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<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-7952-3877> (2023) Mobile Histories, the curated path and the pilgrim trail Tracing the Footsteps of St Bede. A photographic walk as research practice. In: Ethnography and Qualitative Research International Conference ERQ 2023 - 9th edition, 7th - 10th June 2023, University of Trento, Trento, Italy. (Submitted)

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Mobile Histories, the curated path and the pilgrim trail: *Tracing the footsteps of St Bede*

A photographic walk as research practice



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Introduction

This presentation will discuss a visual arts practice led research project exploring the interconnected nature of walking, photographic practice and digital navigation systems as a form of drawing - representative of the human experience of place.

The project is an enquiry into the pilgrims trail - the nature and significance of the path in relation to walking which helps us to understanding something about ourselves and our shared histories as it appears as mediated through analogue and digital technologies.

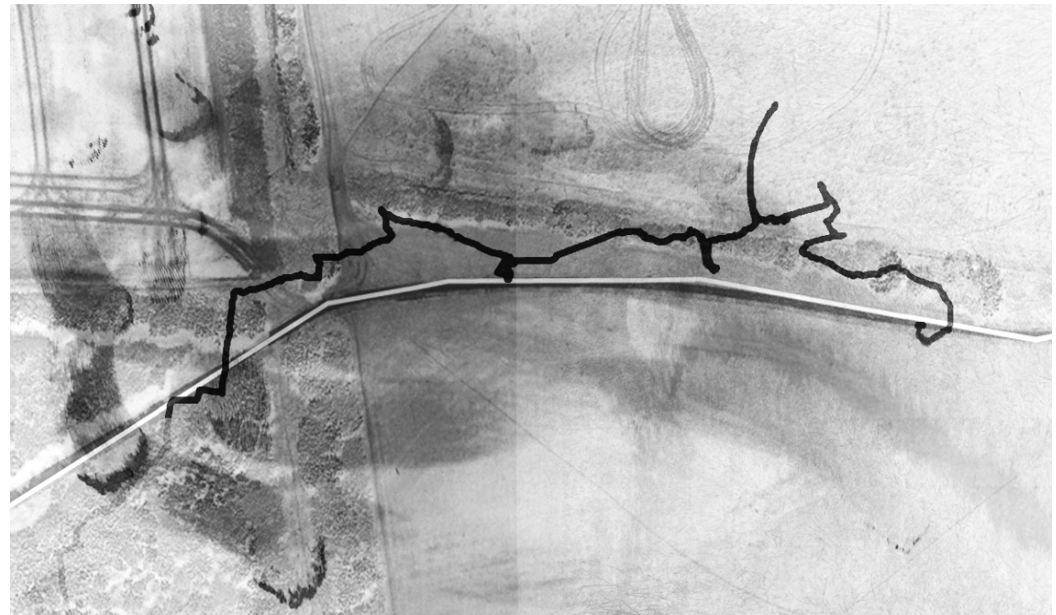
Through practice led research I am asking how photography and digital technologies as an extension of the body may serve as a reflexive post phenomenological tool and how technologies influence human-world relations, ranging from being 'embodied' and being 'read', to being 'interacted with'.
(Idhe, 2015)



Introduction

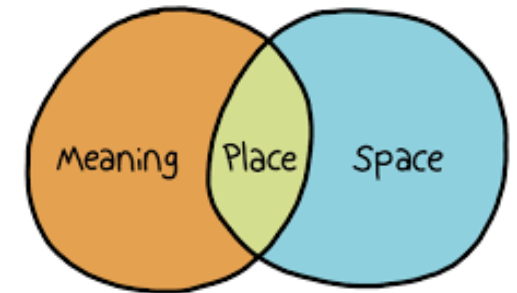
Landscape photographers and human geographers such as David Harvey view the world as a palimpsest – place is as a complex accumulation of history and space as provisional, fugitive and mutable.

The more provisional spaces I will be discussing are shaped and appropriated by pilgrims, tourists, psychogeographers and through the generative and dialectical act of walking which construes the 'self' as dynamic process rather than static entity acted out through itinerant practices.



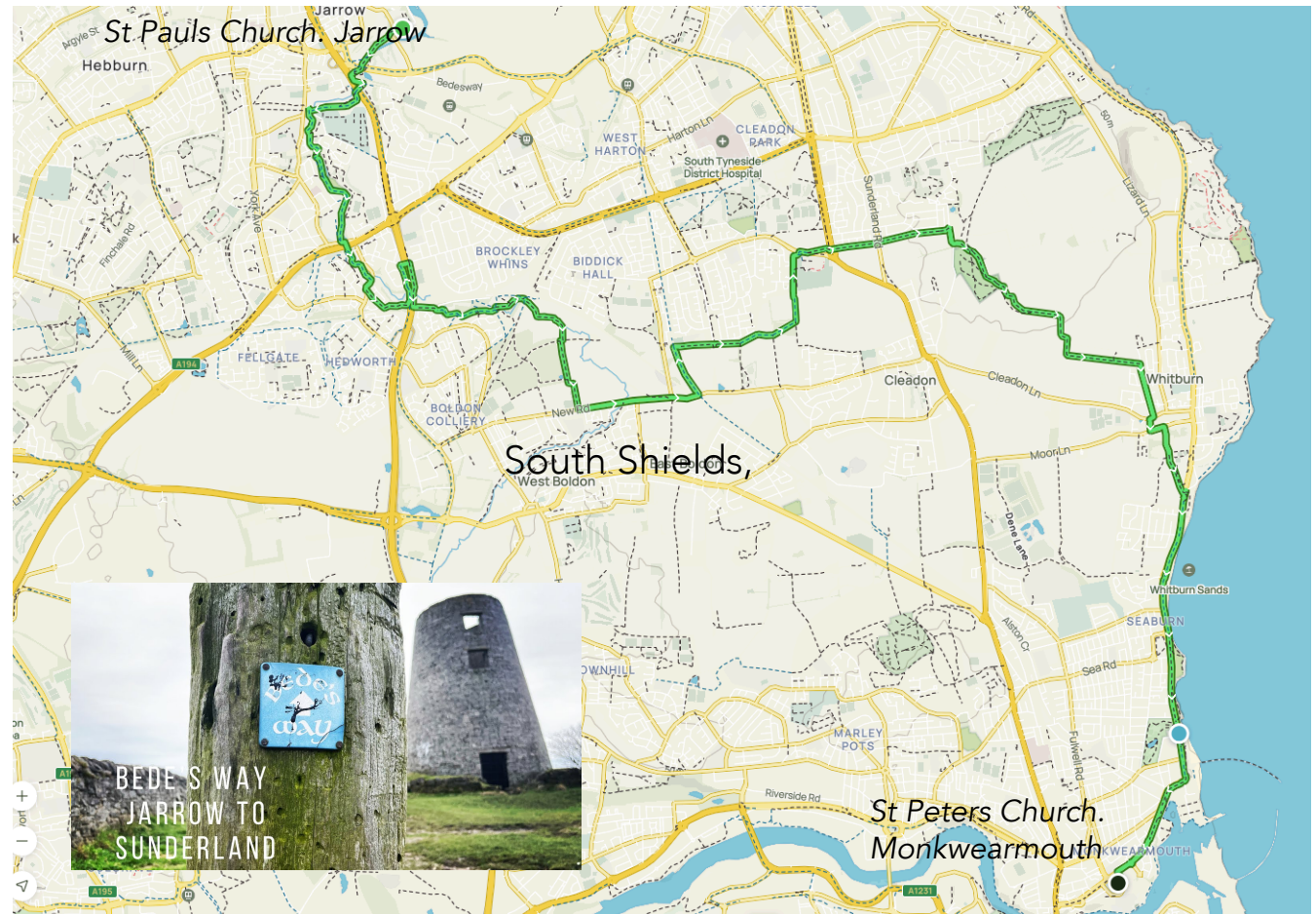
Research questions

- [1] how might distinctions between space and place be unpacked within an aesthetic practice of landscape photography
- [2] what are the limitations of landscape photography and how might they be overcome to align with the complexity of itinerant explorations made by walking artists
- [3] how might the walking artist / landscape photographer unpack the complexities of the pilgrim trail in which many such trails have been repurposed and absorbed into an expanded heritage industry in the UK?
- [4] how might the socio spatial, embodied nature of walking with a camera and assisted technologies generate a transformation, a readability of place and its co constructed, layered histories



Bede's Pilgrim Trail

- North East England
- urban / rural / coastal
- sign-posted cultural & heritage route,
- embodies nature, history, religion & tourism
- monastic site bracket the walk





54.91316, -1.37483 St Peter's Church. Monkwearmouth (facing north)



54.98018, -1.47246 St Paul's Church. Jarrow (facing east)

Bede's Pilgrim Trail – History

- Venerable Bede - a monk and scholar of the Anglo Saxon period wrote Ecclesiastical History of English People (731 AD)
- adopted idea of using Anno Domini as an overarching chronological structure for the measurement of time
- twin monasteries of Wearmouth / Jarrow built in by Benedict Biscop in Roman style to promote Roman Christianity in Northumberland
- the pilgrim route connects the twin monasteries which were referred to by Bede as "one monastery in two places"



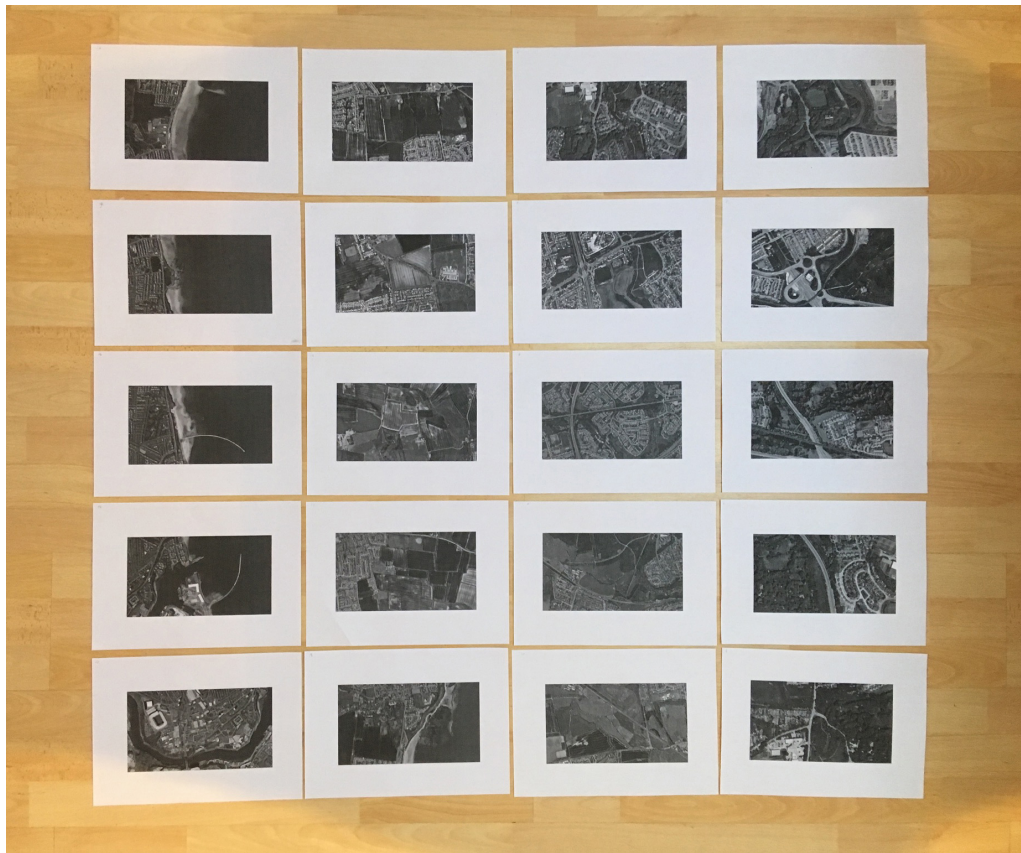
The ontology of the path

- paths can be created without a purpose or with intention, they can be physical historic or virtual, strategic (city planning) or tactical (desire paths)
- signifying opportunities – as De Certeau states *'the act of walking within the urban system is what the speech act is to language or to the statements uttered'* (1988 p.97)
- paths encompass a socio spatial, experiential context beyond their purely functional - use value
- embody poesis (symbolic) and social history (material)



Richard Long.
A Line Made by Walking.
1967

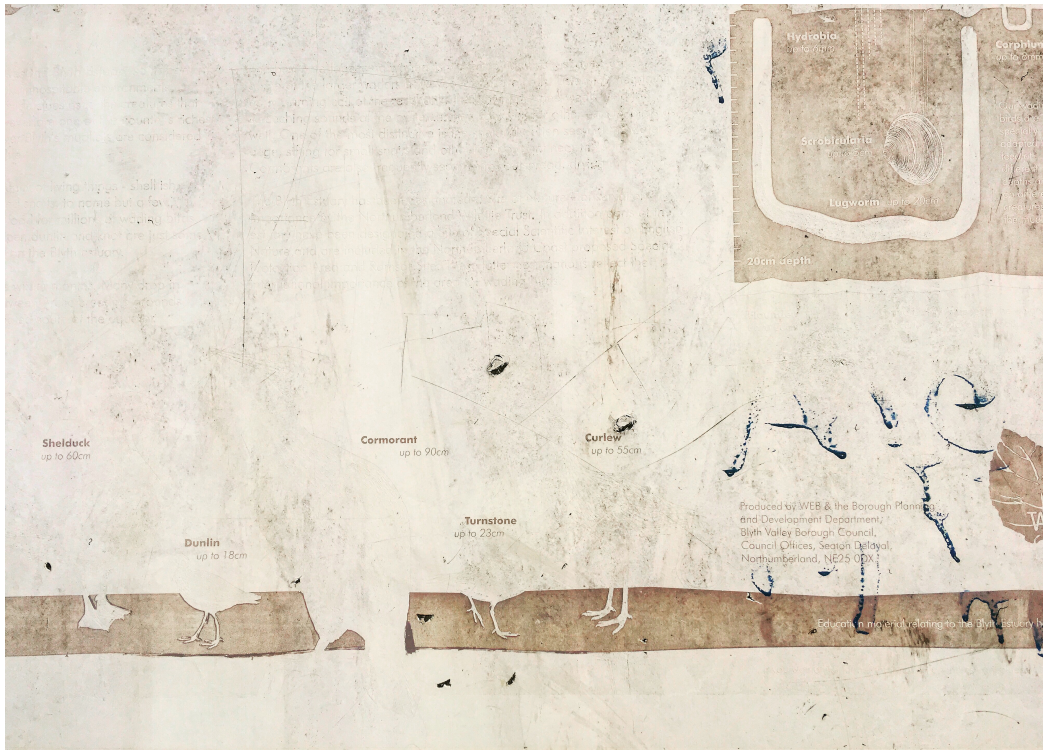
Taking a cue from Merleau Ponty's observations which stated that the traditional sciences 'analyse' things from a distance and phenomenology 'describes' from closer engagement I incorporated this into the projects methodology.



Cornthwaite Park, Sunderland - heading north

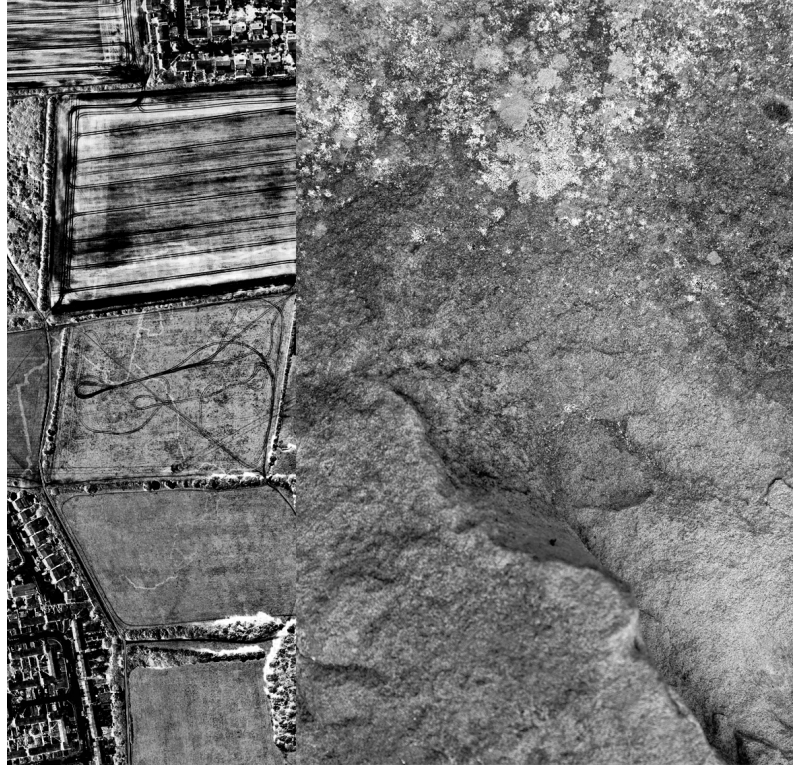


Under the A19 Bridge, Jarrow - heading south



[above] Wildlife information board and graffiti – nature reserve, Bede's trail South Tyneside

[right] Google Maps Aerial view of the trail Boldon Colliery, South Tyneside and macro detail of the terrain - digital collage



Photographs taken at
measured distances
intervals mediating
structure and chance



Ground space: Peripatetic grid – 39 steps from Jarrow to Monkwearmouth

'As we embark upon our walk our eyes are not fixed on the distant horizon, the first steps we take are tentative even experimental'

(Ingold, 2008)



Combined with digital tracing as a third element in the methodology the work represents both an experiential and an indexical notation of the walk



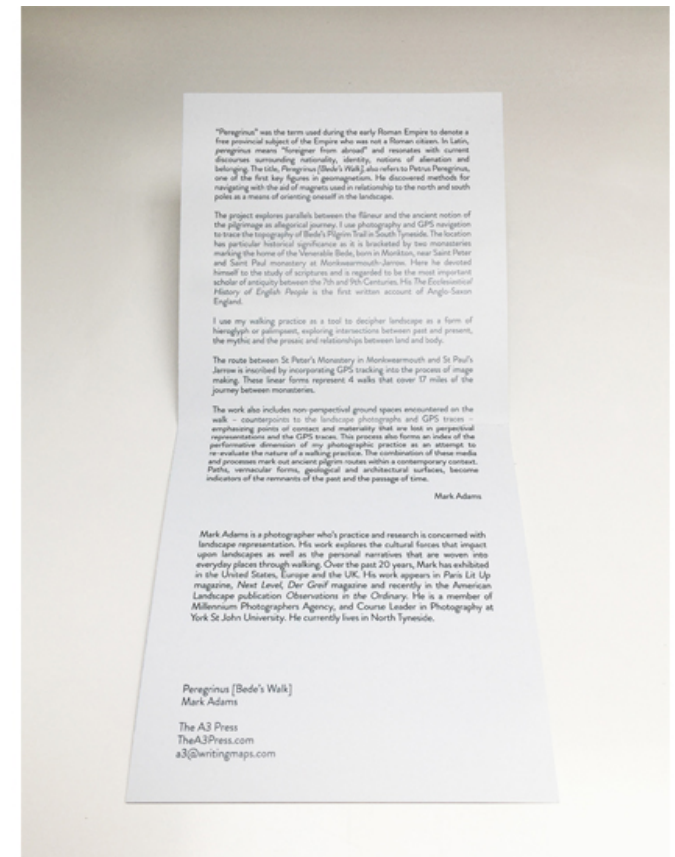
Peregrinus [Bede's Walk]

Publication A3 Press

*'A work of perspectives.
walking eyes focused on the
ground, then lifting to the
landscape. The eye of the GPS
tracker recording the route,
distances covered.'*

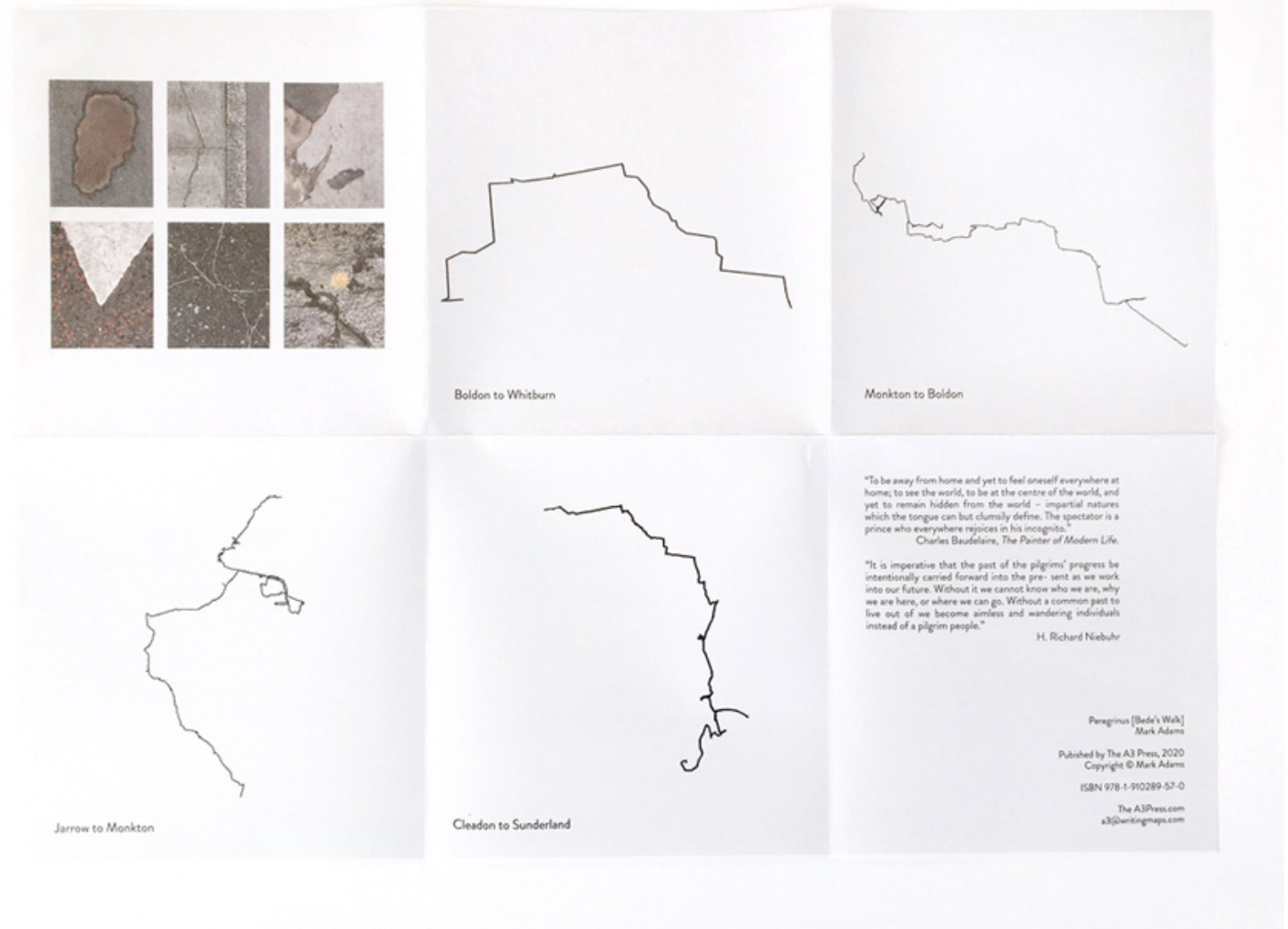
*Quietly intense and meditative
photographs. The walking artist
as pilgrim and explorer,
watcher and watched from
above.'*

Shaun Levin, Editor



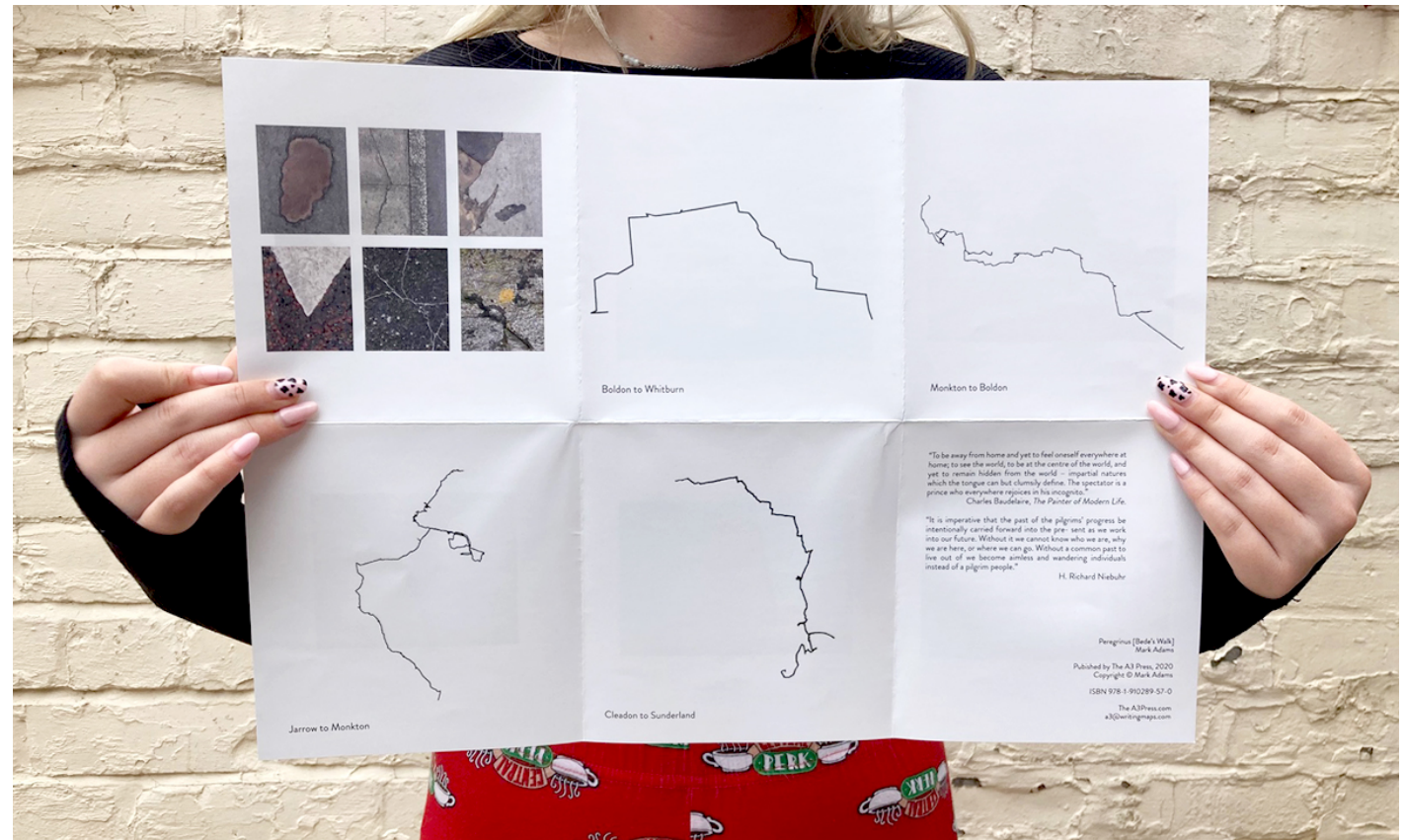
The unification of the material and immaterial is characteristic of the traditional pilgrimage, an instrument of contemplation of relationships between the sacred and the secular, and a central theme of this project.

Like all contemporary pilgrimages these journeys follow an historical precedent – to trace the footsteps of ancestors, embodying history through a disciplined process of repetitive, sustained walking.



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54.97723, -1.47956 Enclosure, A19 Facing North, 2017



Bede's well & slag heap, uncredited, 1950'S



Hudson's grave – St Peters Church by Alex Kapp



Anglo Saxon Street names (odonymy)

Athelston Rigg
Burdon Road
Boldon Lane
Ceasar's Walk
Caraway Walk
Ethel Terrace
Huxley Close
Horton Avenue
Laybourn Gardens
Longstaff Gardens
Lucock Street
Lumley Avenue
Monkton Avenue
Peddar's Way
Petrel Close
Saxon Close
Priestly Court
Rekendyke Lane
Roman Road
Ryton Court
Soane Gardens
St Cuthberts Avenue
Stanhope Road
Tennyson Street
Warkworth Avenue

54.9022, -1.38134 Burdon Road (A Pilgrims Staff – from the latin burdonem)



Phenomenology of the encounter with the material (surfaces)

+

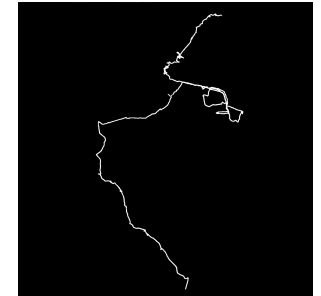
Post phenomenological mediations through technology



PHYSICAL – EMBODIED
NON PERSPECTIVAL
FLAT / SURFACE
MATERIAL ENCOUNTERS
NATURE / MAN MADE
PHOTOGRAPHIC
DE-CONTEXTUALISED

Perceived space
(material spatial practice)

MOBILE
VIRTUAL
INDEXICAL
ACTIVE
CHIROGRAPHIC
DE CERTEAU'S ANNUNCIATIVE SPACE
TACTICAL ' WRITING SPACE'



Lived space
(embodied experience)

Conceived space
(abstract representations)



TOPOGRAPHIC
CARTOGRAPHIC
GOD'S EYE
TOPONYMIC (ODONOMY)
LANGUAGE & PROPER NAMES
STRATEGIC

Analysis from a distance – the celestial 'totalizing' view of the trail

Phenomenology of the encounter with the material (surfaces) + Post phenomenological mediations through technology



PHYSICAL – EMBODIED
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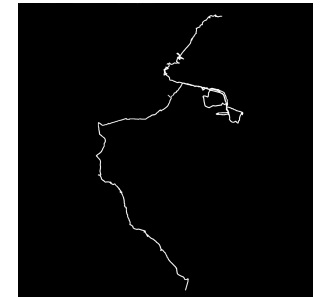
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Lived space
(embodied experience)

"All photographs are memento mori. To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt."

(Sontag 1977)

'Since to follow a trail is to remember how it goes, making ones way in the present is itself a recollection of the past'

(Ingold, 2008)

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