

## Walking in Air on Blackheath Common

*Individual field work / reflective documentation / collective recollection*

Thurs. 15<sup>th</sup> June 2023

With David Grundy, Will Montgomery, Emmanuelle Waeckerlé, Carol Watts

Prompts:

To accept the ground.  
To go to it as a question.  
To open up the day inside the day,  
a bubble holding air  
bending the vista to it.  
Peter Gizzi, from 'Stung', *Sky Burial*)

*A pond, mooring in air.*  
Carol Watts, from *Pond MS*

*Pattern of drift Is eye of air*  
*stray ephemeral visible hand from sky form?*  
Barbara Guest, from 'The Open Skies'

### Schedule

- 11.30am **Introduction** and coffee / Carol's home (6 Cable Place, London SE10 8HS)
- 12.00am Collective walk to Blackheath Common, the Pond: **fieldwork preparation**
- 1pm Lunch at the Pond
- 2 to 4pm Individual Walks around Blackheath Common: **fieldwork, documentation.**  
*We may choose to orient our activity around one or more of the quotes above.)*  
*Afterwards, we take some time to reflect upon the experience.*
- 4pm to 5pm Tea break: **preparing for recollection.** You may want to upload on [Google Drive](#) some **preliminary traces** or documentation of your day.  
**Collective recollection at the atrium or stockwell cafe**  
*We gather to share traces, stories and findings. The session is recorded.*

We arrive with our experience from previous fieldwork (Ditchling, Folkestone, St Yrieix, de chez soi) or perhaps having read Tim Ingold's article "*Footprints through the weather-world: walking, breathing, knowing*" (2010)

Afterwards Upload on [Google Drive](#) your **finalised traces** before the end of June 2023  
*images, videos, sound works, field notes, other text, scores etc.. These will be curated for the project website.*

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Afterword (from *Mimic Pound* by Carol Watts)

Mounts Pond is a small urban pond on Blackheath, the large grass plain above Greenwich in south-east London, named for its dark earth. It is one of four ponds on the heath – including Folly Pond, the Hare and Billet Pond, and the Prince of Wales Pond – the only one which comes and goes with seasonal weather. Records suggest it has been there for centuries, sitting by the old drover and carriage routes into Kent, Shooter’s Hill Road and Old Dover Roads, at what was once a crossroads. It can be found on Goffers Road, just along from the Blackheath Tea Hut. The land here is manorial waste, once frequented by highwaymen and excavated for gravels, now managed by the councils of Lewisham and Greenwich.

The pond is named after the small mound which rises like a tumulus beside it, the only rising on this levelled ground. It is a place famous for rebellions, political speeches, assemblies and sermons. Currently it is known as Whitfield’s or Whitefield’s Mount, named after the Methodist preacher George Whitefield, who held open air gatherings there in the eighteenth century, preaching to thousands. It was the meeting place for Chartists and Suffragettes, who knew the earlier history, most famously the events of 1381, the Great Rising or Peasants Revolt, when Kentish rebels led by Wat Tyler massed on the heath. John Ball reputedly made his famous speech – *When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?* – from this spot. At one point it was known as the Smith’s Forge, after Michael An Gof, a blacksmith, one of the leaders of the Cornish rebellion in 1497 which rallied on the heath. It may be where many of the rebels were buried. Wandering through Kent in 1570, a historian recorded that it was still possible to see the place of the ‘Smithy’s tent’, possibly a burial mound resembling a barrow, of which there are a number in the area. Later the mound was used as target practice for ‘those murderous, mischief-doing engines called bombs’, as the local diarist John Evelyn, son of a gunpowder contractor, reported in 1687.

The pond sits in a surround which continues to carry these histories and related imaginaries in its cup. It swells and wanes with the season. Sometimes passers-by are unaware there is a pond there at all. In 2022 the water dried up by late April, and a dry, hot summer followed where temperatures exceeded 40° for the first time, with marshes and houses out to the east of London on fire. The water came again in late October, and persisted through to early June of 2023. As I write a year on in October 2023, following the rain of Storm Babet, the water has begun to return once more. The pond is a barometer of the climate, and also a neighbourhood shared with the rhythms of crows and starlings, humans and plants. Visiting has given way to deeper ties, and a common inhabiting of a precious, woven kind. The pond is fragile and sometimes vandalised, occasionally rubbish strewn, a quilting point on the heath that speaks to depletion and survival, yet open to endlessly attuning, shifting, sometimes spectacular light, and mimic proposals.

*Mimic Pond* is part of a practice of ongoing documenting, which is my living here in this neighbourhood. ‘Born otherwise’ in Ponge’s words, the pond wells up and vanishes in these poems, and elsewhere in notebooks, photographs and a wider making.

*Walking in Air* is an interdisciplinary project that encompasses walking, writing, thinking, music, performance and discussion. Drawing on Tim Ingold's suggestion that 'knowledge is formed along paths of movement in the weather-world', the project considers walking in air to be a model for speculative thinking, for creative activity and for reconsidering our place within the natural environment. The core walking events can be either collective or individual in nature. These give rise to performance, workshop discussion, texts and audio recordings, much of which are documented online.

The co-organisers are Will Montgomery (Royal Holloway, University of London) and Emmanuelle Waeckerlé (University for the Creative Arts, Farnham). Participants are drawn from an international pool of composers, artists, environmentalists, and poets.

### **Walking in Air activities**

**Walking in air remotely** (Sept 2021), with Stefan Thut, Marianne Schuppe, Antoine Beuger, Sylvia Schimag, Leni Dipple, Will Montgomery, Carol Watts, Emmanuelle Waeckerlé in collaboration with [le centre des livres d'artistes](#)

**Walking in Air in Ditchling** (27<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> May 2022) with Will Montgomery, Carol Watts, Ryoko Akama, Emmanuelle Waeckerlé in collaboration with [Ditchling museum of Arts and Crafts](#).

**Walking in Air in Folkestone** (03/07/2022) with Diane Dever, Rubiane Maia, Will Montgomery, Sophie Stone, Emmanuelle Waeckerlé, Mick Williamson, Maureen Wolloshin, Melanie Wrigley, in collaboration with [URBAN ROOM](#)

**Walking in Air in Saint-Yrieix-la-Perche** (08 to 11/09/2022) with Stefan Thut, Marianne Schuppe, Antoine Beuger, Sylvia Schimag, Leni Dipple, Will Montgomery, Emmanuelle Waeckerlé in collaboration with [le centre des livres d'artistes](#)

[Walking in Air in Ditchling](#). (Pamenar online, 2023)

[Walking in Air](#), Performance Research vol 26.7 'On Air', with Will Montgomery (Sept 2022)

[Walking in Air in Thornton Heath](#). E. Waeckerlé, 5 postcards (CDLA, 2021)

**Will Montgomery** is Reader in contemporary poetry and poetics at Royal Holloway. He has a special interest in the relationship between text scores and poetry and, as well as conventional academic criticism, he is involved in practice-based research, both as teacher and practitioner. He has published on the literary qualities of text scores and curated several events on this topic, both academic and performance-oriented.

[https://pure.royalholloway.ac.uk/portal/en/persons/will-montgomery\(c800e6f1-93a1-41c7-ad0e-1440ce2cc9bc\).html](https://pure.royalholloway.ac.uk/portal/en/persons/will-montgomery(c800e6f1-93a1-41c7-ad0e-1440ce2cc9bc).html) , [www.selvageflame.com](http://www.selvageflame.com)

**Emmanuelle Waeckerlé** is a London based academic, artist, composer and improviser interested in the materiality and musicality of language. She is Reader in Fine Art and Relational Practices and director of bookRoom at UCA Farnham. Her practice and research evolve across multiple interconnected work zones – conceptual writing, performance, new musical composition, artist-publishing, curating (here.here concert series, Cosy Nook). Her music and scores are distributed by Wandelweiser editions.

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