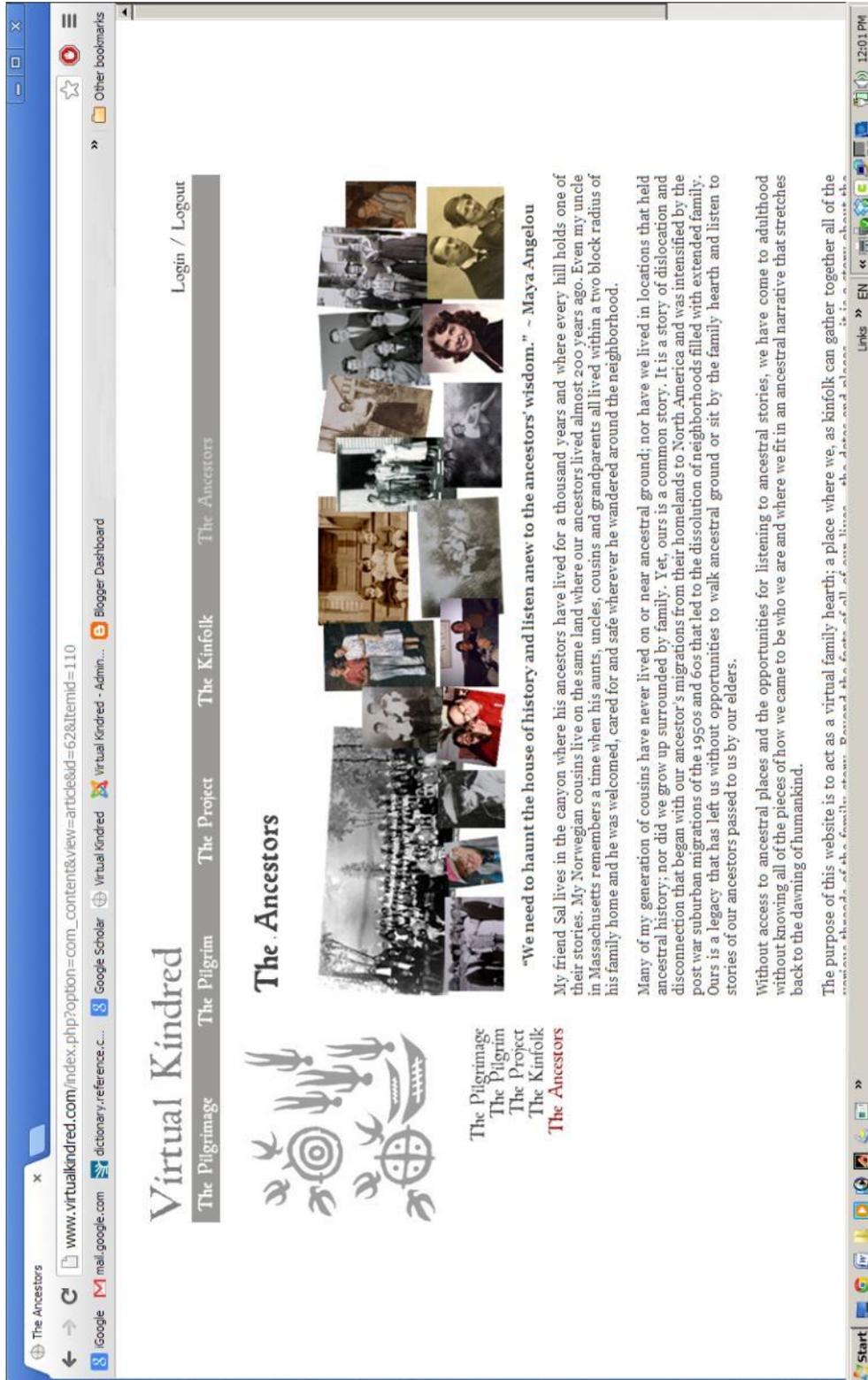
Subfolder 1 - Public pages, image 3e: Writings landing page



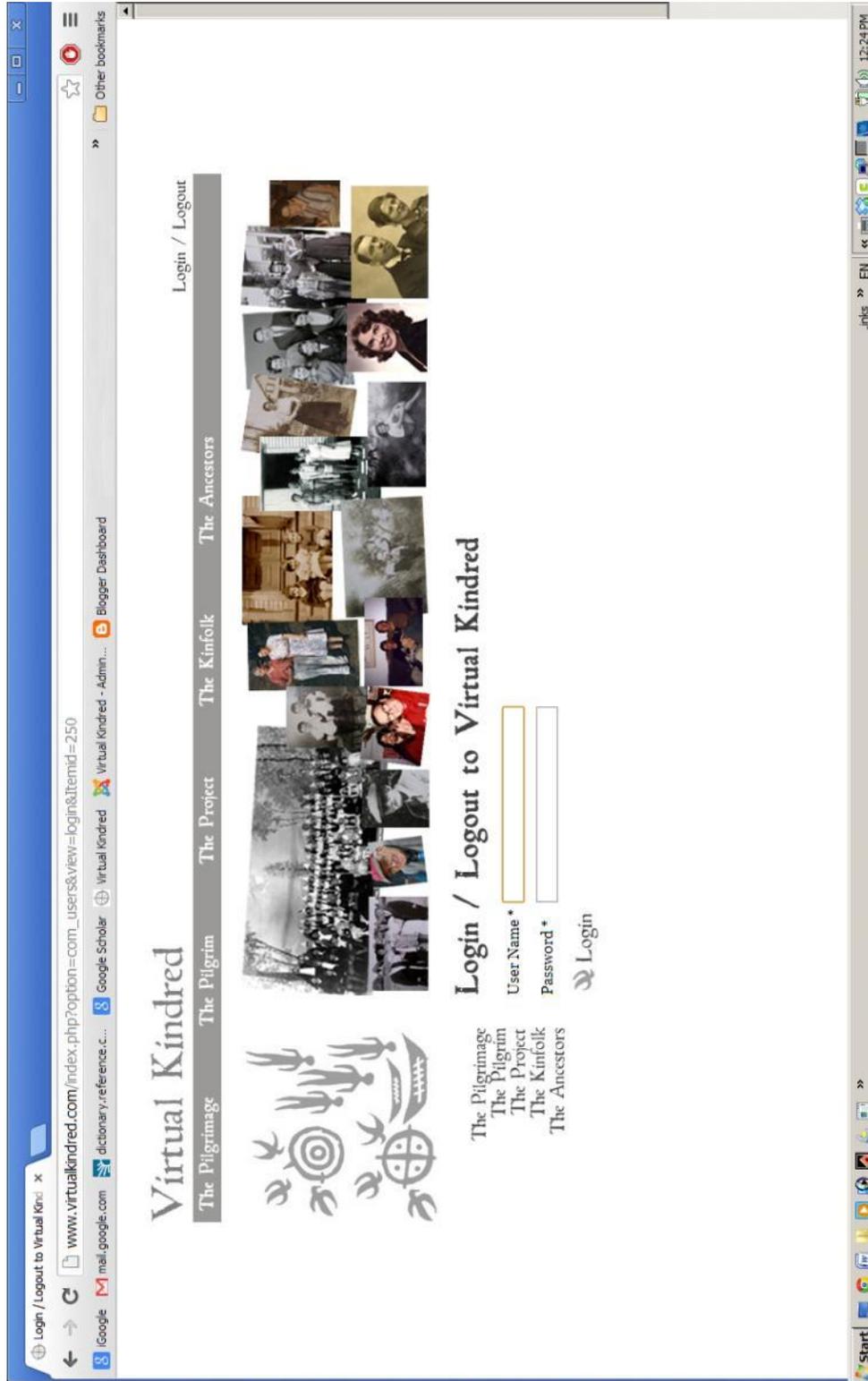
Subfolder 1 - Public pages, image 4: Project landing page



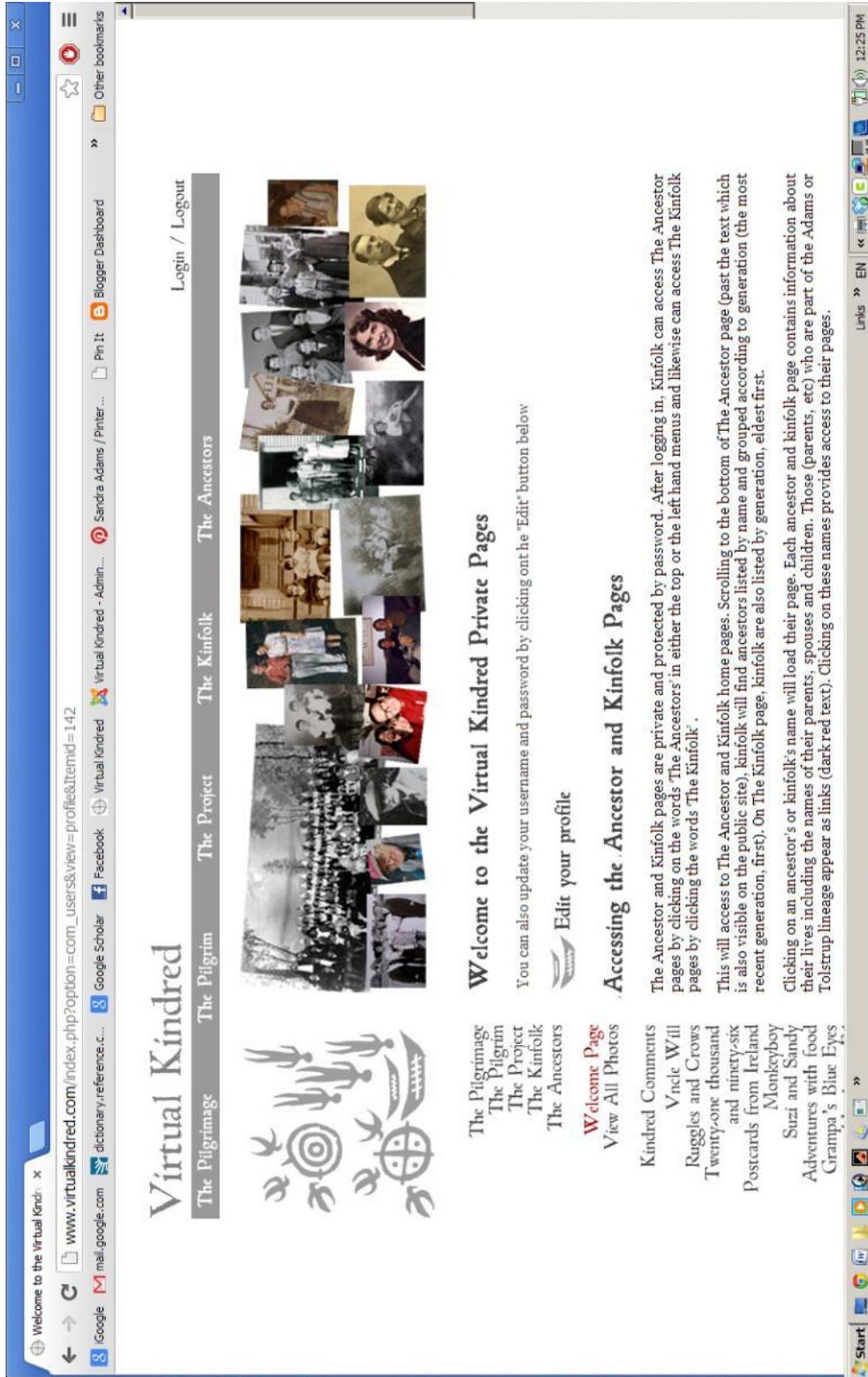
Subfolder 1 - Public pages, image 5: Kinfolk landing page



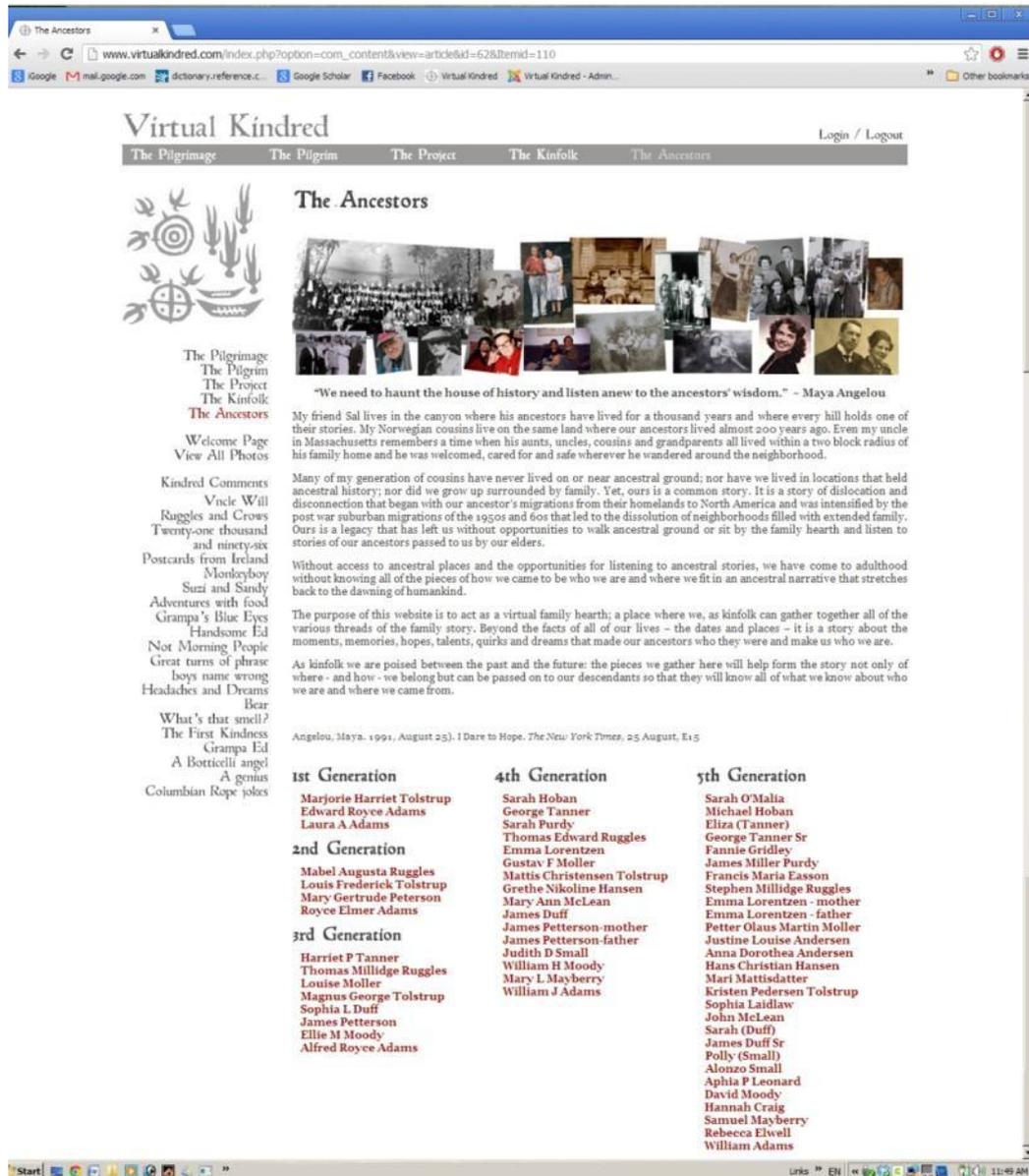
Subfolder 1 - Public pages, image 6: Ancestor landing page



Subfolder 1 - Public pages, image 7: Login/logout page



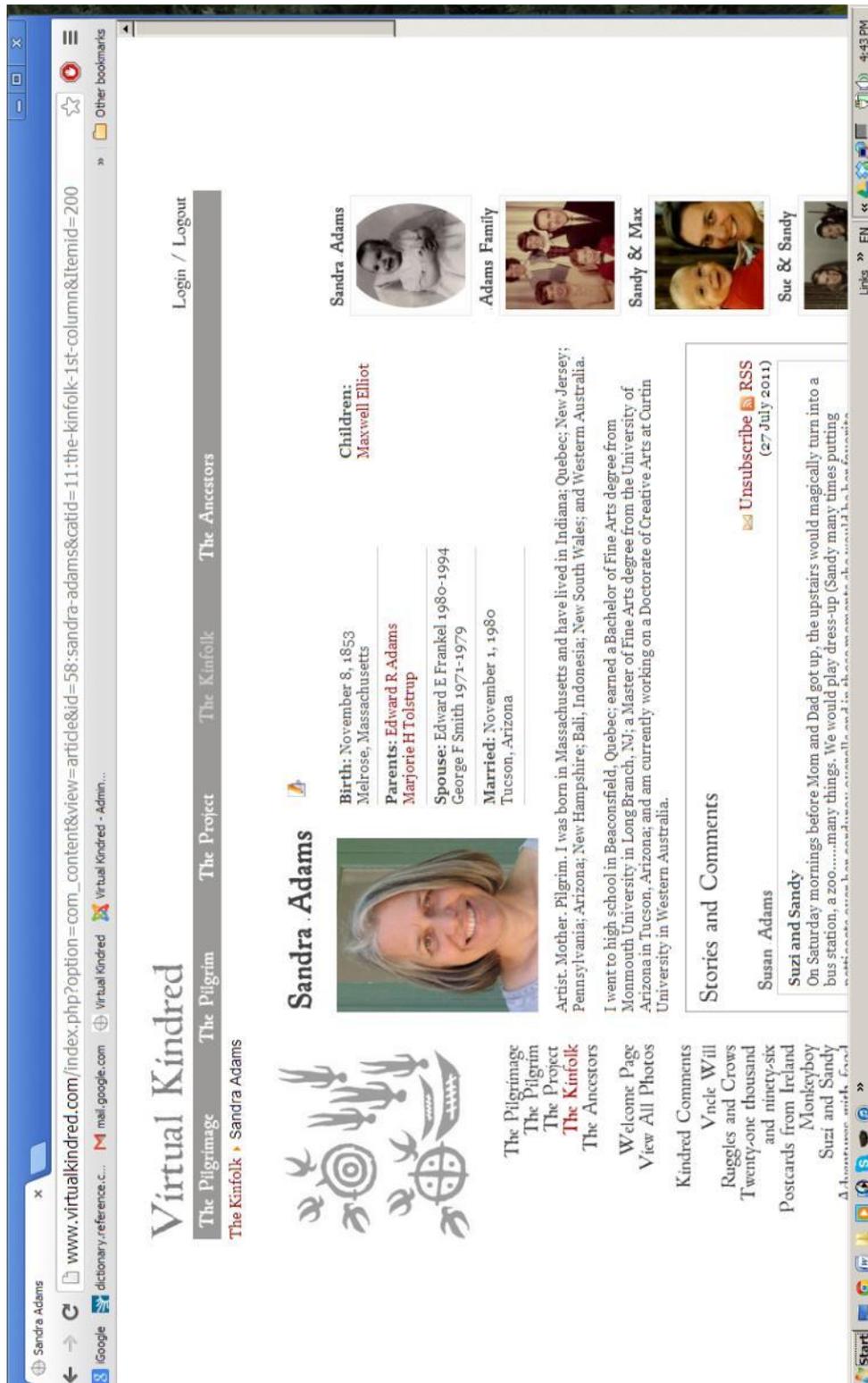
Subfolder 2 - Private pages, image 1: Kindred private pages welcome



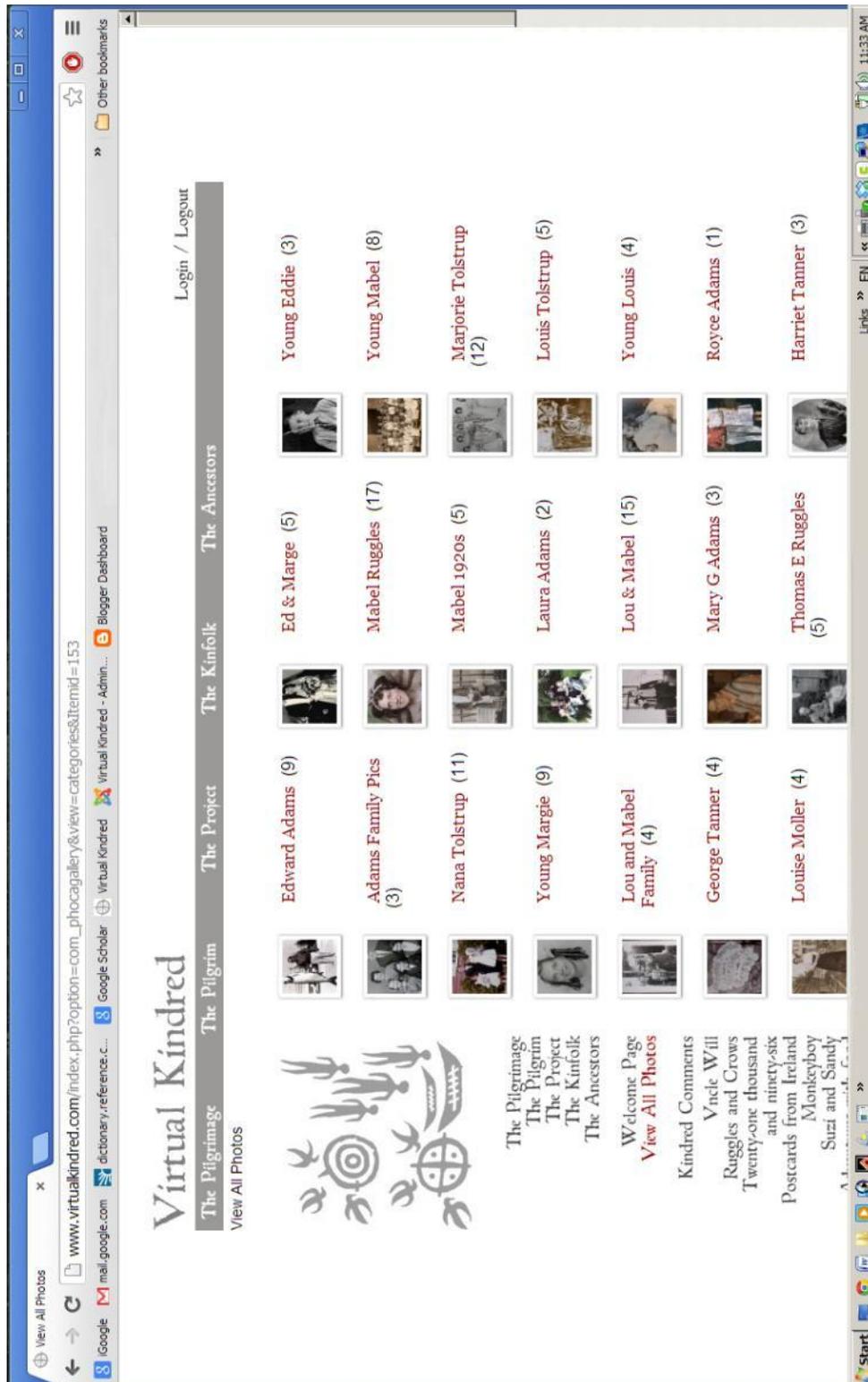
Subfolder 2 - Private pages, image 2: Ancestor landing page

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the 'Virtual Kindred' website. The address bar shows the URL: www.virtualkindred.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=19:mabel-ruggles&catid=13:2nd-generation&Itemid=159. The browser's address bar also shows 'Mabel Augusta Ruggles' and 'Virtual Kindred - Admin...'. The website's navigation menu includes 'The Pilgrim', 'The Project', 'The Kinfolk', and 'The Ancestors'. The main content area features a profile for 'Mabel Augusta Ruggles' with a portrait and a list of biographical details: Birth: November 20, 1901, Boston, Massachusetts; Death: June 14, 1999, Malden, Massachusetts; Parents: Thomas Millidge Ruggles and Harriet P Tanner; Spouse: Louis Frederick Tolstrup; Married: June 26, 1926, Malden, Massachusetts. Below this is a paragraph of text about Mabel's personality and a 'Stories and Comments' section with a 'Subscribe' button. The right sidebar contains several photo galleries: 'Young Mabel', 'Lou Tolstrup Family', 'Lou & Mabel', and 'Mabel Ruggles'. The browser's taskbar at the bottom shows the Start button, system tray icons, and the time 12:34 PM.

Subfolder 2 - Private pages, image 3: Ancestor page



Subfolder 2 - Private pages, image 4: Kindred page



Subfolder 2 - Private pages, image 5: Photographs landing page



Subfolder 2 - Private pages, image 6: Virtual Pilgrimage map page

Ancestor

his departed story
beckons tragedy
Yet his sweet Faith
deaf to the tread of failure
blurred The perils of a Predatory History
a dark exile from childhood
from heartland
FROM home

RISING from
this set in stone delusion
he SHIFTED the Downtrodden
& crippled vision
stealing an unflinching Tomorrow
from inside his ash-filled past

Image 1: *Ancestor*, 2009

The art of *Evolution*
Wrought from a landscape
of **defiant** chaos
this wayward wisdom
at odds with **the** triumphing
vandalism of our mothballed *truth*

in the hopeful territory
of Starry-eyed **Terror**
risk bruises the **genuine** conviction
and eager life treads past
the mauling **gloom**
of virtuous NARRATIVE

here, dilemma scuttles
the **Deathly** VESSELS of elusive safety
& wrecks the **Stifling** seductions
of unseaworthy *compromise*

where Flickers escape
in The ALMOST Unbearable message
this Heart-thumping journey
NOT a battle, a reward

Image 2: *Art of evolution*, 2009

genius haunts
THE PILGRIM'S Footsteps
WHERE uncertainty walks
A Peripheral Geography
AND Hopeful panic awakens
the virtuosity of dilemma

in this mayhem of thoughts
No vacuum of sanctuary
snares the unfinished story
No holy grail blinds
where BEING MAPS a wilderness
of wonder & mystery

Image 3: *The pilgrim's footsteps*, 2011

the landscape of paradox

stitched Round and round

this Toxic COCOON

is a web

of MONOCHROMATIC bliss

I WANT

to be LURED BEYOND

the siren call of absolution

to find succour

In spacious uncertainty

To Wander

the Breathtaking landscape

of paradox

Image 4: *Paradox at risk*, 2010

here **BELOW** everything
THE MUSIC of **SPHERES**
spreads **AN** Unconciuous euphoria
No weathered rhapsody
this Native tune
awakens **THE** journey of dreams
from with in **THEIR** own dreaming

An ephemeral harmony
this Music of risk
finds Nurture in **ANARCHY**
AND A sense of place
in The movement **BETWEEN**
THE idea and its artefacts
THE tale **AND** its **TELLING**

Image 5: Between the tale and its telling

ancient Shape shifters
haunt the Cellar of my dreams
and whistle an irresistible *Ambition*

these Radiant Shadows
approach from THE borderline
to TELL A tribal STORY
of starry-eyed Adventure
and the perils of forgotten hope

These Divine witnesses
prowl from beyond history
to AWAKEN a terror of sumptuous thoughts
and weave their proud Lessons
into my BOUNDLESS banshee SOUL

Image 6: Ancient shapeshifters, 2012