

Walking in Air in the London Open Form Pavilion of Air

8-10/09/2023



Thornton Heath – Saturday 9th September 2023, 4pm

Exactly one year ago I was walking and whistle-walking in air in Anliac in South Dordogne, on the first weekend of the hunting season. My first walking in French air and on familiar ground on which I lived part time between 2006 and 2014. It was already unusually hot for the season and the end of a long and rare drought in the region, not as hot as it is in London right now, consistently over 30 degrees Celsius all week, breaking records for the month of September since records began. Last year I started my fieldwork on the understanding that perhaps it was the air and the ground that were thinking and breathing me and literally 'winding me along', Tim Ingold's words, as I watched time walking in the wind across the cloudy watery surface of a small pond I was sitting by, while my breath came and went.

I am now sitting in my studio in Thornton Heath preparing for some fieldwork in Kensington Gardens tomorrow, with Will and his son Kip, under Robert Curgenvén's Open Form Pavilion of air. He will be joining us remotely from Cornwall, under another of his invisible floating roof. Robert's pavilions of sonic air are scattered around the world, each covering a surface of 160 square meters that you can activate via a smartphone app for geolocated

audio tours and headphones, to create an electronic sound work in real time: from prepared sine tones samples that are assembled according to your movements through this latent space. I am curious and puzzled. A pavilion of sonic air may be invisible, yet I am imagining that it would still block out other sounds from the living world, human and non-human, as a shut window in any enclosed space would. To accept this artificial groundless ground, a bubble holding sonic air, holding my ears to it, as a question. How will I wind along if I cannot hear nor feel the wind? With ears already full of sounds, how will they tell my feet where to go, or my eyes where to look? What is the difference between walking or whistle-walking in air as I have been doing and walking or whistle-walking in a pavilion of electronically manufactured sonic air? The ground will be the same but the tracks I make across it will be informed not by the groundless ground I hear and feel in my throat on my skin, but by the sound waves feeding my ears, thus distracting, or even closing them to it. Between earth and sky a breath will come and goes meandering in between. According to Ingold "the air is not so much what I perceive but what I perceive in." So what will I perceive of the world while being separated from it and immersed in a pavilion of sound, in another world within the world.

Kensington Gardens (just behind the Serpentine), Sunday 10th September, 2pm

It is hot and sticky, 31 degrees still. The grass is dry under my feet, the sky cloudy and low. The Serpentine gallery is closed because of the heat, not good for the gorgeous spiders' webs occupying most of Tómas Saraceno's multi-species exhibition - *In Collaboration: Web(s) of Life* - that Will and I visited when we came in August to test out the access to Rob's open form pavilion nearby. The spiders that crafted the webs, the undisputed stars of the show, are nowhere to be seen, probably busy webbing elsewhere for the next iteration of the exhibition closing soon. Gentle breeze, but of warm air as I am waiting for Will and Kip to arrive. Two crows and two pigeons nearby, checking me out from a small distance at ground level. A pigeon gets close enough for me to notice their plumage is matching exactly the grey of my corks.



Kensington Gardens (just behind the Serpentine), Sunday 10th September, 3pm

I am walking in air in thick warm air
in Hyde Park behind the Serpentine Gallery and underneath Robert's
pavilion of sonic air that I have not yet switched on an invisible
roof of sound sine tones of different frequencies that I will be able to
compose with my movements with my walking step by step with my
body moving through air my feet on soft dry grass
of a hot late summer day my body my head my hand my arms
moving through the groundless ground now I
am walking in air circling around a very old very big
chestnut tree its branches spreading wide creating a
beautiful natural parasol of shade under which I have left my
belongings and around which I am now
one step at a time (breathe out) one breath at a time (breathe in)
circling an endless path voices in
the distance a few strollers passing by on an existing path
(breathe in) whistle out whistle in whistle out whistle in whistle out
whistle in whistle out whistle in whistle out whistle in

a man in shorts passing by a dog on a leash in each hand sandwiched in
between a few groups here and there picnicking un
dejeuner sur l'herbe a couple tightly embraced under another tree
nearby a plane I can hear
a few cars in the distance an helicopter I can see in the distance
two kids racing on tiny bicycles this is
the air I am walking through and breathing in and out
beautiful firefly or beautiful libellule in french a dragon fly

I am about to switch on Robert's sonic roof

two vibrating bass tones in my ears pulsating underneath
higher frequencies I can hear a dog barking over or under the sonic fields
that my moving steps are triggering I am entering a
zone of shade the sun being now behind the chestnut tree that I am
cycling circling walking under
the invisible roof of sonic air descending melody throbbing
bass as I enter a sunny patch I can still hear some
voices distant in the distance in the distance outside
this invisible pavilion of sound I am continuing in a straight line
thus silencing all the bass frequencies being left with higher and higher
itches (sniffing) which are slowly fading away as I stop
and stand by a concrete bitumen straight path a bicycle just
passed right to left I can now hear magpies in some trees nearby
or are these parroquets steps on the path
barely audible over and under the pavilion of air
I am crossing the path rob's melody is fading
away I am turning around enjoying
the absence of man-made sounds

I must be outside this pavilion of air one step to the right and
it starts again very low gentle artificial hum with a subtle throb
the throb is building up slowly ears with the headphones it
feels as if it is coming from an organ in a gigantic hall I am
standing still the air is still
the air outside my ears is still the sounds inside
my ears have stopped (breathing out)
I can hear myself breathing and thinking air looking at
the ancient chestnut tree in the distance

I am walking again
thus triggering a high pitched melody and a low
pitch throb which are slowly carrying the cries of a baby and the creaks of its
pram on the path that I just left behind a parroquet just flew off
in a straight line from somewhere inside the ancient chestnut tree
walking in a straight line thus raising the pitches
of the sounds within my ears

I am stopping
and circling
not the trees my eyes scanning 180 degrees around where I stand
silent panoramic view of the park
devoid of human and non-human sounds my ears filling up
my brain filling up with what my ears is feeding it

to walk the ground to accept the ground to accept the groundless
ground that I cannot hear but feel to accept
this pavilion of sonic air going to it
as a question a bubble holding loud air
preventing my ears to tell my eyes my feet
where to look where to go a
bubble full of sounds filling the landscape of my mind as

I am circling an ancient chestnut tree I might as
 well close my eyes since my ears and my feet are blind
 whistle in whistle out whistle in whistle out whistle in
 whistle out whistle in whistle out whistle out
 whistle in whistle out whistle in whistle out
 whistle in whistle out whistle in whistle out
 whistle in whistle out whistle in whistle out
 whistle in whistle out
 I am circling the tree and whistle-walking while Rob's sine tones
 are providing a sonic roof the tree is
 standing in the warm air Kip is lying under the tree
 in the shade eating fruits and listening to the pavilion of
 hot sonic air that Rob has created unbeknown to everybody else
 whistle in whistle out whistle in
 whistle out whistle in whistle out
 whistle in whistle out whistle in
 I have just stepped out of Rob's pavilion of air another paroquet has crossed
 the empty silent groundless ground the immense groundless ground
 (breathe in) that I just feel reunited with my breath
 joining once more the grounded ground beneath my feet and the
 groundless ground that is hosting rob's pavilion of air currently on hold
 (breathe in) (breathe out)
 how busy and layered and infinite that expanse
 of invisible tiny gigantic airy ground is .

Transcript of the recording of my improvised commentary on breathing and thinking while walking under a Pavilion of air

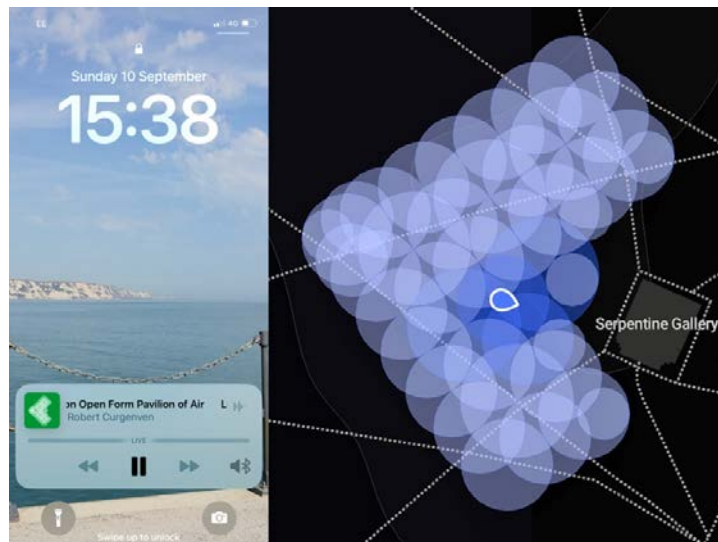
Thornton Heath – Monday 11th September 2023, 10am

I am now sitting in my garden, the morning after our walking in air under Robert's roof of sonic air. I was wondering beforehand about the difference between walking in air and walking in air in a pavilion of air, in a prepared air hovering over and among the air that I have learned to dance inside out with, over the past couple of years, developing a few strategies of walking with air that have become almost second nature to me. Such as thinking aloud about the effect and impact of the groundless atmosphere on my being and thinking while 'moving through the weather world', or whistle-walking as a way of connecting and synchronising walking, breathing through a whistle and the ground at a pace that can sustain it, albeit at the expense of my thinking, not enough non synchronised headspace for it. I have grown the habit of sitting down and writing my thoughts before and after such fieldwork as a way of keeping inked tracks of such fleeting and subtle experience, which is sometimes hard to put into words, or only becomes concrete in such retrospective acts of remembrance, as I am doing now.

Walking in air under a pavilion of air may have been a very different experience had I not become such an experienced and seasoned walker in air in the groundless ground that we breath in and out, the carrier and the substance of my thinking.

Kensington Gardens and Hype Park were very busy on this hot Sunday afternoon, whole families and clusters of friends having picnics, strollers, dog walkers, joggers, roller skaters, cyclers, tourists, lovers, loners, readers... We had to wait thirty minutes or so before the large sweet chestnut tree I had chosen as a base and natural umbrella, became available. Once settled and ready, I decided to simply walk around it, headphones on my head, zoom recorder held in one hand, arm stretched, without switching on Robert's sonic roof, yet: a familiar way of starting as on previous occasion and of freeing mind and ears from having to choose where my feet should go. After a few rounds of walking and thinking aloud about the air and the gentle breeze moving (through) me, I switched my headphones and the app to activate the sonic roof I was already walking under. A gentle melody of long sine tones filled my ears, evolving slowly according to my steps as I progressed simultaneously around

the chestnut tree and as a dot on Robert's geometrical diagram displayed on the screen of my mobile phone, that mapped the 160 square meters of the London pavilion invisible to the eyes: an arrow shaped gridded map of overlapping shaded circles pointing towards the setting sun. The chestnut tree being situated towards the back of it, close to the edge by the tip of the inner angle.



At the most basic, it felt like switching on a Walkman (old-fashioned and obsolete but the first thing that came to mind) or Spotify on your mobile phone with a request for ambient electronic music. It had the immediate effect of switching off the outside world, turning it into a silent movie, since the air was still hugging me but no longer reaching my ears, replaced by a different more melodic air coming through the headphones and filling my ears and my mind. Slightly disconcerting at first since I no longer felt part of the cosmos, now sounding muffled as if coming from behind some invisible walls: I felt detached yet moving through it. I tried to regulate the volume so that I could mix Robert's prepared and sampled air with the atmosphere so that I could perhaps activate what Pauline Oliveros refers to as quantum listening to more than what is there, listening to my listening of more than one reality at a time. That did not work for me. The outside world was interfering as noise with the gentle continuous music being composed by my movement through the weather world and at the same time the evolving sine tones were filtering too much of what they were interfering with, my ability to sense and read my surroundings, shutting me off from it. It had to be one or the other.

So I chose to immerse myself fully in the pavilion of air for a while, while keeping my feet on the invisible circular track I had chosen around the old yet majestic chestnut tree. I don't make a habit of listening to music while walking, while driving yes. I prefer sitting still to concentrate my attention fully, often with eyes closed or staring in unfocused distance. So sometimes I stopped and stood still and sometimes I closed my eyes. Perhaps in reaction to my difficulties at walking in air in a bubble full of prepared air, looking for some kind of comfortable compromise between the two groundless grounds I was juggling and contending with for the first time.

I then found myself breaking my circular path and walking in a straight line leaving the old tree base behind me, wanting perhaps to reach the invisible boundaries of the pavilion and also curious about what melody a linear movement would compose in real time, instead of a circular one. The resulting crescendos and glissandos of the sine tones underlined by a throbbing bass line were pleasant to the ears indeed and their slow dissolve into the atmosphere gave me an indication of the closeness of the pavilion's limits while gradually allowing the other non-prepared sonic events taking place around me to reach my ears. I welcomed feeling part of the world again and yet I also missed my temporary isolation from it. I realised that I had grown accustomed to that isolation chamber effect provided via my headphones: cutting me off from the outside world and from the inner world of my thinking, replacing their flowing unpredictability with a continuous and melodious acousmatic landscape of prepared sounds that didn't allow for (welcomed or unwelcomed) surprises or disruption. I soon became accustomed to it and sometimes forgot that it was there and that the outside world had been silenced. As if it had become part of me, part of my inner landscape, a day inside a day, a bubble full of prepared air.

I went to it with a question. What is the difference between walking in air and walking in a pavilion of prepared air? The groundless ground that I breathe, the substance of my thinking that I walk and breathe in and out is always there for me whether I am aware of it or not and I would not exist without it. It is boundless, boundary less and always switched on, connecting me with the ground, the sky, my inner and outer landscape and the other(s) too. Robert's pavilion of air, when activated, is full of prepared air I cannot breathe but only listen

to, therefore it is not the substance but the absence of my thinking. I can listen to it and in doing so I can have a breather from thinking, a day inside a day, a break in a bubble from being part of it all, a cinematic and sonic massage in motion to my brain to my nervous system, a kinetic soundtrack to a silent slice of life, dissolving the chaotic unpredictability of an apocalyptic here and now into a self-composing melodic walk movie. By switching it on I am momentarily switching off, not the world itself but my full access and vulnerability to it. I become detached from what I can perceive of it, like the electronic air that I am listening to as I am taking a walk in the switchable side of air, hovering á l'air libre.