

Walking in air on Blackheath Common

26/05/2025



Sat 24th May, 2pm, somewhere between St Yves and London

Almost 2 years since our last *walking in air* fieldwork, with Will and his son Kip, under Robert Curgenvén's Open Form Pavilion of air temporary installed in Hyde Park near the Serpentine gallery. It was the first time we added another layer of air, literally, to our project. I wondered what I could perceive of the world while being separated from it, immersed as I was in Robert's sonic air. I found it hard to reach some kind of comfortable compromise between the two groundless grounds I was walking in.

I am sitting on a train on my way back from St Yves in Cornwall writing these words while the calm sea is scrolling by outside the window. I was there for some much needed (walking in) sea air and swimming in watery ground and to concentrate on a piece of writing to accompany the upcoming release of the *What is left if we are not the world* CD, the text composition inspired by my lockdown experience of pandemonium and forced intimacy, that I have been touring and playing with big ensembles for the past three years. So much has changed since then and not for the better, pandemonium is global still and in my own life too: three waves of tsunamic proportions that have systematically dismantled my world, my health and my sanity. Late June 2024 I walked in air in Glasgow, as part the Music and/as Process conference before a total collapse two days later I am only just emerging from. The question is no longer 'what is left now that we are no longer in control of the

world' but 'what we can do now that the world as we knew it, is crushing (on) us. How can we survive among this onslaught of destruction going on in our name. How can we create pockets of heaven within this hell on earth where we learn to live in the here and now, in harmony with each other and everything else on earth. St Yves felt like such pocket of heaven on earth, despite the tourism, a place where what Naomi Klein calls the mirror world - of simulated reality based on fake truths, conspiracy theories and spiritual fanaticism - has not yet taken over. Little writing was achieved but I feel recharged going back to London where it is hard to escape the all-encompassing hall of toxic mirrors which is infiltrating every aspect of our urban life: impossible to ignore, difficult to resist nor succumb to its crushing power in the news, at work, among friends even.

In 2 days on a bank holiday Monday, we will be meeting Carol Watts and David Grundy by a little pond in Blackheath, South London. A pond close to where Carol lives that she visited daily during Covid times and after. Her perambulations led to *Mimic Pond* (2024) a book of long form poetry recently published that she co-incidentally started writing when we invited her for some walking in air in Ditchling back in May 2022. We are using the afterward of the book, giving the varied history of the pond, as a way to prepare for our fieldwork, together with a quote from it - *A pond, mooring in air* - alongside words from Thomas A Clark and Emily Dickinson. It is David's first walking in air but he is familiar with this little pond, having lived nearby in Lewisham and walked to it often during the pandemic and written about its historical and political significance in *Present Continuous* (2022), a series of personal essays woven around the various locations of his lockdown walks.

I am watching through the window of the train cows grazing in a field and I am wondering which of my walking in air strategies I wish to use: whistle-walking or recording my thinking aloud while walking in the groundless ground. Parts of me feel that it may be time to try something else. I have somehow become a bit of an expert at whistle-walking and thinking aloud. Isn't the pursuit of novelty the cause of so many ills in our collapsing capitalist world? I find practice, and fine tuning more interesting. These two strategies have led me to some great insights about thinking in movement, about breathing and air, the object of that thinking and walking, as well as to sound works, performance writings and readings and to

a growing set of walking in air invitation scores: the result of reductive editing of the transcripts of my thinking aloud about walking in air at various location. I remember enjoying walking around a small French pond while my eyes followed moving clouds reflected in the blue sky water. Perhaps I could try one the invitation scores that came out of this vivid experience.

wia inv.12

a small pond
stand still
in the air wind time

wia inv.13

walk around a pond
time upon time
walk around a pond
whistle in out (18 times)

Or I could connect the 2 ponds in time and space, from one mooring in air to another, by walking and reading the words gathered in the Dordogne, at this new pond on Blackheath Common, Southeast London. Breathing and speaking these sonic vibrations that will steady briefly their new locality as a tuning to this new place. (*Thomas A Clark*). Air has no Residence, no Neighbour, wrote Emily Dickinson, neither this pond nor the other. *A pond is not a pond is not that pond is this pond.*



26 / 05 / 2025 Mounts Pond 2 pm

Sitting on a bench by Mount's Pond, Carol's Pond that she visited daily during lockdown, filling in a whole sketch book of words and images of it, in all seasons, all weather, attending and tuning to the place that led to *Mimic Pond*. A girl is sitting on a bench on the other side of an empty dry pond. I did not expect that. The absence of water in that hollow in the ground is disconcerting to say the least. I remember the premonitory last words I wrote on the train two days ago. *A pond is not a pond....* Is a waterless pond full of flowers flowing in the wind still a pond?

I am looking at a large roundish crater like pit full of windy air under a low cloudy sky about to burst in rain. Crows are crossing it, planes are flying one after the other over them and it, southward towards the continent. The long-awaited Mount's Pond is an empty earth vessel in between two paths, one on my left for (dog) walkers, joggers, cyclers, the other on my right for parked and moving cars, both under a big open sky, joining behind a small man-made mount of earth with one bench under a single tree surrounded by a few bushes. The mount that gave this pond its name. A ghost pond, seasonal, temperamental, an invisible pond, water turned into air, windy air. Walking in air often delivers the unexpected.

26 / 05 / 2025 Mount's Pond 2.40 pm

(rain).....walk ... around a pond time ... upon.... time
..... walk around mount pond an
empty mount pond a waterless ... pond a mourning in
air... in wet air walking..... around..... mount's
pond under low .. sky
..... black feathers scattered around left behind by the
..... numerous crows that live around..... the
pond
..... whistle out whistle in whistle out whistle in whistle out
whistle in whistle out whistle out whistle in whistle out
walking around mount's pond inside a waterlessmount's pond
.... green grass under my .. feet..... dry straw colored..... grass
..... under my feet tiny yellow flowers on black soil
..... where water used to be whistle out whistle in
..... whistle outwhistle in whistle out
whistle in whistle out whistle in whistle
out whistle in
..... white iris
flowers where the water used to be whistle out
..... whistle in whistle out
..... whistle in whistle out whistle in
..... the sun is peering ... through
the sky warming the air against my hand
my black sky against Greenwich
church spike..... crows in the air walking around mount's
pond time after time
an emirates plane..... flying low above my head whistle out whistle.....
in..... whistle out whistle in whistle out
whistle in whistle out.....



26 / 05 / 2025 Thornton Heath 8pm

What a strange experience this has been. The absence of water, the empty pond looking more like a small meadow in a ditch in the middle of Blackheath Common on a bank holiday Monday. A wide-open sky forever changing and moving under the influence of a very breezy air, from a light drizzle to heavy low black clouds about to burst before dissolving into sunshine in a bright blue sky. The hollowness of the pond was echoing in my body. I sat in turn on each of the three wooden benches around it, trying to contain the emptiness facing me. I could almost see the clouds being reflected in the absence of water that is allowing the wind to create havoc in the tall grasses and yellow stinking irises (*iris foetidissima*) now covering the dry pebbled ground. No flower deserves such a name.

I took pleasure walking around, circling and feeling pulled towards the hollowness of the pond, imagining the density of the water holding me. I proceeded counterclockwise, windershin, one slow step after the other through the watery groundless ground of a waterless pond. The busy wide-open sky crossed by crows and planes and the empty shell of this water hole leave me feeling unsettled and ungrounded. I whistle-walk around it a couple of times, a now familiar ritual act that brings some relief. I stand still in air, wind, time but nothing feels satisfying nor real. As if I had to pretend in this pretence of a pond. Have I switched to the mirror world? I need to come back in the Autumn when the water will have returned, then I will know. We have had a very dry Spring and that is the consequence of it, together with the dry yellow grass covering the common and the sides of the pretence.

While I am whistle-walking, sitting, standing in plenty of air and occasional rain, in this picturesque part of a very flat Blackheath Common, all I can think of is the missing water. I wish I could just walk in water not air. I began picturing in the landscape of my mind, empty riverbeds, dry oceans and lakes everywhere and I worry about the increasing pace of global warming, this was the hottest March and driest May since records began in the UK. That led to those not having access to water nor food in devastated war zones, occupied territories, slums and deserts. My mind slides into a rabbit hole. I feel ashamed, pointless, useless. What can I really do that matters against such horrors. For the first time since walking in air I have not managed to be transported and dance inside out with air despite the abundance and energy of it this afternoon.

When we walked to a pub nearby for our collective recollection, rain started to fall quite heavily, and we rushed past the Hare and Billet Pond looking majestic full of water. My body shuddered, a sudden sigh of welcomed relief at this comforting sight. There are two other permanent ponds such as this one on Blackheath. I could have gone to them, the others did. I stuck to the ghost pond instead, mourning its waterless status and our cruel crumbling word. Perhaps because I have been hearing and reading about it for a long time in Carol's and David's words. It has always been about tending and tuning to their Mount's Pond, not Blackheath Common. What Park deserves such a name, even it has no connection to the Black Death as rumour has it. Air has no Residence, but Carol is its neighbour. David now lives in Berlin. It is commonly believed that the name comes from Old English words meaning 'dark soil', or that it is a corruption of 'bleak heath'. Which I find quite fitting after today's experience of walking in air in and around a mirage pond in the mirror world.