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SUBTERRANEAN

OSMOSIS

SurreyHillsArts

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Mole Valley

Gareth Hughes

Four of us stand on the shoulder of the hill, at Radius.[1] Dusk gathers pace, and an aperture moon begins to pierce through the thin clouds, hazy and gibbous. Night settles on the South Downs, and visibility lessens.* The shine of Gatwick rises over the canopy of the facing wood. We look out over Dorking, which was once known as Darking.[2] Dogs and humans rustle in the copse below, the odd flash of an LED collar or a torch signalling presence.

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*The geologist told us that the valley was carved out by a glacier.[3] A river called Mole runs through it now. Maps of Surrey from the 16th and 17th centuries state that 'the river runeth underground.'[4] At Radius, our view is far-reaching, aspiring to a cartographical eye. But our sight does not extend into the earth. The Mole runeth underground.† We must turn to other ways of sensing.

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† Moles spend their time in the inner workings of creation. They are hidden tillers, dining on the earthworms. They go about their business of turning over the earth, denuding it in one place, making it anew in another. The mole's home presents to humans a problem of scale. The earliest sighting of this is in Nicholas Udall's translation of Erasmus.[5] Udall took Erasmus's analogy – 'making an elephant of a fly' – and bolstered its meaning with an expression of his own. An elephant and a fly are not very alike, but if you steal a quick glance at a pile of displaced soil, perhaps it could be mistaken for a much larger formation. From certain perspectives, molehills could be mountains.

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[1] 51°14′39″N , 000°20′28″W. What three words: rapid.leads.play.

[2] John Norden, 'Surrey, engraved by Charles Whitwell, 1594' in *Two Hundred and Fifty Years of Map-making in the County of Surrey: A Collection of Reproductions of Printed Maps Published Between the Years 1579-1823*, ed. W. L. D. Ravenhill, Harry Margary, 1974, sheet 3b.

[3] See †††.

[4] John Seller, 'Surrey Actually Surveyd and Delineated. Engraved by John Oliver and Richard Palmer with "many additions" by Philip Lea, c. 1693', in *Two Hundred and Fifty Years of Map-making in the County of Surrey*, sheet 5a.

[5] William Safire, 'On Language: The Earth Makes its Move', *New York Times*, 14 June 1987, Section 6, p. 12.

We are alert, looking for signs, responses to our own signals.** Moths stray off their paths, waylaid by our small lantern. Cackles from nearby crows who have clocked us, the strangers. Bats come out to hunt, registering our shapes as echo frequencies. While we take in the view, something of us is being taken in turn.***

** I am looking for something. My role is to assist the curator.[6] I look for texts, objects, fragments. Arrange them. The scraps of paper that we generate throughout our lives attest to our self-importance: bills, marriage certificates, property deeds, exam papers, passports, postcards. We insist on these paperwork mountains, which will eventually fall into the fissures of the ground. With persistence and chance, however, things that go under tend to resurface eventually. ††

*** Does Radius allow us to see molehills or mountains? From here, the Earth appears as a series of great static waves, whose throes are imperceptible on a human scale.††† Imagine a clocktower, bringing your face level to its own: you would see the hands on the dial move continuously. But from afar the steady change is imperceptible.

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† † The valley awoke in a thin blanket of January frost. Figures appeared in the vineyard, setting the ground crackling as they walked. They carried instruments of extraction and recording. Their leader, Wedlock, made the first incision using his shovel, carving downwards, prising the clod, moving the earth aside. The others joined the effort. They proceeded to map the surfaces of an emergence. The vehicle they had seen so clearly in their violent dreams gradually appeared. The contours of a war machine began to protrude out of the new geography they had made. Later that year, the Covenanter tank was fully extracted. It had fuel in its belly and a working wheel. The chalk had kept it well. The exhumed artifact lay in state for six months. People came in their thousands from afar to see it displayed in the vineyard grounds.[7] The moles reoriented themselves, adjusting for the absence of the Covenanter. Their fortresses expanded.[8] They runeth underground.

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[6] See §.

[7] Chris Ballinger, 'Second World War tank discovered at Dorking vineyard taken away to be fully restored', *Surrey Live*, 5 December 2017

[8] Large mole constructions are known as fortresses. See Steve Gronert Ellerhoff, *Mole*, Reaktion Books, 2020, pp. 30-32.

††† The River Mole now, and the great glacier then, are fossorial makers of this land. The glacier was a gigantic burrowing entity, creating its molemountains. The great earth-thrower, Moldewarp, tunnelling through a Darking dreamtime.[9] Its gigantic crystal skull striated the land, then melted into the oceans, scattering its liquid fossil record to the far and deep niches of Earth. § Here, the River Mole runs underground.

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§ Around the time I begin to visit Radius, I am working in the university archives, located in the basement of the library. A tubular structure in the ground, with heavy black doors that clank in their frames, like an airlock. The archivist's assistant and I become adepts of this ecosystem, where the darkness and the cool air move slowly between the stacks. We turn the wheels that make the moving shelves slide back and forth like tides. It is an ark of metal, journeying in the earth. Boxes swell and buckle, wormlike ties strain and fray around their folders, and words grow diacritics of mould. But their ultimate release to the soil is set to occur only when Moldewarp returns to reclaim these materials from their brief sojourn in the ark. Other opportunistic elements wait outside the reinforced threshold, but we don't let them in. We make sure to turn the key in the fire suppression system panel every time we enter and leave. This is so that, in the event of a fire, the contents would be protected from the flames in our absence, but while we are inside the oxygen won't get sucked out. Down here, we hone our senses. We acquire feeling for where things might be, using an archivist nose to sniff out documents. The information that nourishes might be here, or it might be there, or nowhere, but at least we have an idea to go on. We runeth underground.

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[9] See 'Moldewarp' in Heathcliff Newman, *Myths and Folk Tales of Southern England*, Press of the Real, 1978, pp. 87-92.

Radius stands above ground.**** We have departed, and the seat has been unoccupied for a while.***** The air, however, continues to rearrange itself around and between the sculpture's wooden slats. A spider's triangular web, stretched across a gap, vibrates in concert with the hot breeze. Unharvested grapes are blown off their vines and onto the surface soil, where they begin to secrete their expired skins into the ancient furrows. A red kite rides the thermal currents, taking up a long watch for its prey. But the Mole runeth underground.

**** The geologist's sounding device detects large caves under the ground, where the Mole flows.[10] These chalk hills are porous, allowing the deft waters to seep profusely. In the cellars beneath Dorking, fortified wine swirls in bottles, threatening to spill. The Covenanter's siblings remain hidden beneath the hills, contracting new forms of life in their chambers and barrels.[11] The coming of the earth-thrower promises to prise apart all these shells. Perhaps this day will come within my lifetime, and I shall go down with the ark, exalted.

***** *"But what has become of them all?" asked the Mole.*

"Who can tell?" said the Badger. "People come— they stay for a while, they flourish, they build— and they go. It is their way. But we remain."[12]

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[10] See fig. 1.

[11] See ††.

[12] Kenneth Grahame, *The Wind in the Willows*, Lerner, 2016, p.63.

Seismic-Reflections as Poetic Practice: a sub-survey

Redell Olsen

Although an embodied poetics of seismic-reflection methods could not be developed for oil and gas exploration, such methods may have other uses. Most obviously a poetics of seismic-reflections might be deployed in non-militaristic contexts, initially as an active-source geophysical modality of investigative techniques with applicability across a range of temporalities, materials, linguistic and cultural terrains. This approach will need to be understood as necessarily going beyond the concept of an uneven mirror, that is if it is to catch up with current technologies of remote sensing. The mimetic is as outdated as it is heroic in its commercial persistence and this is true across every genre, such as in the design of tea towels or contemporary novels.

The technical possibilities implicit in a consideration of seismic-reflections as poetics offers untapped use potential on near surfaces such as landscapes, leisure centres, public transport, kitchen tables and other designated peripheral sites for something other than realist log jam making. This is especially beneficial where there is a need to re-materialise overlooked or incidental noise that might be embedded over time in the fabric of something formerly known as self or left even behind and later found snagged on a hedgerow along an ancient way once used by pilgrims on their way to worship at the shrine of Thomas Becket in Canterbury. This methodological practice can also be implemented where there are signs of imaginings associated with commonly overlooked sub-surfaces, including those apparently lost or outside the current frameworks of digitisation policy. Such incidents and indices of loss are often recoverable in high resolution poetic formats across word and image either as fragments or tiny shards of matter which signal conditions of past and indeed future possibilities for artistic socially engaged communities of practice. Current Safety Data Sheets should always be always consulted for clarity on the viability of form in any situation and it is taken as a given that in many instances democracy is likely to prove unreliable.

Seismic-reflection methods in poetic practice are best suited to the imaging and acoustic rendering of sub-surface poetic environments whether composed of approximately horizontal layers or drawn from an investigation into the oversteps and overlaps as yet unmapped by conventional methods. For instance, you could ask if moonlight had a sound? And while the moon remains in the sky this question would be continuous with the subterranean linguistic investigative procedures that span a range of applicable situations both above and below ground!

Post-accretion units of sedimentary or igneous linguistic traces deposited on, or intruded into, by two or more adjacent terranes suggest the case for figuring the embodiment of alternative semantic logics and this necessarily has consequences for facture. The writer or artist engaged in seismic-reflective methods will remain open to a range of indeterminacies and readerly explorations that are particularly suited to the materials and or landscapes designated by the remit of the project. A note of caution, some may find that they cannot remain neutral from what might be deemed political judgements once these methods have been engaged with. These could relate to local views on economic and social deprivations or disparities of wealth as evidenced by the number of food banks in comparison with wine bars in the area or an overheard snippet of conversation in a café on the High Street which could be aligned with governmental policies on immigration. Also, the names of the makes of car visible at the bottom of the Pilgrim's Way might be read as an indication of a particular demographics' disposable income and gift aid applied automatically at POS for any art works to be sold.

Often the lack of previous attention to certain types of materials that may go undetected is a consequence of the stratification of contexts and or exclusions of individuals and related narratives that historically appeared irrecuperable in relation to salient profit markers which profit markers always are. Here they are encountered as markers most recently associated with the expansions of late capitalism into non-traditionally productive areas of investment. These include creative expressions avoided by previous generations as potentially symptomatic of cold war sensibilities, perversion or anti-lyric gestures of negligible value until endorsed by buyers.

Sadly, most poets only read themselves and only buy drinks. Art is in business if it can be featured in a tourist brochure that compliments and encourages consumption and especially if it can be sat on. Everyone likes to rest while they look at the view and if art can be its own viewpoint, then it suggests that something subversive has been dealt with, contained even and that we can now get on with the real picnic at hand.

That the shallow subsurface of communication and representation are commonly stratified is not in doubt. Seismic-reflection methods in poetic practice have the benefit of providing access to numerous sceptical near-surface doubts. And in locating previously unremarked and unremarkable points of connection and development across a variety of cultural imaginaries hitherto mistaken as unproductive banks of shale and now visible as potential poetic text. Unseen caves once dismissed as dead ends rather than as markers and places of human and non-human habitation might be refigured as plot holders in a narrative about smugglers or opened as a wine cellar or peripatetic performance venue. And then there is *The Donkey of Dorking* who is bought back by the good townspeople and who confront the evil circus entertainer from London and send him packing. There is the man who wished to be buried upside down and therefore had an inkling of this form of poetics ahead of his time, as if he figured that only through death could he vertically cut through societal stratification and be ready for what he imagined was coming.

The poet as seismic-reflection surveyor is involved both in the design of situational above-ground sources of encounter, often in libraries, digital repositories, galleries and through archival materials while working in and with an array of bodily and technologically enhanced sensory receivers. The aim is to make possible the work as the transmission and receptive hollow that is open to so many conditions of practice-led waves: of affinity, of solidarity in the setting up of those that allow for the continual flow of yet unknown speculative imaginaries to meet in a conflux of underground streams - tributary formations that are both designed and haphazardly chanced upon. Each is partial and discontinuous in its modes of representation and inscription and in each network are figured through the reflective properties of existing materials and bounced off discontinuities and relative reflective interfaces and interactions with local sites in ways that do more than reflect but which have the potential to enact and disrupt.

That the environment is amid a crisis of climate and ecological disturbance is a point of measurement that is not general to each locality. This should be acknowledged as such. If at the site the conditions turn out to be good for business then this will necessarily show up in the accounts of the echolocations of bats, the representations of the romance of the changing colour of the grape and its blended properties. We watch the horizon knowingly from the vantage of our temporary 21st Century viewing platforms and are inured to the ghostly resonances that continue to lift the hairs on the back of our necks. Each is attuned to her own version of an 18 hrz refraction of subterranean unseens what cannot be measured as much as felt. This is a poetics that counters in textual, sonic and visual terms the discontinuities in the surroundings and meets these waves with acoustic and verbal disparities of performance in search of the shapes and gaps that result from a variety of impedance contrasts. A poetics of relation between seismic poetic velocity, seismic-wave travel time on delayed or non-existent public transport and through word as image and vice versa. The poet as retro-future wayfarer above and below grounds attention and goes in search of archival overlappings only to find themselves caught in a moment that is positively wracked with generative linguistic uncertainty, at once at odds with the diagrammatic pull to multi cross section and relentless in its unfoldings towards other landscapes and points of view.

The seismic reflective paths taken by the poet are both to be trodden on foot and through the available noise and detritus of subterranean linguistic and material layering. Such poetic seismic-reflection data is most often used to create texts, performances and bookworks that are concerned to depict the depths to and structures of reflecting interfaces. These are signalled in the recognition by the reader of the contexts and linguistic registers of the work to hand, like a medieval girdle book that hangs from the belt to be swung up for contemplation, this is a fossil book of h(ours) on the go. A mapping of poetic or linguistic surface tensions that really gets underway when it seeks to engage the reader with the complexity and the radical necessity of a poetics that is capable of diagrammatically folding up and opening out in its own series of seismic-reflections; a series of soluble uneven mirrors that treads across the gutter, into the margin and across the fold. A codex of limitless spines, the poetic work as work that is alive to its own materials and intervals, unbound in any single representation of event, temporality or dimensional field of practice.

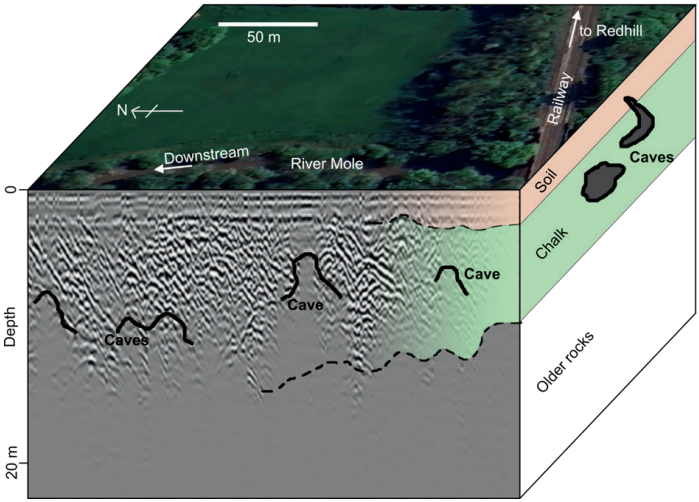

Figure 1: Geophysical survey of the River Mole near Dorking, Jonathan D. Paul, August 2024.

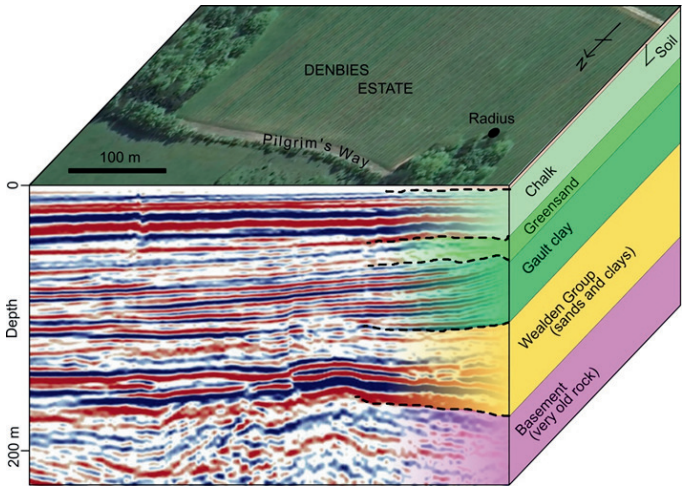

Figure 2: Geophysical survey of the Pilgrim's Way near Dorking, Jonathan D. Paul, August 2024.

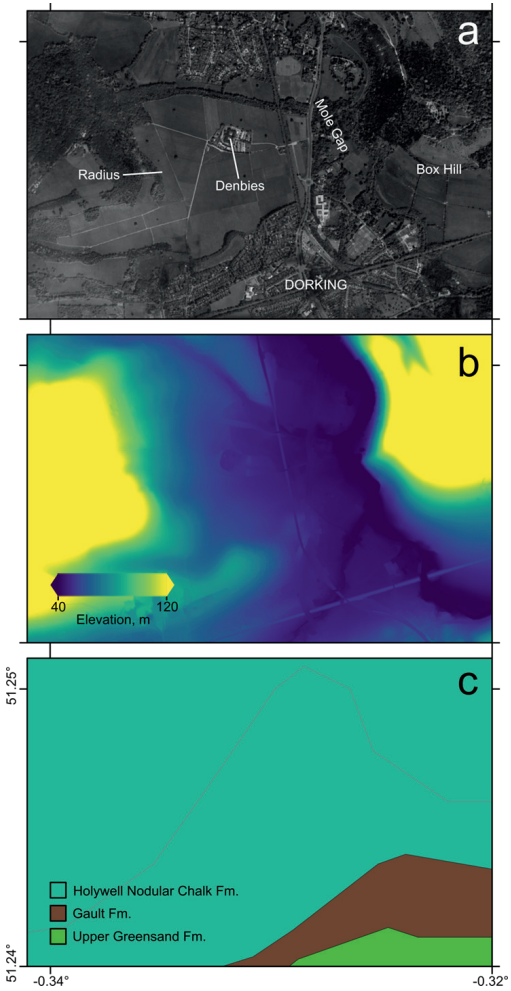

Figure 3: Mapping Denbies Estate, Jonathan D. Paul, July 2024.