



ROB IRVING

FIELDNOTES
Special places, spectral traces

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This book contains pictorial documentation of the practical element of my thesis, *Playing Puck: a Study of Performative Action in the Shaping of a 'Legend Landscape,'* submitted as partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of the West of England, Bristol, for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

The text consists of my field notes recorded during 2010-2, in the course of my walks and interventions in Avebury's ancient landscape, a selection of my alter ego Harmony Blue's conjectural observations, and a small sample of responses to the artworks.

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A barley field awaits the arrival of a crop circle, and much ritual activity, near West Kennet long barrow.

Contents

Introduction	7
A Description of my Practice	8
Windmill Hill	11
Overton Down	17
Reflections on excursions into a legend landscape – an exercise in visual mapping	27
Ignis Fatui	29
Cley Hill	38
A novel approach to crop circles: ‘Ghost’ geometry as spectral traces of generative energies	44
Heard on Radio 4	51
A Crop Circle at East Kennet	52
Map of Lines of Intervisibility	62
A Crop Circle at West Kennet	64
The Ridgeway: A Ritual Walk	82
Filamentous cobweb-like material known as ‘angel hair’ found at ancient sacred sites	93
Imramma	103
Yatesbury	111

Introduction

These field notes provide the background to some of the themes, observations and interventions that are included in my thesis, *Playing Puck*.

In *A Phenomenology of Landscape* (1994), Christopher Tilley observes that the construction of the monuments that now constitute ancient ritual landscapes objectified the cultural memory of place, and that the permanence of their scale or materials has prevented this significance from being lost and forgotten. At Avebury, the network of relations represented by these vestigial remains suggests tenuity between the material and spiritual realms, what is visible and invisible, the worldly and otherworldly, between this life and the next, and how we imagine lives already lived, long ago. They induce imagining, which invites, in certain sociocultural environments, the turning of imagination into a kind of memory of what occurred in this place and knowledge of what spiritual presences (and absences) still dwell here. The lived body mediates these psychophysical relations between memory and place, and felt experience becomes a phenomenological enterprise.

To Tilley, such artifice signifies a will to make ancestral powers in the land visible, to be seen and remembered through the particular perspectives offered by the vantage points of the monuments. These places and what they represent become “not just subjects of knowledge but objects of knowledge too, resources to be worked upon and manipulated for the sectional social interests of individuals or particular social groups” (*ibid*). Just as 5,000 years ago they objectified ancestral powers in the landscape, so this activity continues today in a different frame of reference. In the cultural framework of the post-rationalist New Age

movement, our ancient ancestors are not so much ‘us’ – though they do represent a human identity – as much as ‘other,’ and through the mediation of their topographic legacy this otherly past is drawn into our present. Crop circles are an affective response to this re-remembering, for they, too, sing across thresholds. Moreover, they are also situated in place, and in relation to other sites, thus rendering new layers in a palimpsest that lives in tension between agricultural utility and a curious pre-apocalyptic intimacy with ancestral ruins. In doing so they offer integration into a special identity, whose inspiration comes from their place in place, and thus locates our place in place. By creating fresh sites we open these places as spaces to experience this landscape and these placial relationships in a new way. The placement of these artworks, ancient and modern, has an effect on movement through the landscape, and create an affect upon the individual by influencing his or her experience of that location. In this way the perception of the living is focused on the matrix of an animated landscape populated and consecrated by the dead, with place coagulating subject and object into New Age legend. Playing Puck within this scheme, I contrived through my practice to provoke situational encounters that evoke, or respond to, a special something that I, too, sense in terms of its loss.

For more than 300 years, Avebury’s ritual landscape has played host to an evolving cultural cosmology; then, as now, its sites are lenses through which to project contemporary religious values and ideas, reconstituting, as legend, old myths brought to life as apparitions and preternatural phenomena. For 30 years, crop circles in particular have performed this role, and, moreover, offer lost or forgotten vantage points where the ritual landscape may be viewed from a reclaimed perspective, as epitomised by James Sheppard’s observation opposite.

These circles are telling us to look. They get us to a place where we can actually see something; not just in the circle itself, but the landscape it's in. Look up and out. Look down the valley, and think that [so many] years ago there were people in the same spot, under the same sun, looking at the same view.

James Sheppard, farmer, responding to the appearance of a crop circle on his land in 2009.

*Practice as stopping and standing, sitting or lying still; practice as walking;
practice as movement; practice as being; practice as seeing; practice as
thinking; practice as imagining; practice as doing; practice as ritual;
practice as document; practice as writing; practice as making; practice as
showing; practice as telling; practice as becoming invisible...*



Overlooking Windmill Hill towards Avebury Down.

Windmill Hill

*We are surrounded by the greatest of free shows.
Places. Most of them made by man, remade by man.*
Jonathan Meades, 2012: xiii

28th April 2011

On a sunny evening, I'm sitting on the most prominent of the tumuli within the prehistoric causewayed enclosure on Windmill Hill. The site overlooks Avebury to the south, the Ridgeway stretches across to the east, and to the southwest is Oldbury Castle. Between them, my gaze settles on Silbury Hill, situated in the Kennet river valley a couple of miles away.

Considering this distance, the hill looks surprisingly large. I enter into that state of meditative subject-centred encounter: what am I actually seeing? A few minutes of re/orientation. Some speculative impressions: the man-made structure of Silbury Hill was contrived by its builders to be seen from here and that this visibility defined its size. Its scale seems to fit the landscape it is situated in, suggesting that it is intended both to be seen from here and for this place to be seen in relation to it. From here, jutting out from its left side I can see the long barrow at West Kennet, the line of its length continuing 'into' a ledge that appears to be cut into the hill a few metres from its summit. It is an intriguing optical effect.

I note that from here the long barrow is not in direct alignment with Silbury Hill; if it were, the barrow would be obscured by the hill. What I am seeing is another kind of alignment: a purely visual alignment. The long barrow

is in alignment but is meant to be seen from here, so their situatedness in relation to each other allows this. Could this have decided the hill's placement? I doubt it, but it is difficult not to feel that by being here I am making a real connection between one 'place of the dead' and another. They are connected through me. I have a part to play: Who am I in this place? How am I transformed by it? How do I transform it? As an artist, what contribution could I make to its transformation?

When West Kennet long barrow was constructed, Windmill Hill was a place of the living before being turned over to the dead as a barrow cemetery. Only relatively recently has the archaeological emphasis shifted from consideration of individual sites in terms of their immediacy as places of burial to their place and setting within a wider ritual landscape and their continuing relationship with the living. Pryor observes in *The Making of the British Landscape* (2010: 64) that we have become attuned to the idea that in antiquity the ancestors were thought to play an important role in regulating the affairs of the living. Moreover, belief in an active spirit world in turn affected the location of significant sites in the landscape.

Certain natural and man-made landmarks would have been perceived to be representative of, and even serve to embody the dead. I sense the same in the presence of the beech-covered barrows that line the horizon along the eastern ridge of Avebury and Overton Downs. I am visually touched; I sense connection between myself, the builders, and their own immediate and distant ancestors, who were as ancient to the builders as the builders are to me. Now they are my ancestors, and we continue to interact.



A ringed tumulus on Windmill Hill: the starting point of my practice.



View from Windmill Hill looking south towards Silbury Hill (right page) and Overton Down (left page). Avebury is obscured by trees. Detail shows alignment of Silbury Hill and West Kennet long barrow. From here, the line of the barrow appears to be continued by the ledge below the hill's summit (see insert).



Silbury Hill





Towards Windmill Hill from the Sanctuary.

Overton Down

4th May 2011

Topographical Poetics

Only by walking Avebury's ritual landscape is it possible to get a sense of the way its prehistoric man-made elements were set out as a cartography of meaning, connecting the living in physical relation to landscape features, natural and man-made, with the ancestors and the immanent and celestial forces that create and control life.

These topographical connections are especially evident from the barrow cemetery at Overton Hill, at the southern end of the Ridgeway, a prehistoric track that runs along the ridge northeasterly into Oxfordshire and beyond. The tumuli are Bronze Age, added long after the construction of the Avebury circle, Silbury Hill, and the long barrows. But like the Ridgeway, the Sanctuary, a stone and wood circle site at the end of an avenue of standing stones connecting the site with Avebury, is much older and sits at the same elevation as the tumuli - the effect of intervisibility is therefore contemporaneous with the Neolithic elements. Stukeley translated 'hak' and 'pen' into 'snake's head,' an image corresponding to his interpretation of the overhead serpentine layout of the stone avenue/s leading from here to the Avebury stone circles and then down to Beckhampton. He refers to the Sanctuary as Snake's Head temple.

Silbury Hill can be seen a mile distant in the shallow Kennet valley. From here, the mound fits snugly within the contours of its natural surroundings. Clearly, it was not made to provide a better view of its surroundings,

because its height matches that of its neighbour Waden Hill, which would have suited that purpose just as well. The lack of burials inside it suggests that its *raison d'être* extends outward, rather than being something contained within. The hill's placement makes more sense when it is considered in a ritual context in terms of its relationship to its surroundings, and as integral to a man-made system incorporating these features. Indeed, it could have served as the central element to that system, or, as Devereux describes, as "the hub of this great wheel of monuments" that make up Avebury's ritual landscape.

Today I walked north along the Ridgeway towards the nearest of the beech-covered tumuli, which stretch along the ridge like beads of dew on a cobweb filament (see overleaf). According to the information panel at the Overton Hill barrows, the locals refer to these tree-covered tumuli as hedgehogs. The near horizon of Waden Hill is visible from here, and the summit of Silbury Hill 'peeks' over it, as if intended to make, and be made, visible.



The top of Silbury Hill from the Ridgeway.

Wasn't it Stukeley who first proposed that Silbury was built as a viewing platform? I can see why he thought so. From here it is possible to see how, from the summit of the Silbury mound, the sun would rise here, at the 'snake's head,' and would set over its 'tail' to the west. Devereux has suggested that Silbury's 'ledge' visible a few metres below the summit is measured by how it intersects certain local and distant skylines. He noticed that during summer months the sunrise can be witnessed over Overton from the summit and then again, minutes later, again from the ledge, as the sun appears over Waden Hill. He supposes that Silbury was built to the "right height, in precisely the right place," to facilitate this double sunrise at certain times of the year.

A Haunted Landscape

My fieldwork addresses the challenge posed by Otto that the "primal numinous awe" experienced at sacred sites – a *numen loci* which can extend across entire landscapes – does not depend on the existence of particular *genii* or divinities, but that place itself contains "all the rich potentialities and possibilities of development inherent in true primal numinous emotion" (1917/58: 126-8). The 'it' in the German *es spukt hier* (it haunts here) contains no suggestion of what it is that haunts, only that it is whatever we project when we enter into the "art of making shudder." Similarly the Sanskrit *adbhuta-darsanam* refers to 'seeing' (*darshan*) the inapprehensible, the inexpressible. To receive *darshan* is also an act of projection. The sacred place is an empty house possessed by numen-haunted spectres of human experience. When preternatural phenomena are associated with specific places as legend they can be viewed as both immanent expressions of the landscape and as a consecration of the territory via external entities. Freud captured this weird

combination of the homeliness and the strange in his essay *The Uncanny* (1919).

We are haunted by memories, real and imagined. We may think of memory as something contained and controlled in our mind in terms of the medium of language and thought, but, as Daniel Miller observes, we are also bound to physical reminders: meaningful objects that find their way into special places, and which make them special. Just as we possess them these objects possess us. They are our technology of attachment. Such is the case with the man-made topography of this landscape. The stones, rings, lumps and bumps still inform emerging legends as much as these inform the way we view them.

Haunted objects, images and places maintain continuity between 'then' and the 'here, now.' Such transaction is continuous and ongoing, for the haunt as agency is two-way traffic. Myth, as expressions of unobservable realities which manifests as observable, legendary phenomena, is not only shared by word of mouth, but also physically, through action and performance, embodied in a pattern of relations between humanity, other forms of life, acatants, and the environment. Legendary notions of 'earth energy' can be viewed in terms of the synergy of place and uncanny experience. As with points of intersection between humans and place/landscape, and how myth and objects of myth mediate such interaction.

Fairy knolls

As an argument against today's received wisdom that "the 18th century fashion for planting beech trees on Bronze Age barrows (like those on Overton Down near Avebury)" is responsible for their appearance today, it is plausible that tree-covered tumuli have existed for much longer. In South



America the deceased were buried and covered with tumuli on which trees were planted, and bells were hung from the branches of these trees. The roundness of the tumuli signified gestation and rebirth. A letter to *Gentleman's Magazine* dated August 7, 1822, describes a mound in Virginia covered in trees, one of which – an oak – "must have been the growth of four or five centuries." An even earlier reference can be found in Virgil (*Third Book Of The Aeneis*, pt VIII), where a "rising hillock" associated with a burial showed "sharp myrtles on the sides, and cornels grew." Virgil writes that the act of pulling up a tree disturbed the spirit of the tumuli's occupant:

*The violated myrtle ran with gore.
Scarce dare I tell the sequel: from the womb
Of wounded earth, and caverns of the tomb,
A groan, as of a troubled ghost, renew'd
My fright, and then these dreadful words ensued:
Why dost thou thus my buried body rend?*

While it is tempting to regard such tales of haunting as the origin of more recent folklore associating ancient tumuli with fairy knolls, it is important to consider the dormancy between their original use as burial sites and ancestor veneration and their relatively recent rediscovery as graves.

Then, as Jeremy Harte observes:

Unfortunately the prevalence of sites which are not gravemounds tends to diminish the significance of those which are, and this eclecticism becomes even more apparent when we include others which are not prehistoric at all into the reckoning.

At the Edge No.5 1997

(Above) Beechwood tumuli on Overton Down.



A beechwood tumulus on Overton Hill.

The sociocultural value of any legend may be judged by its durability. It seems likely to me that ancient traditions of mound burials may have emerged out of older legend associations with mountains, hills, outcrops and tumps, and which continue to contribute to the legend landscape. Folk associations of haunted tree-covered tumuli (as burial places, containing spirits) would appear to be supported by Kirk's chronicle of supernatural folklore *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies* (1691), which records that:

There be many places called Fairie hills, which the Mountain People think impious and dangerous to peel or discover, by taking earth or wood from them; superstitiously believing the Souls of their Predecessors to dwell there. (Kirk 1691)

There are practical reasons for thinking that the association between mounds and trees precedes 18th century fashion: if the bodies therein were buried soon after death, the sites would be naturally fertile and verdant. It does not stretch the imagination too far to associate death with renewal, and an otherworldly, supernatural vitality.

9th May 2011

John Aubrey, the first modern archaeologist

When, in 1649, John Aubrey, an Oxford University student, decided to stop what he was doing (hunting with friends) and pay attention to the mysteries presented by the topography of what is now known as the Avebury complex, this was not a discovery, per se, as much as it was a return to awareness. In terms of landscape phenomenology, he did what the archaeologist Miles Russell describes as “a nice long walk with your eyes open.” A village had stood in the centre of the vast circle of standing stones, with

its smaller circles set within the wider circumference; the arrangement would have been impossible not to notice as a monument. But to what? Gradually, the stones were quarried, piecemeal, often to make way for farming, and used to construct the village. Aubrey was the first to write about what he saw. He envisaged the site as a temple, identifying it with another, Stonehenge, 20 miles to the south, as “probably” Druid temples. It seems certain that as an educated man Aubrey was familiar with the works of Greek and Roman writers, who described the *Druidae* as a priestly sect active in Gaul, and perhaps in Celtic culture in Britain in the years prior to the Roman occupation. In 1663, Aubrey joined the ranks of contributors to the Royal Society with a paper on his studies at Avebury, and in so doing he created modern archaeology (Bryson, 2010: 5). The Druid theory was enthusiastically taken up fifty years later by William Stukeley, an antiquarian vicar, friend, and subsequently biographer, of Sir Isaac Newton. Stukeley's was a purely phenomenological approach, as besides his Old Testament there were no books or authorities to guide him in his studies. In numerous visits spanning years, Stukeley walked the landscape, making detailed drawings and ruminating on its prehistoric sanctity.

What remains of Avebury's ritual topography are ghosts of Neolithic and Bronze Age activity that shows evidence of combined agricultural and religious use – manipulation of surroundings on a grand scale, in a combination of practical purpose and religious ritual. This coincided with the arrival of the funerary monuments and ceremonial sites that define the identity of Avebury's ritual landscape, even today. Its skylines are marked with meaningful bumps, triggers of memory, an effect that could (seemingly) work only in an open landscape. Walking these ancient viewsheds, I get a strong sense of how place combines with cultural practice to create an ecological framework



The sun shines down on Silbury Hill, just visible on the mid horizon, in this view from the Ridgeway at Overton Hill.



of transactional and transformative relations that comes alive through ritual, intended to revitalise the environment and life itself. Moreover, there is evidence that the ritual process was embedded in the making of monuments. The making of Silbury Hill, for example, involved continuous cycles of digging, backfilling, and re-digging of ditches, extending outwards. (This was emulated in 2011 by a ringed crop circle at West Kennet which extended outward by ‘growing’ additional rings.)

Millenarian Nostalgia

The expectation that solutions to present crises will be brought about through rapid and radical social transformation is bound to nostalgia for a golden age that is thought to have existed in the distant past, and to which, accordingly, some of us will return in the near future (come the New Age). Nostalgia is bound to place as much as it is to time. Paradise is conceived as both physical place and conceptual space. It represents a collective memory, an archetypal recollection of the Garden. Place, then, embodies the millenarian myth, making it real and livable. To Casey, rather than thinking of memory as a way of re-experiencing the past, he conceives of it as an activity of re-placement, of re-experiencing places in terms of sacred time. At Avebury, because it is self-contained within physical horizons and its visual system of sightlines and viewsheds, we are invited to shut off the outside and enter into its Dreamtime.

In *The Sacred and the Profane*, Eliade explains the etymological kinship between *templum* (temple) and *tempus* (time) as an intersection, where *templum* designates the spatial, and *tempus* the temporal aspect of the motion of the horizon in space and time. Its starting point is a state of primal harmony, and that’s my point, and that’s the centre point of New Age Millenarianism. As John Michell observed, God placed his compass at Avebury and it became the centre of the cosmos. This involves a return to the original time, whose purpose is a symbolic rebirth. The underlying conception is that life cannot be repaired; it can only be recreated through symbolic repetition, to bring it closer each time the ritual is performed.

I have heard talk of Avebury’s repositories of secrets, accessible through hidden portals, which are to be revealed in the Rapture. Such places are both receptive and preservative of a past that is held in the present by

collective archetypal memories of primal harmony. The notion that lines of energetic force connect prehistoric and other mystical sites has surfaced in English folklore only in the last century. Since the 1960s, mainly through the work of John Michell, it has achieved the status of foundational truth amongst alternative seekers. Accordingly, ancient stone circles and other constructions were situated on places of energy – crossings – and in order to do this the ancients must have known how to detect and locate these energies, a knowledge that eludes us moderns. From this it is possible to construct a chain of evidence that situates ‘lost’ wisdom as integral to scientific approaches that circumvent the (perceived) failings of modernity. I think of this nostalgia in terms of a homecoming, intensified by anticipation of direct experience of the uncanny. To Freud, this combination of the familiar and the unfamiliar represents the other side of aesthetics. It is elicited in response to stimuli, and shares the same familial characteristics as beauty, but it resides at the other end of a continuum of sensory response. It is nonetheless deeply attractive.

By dissolving the lines between the fanciful and the real, the virtual and the actual, we create a sense of the primal as both eternally past and eternally present, and the trick then becomes to mobilise these connections. The same dialectic dwells in the interplay of the visible and invisible, imagination and physical reality, and, crucially, what ‘is’ and what is ‘as if.’

The Trickster lurks in the space between ‘is’ and ‘as if’, and this zone is inherently, sometimes hiddenly, theatrical. Memory of place empowers us and thus empowers us. Ritual re/enactment of legend is an act of remembering, and this is particularly true in relation to place, for, as Casey remarks, places retain the past in a way that can be reanimated simply by our remembering them. This performance becomes stronger when it is shared, where, writes Casey, body and place memory conspire with co-participants in ritualised scenes of co-remembering. This re/presencing of place puts those present into physical and psychic contact with the object of legend as a means to recover our ‘memories’ of primal harmony.

Double spiral in wheat, Windmill Hill 2011.





Ignes Fatui

*If any wanderers I meet
that from their night-sports doe trudge home,
With counterfeiting voyce I greet
and cause them on with me to roame,
Through woods, through lakes,
Through bogs, through brakes, --
Ore bush and brier with them I goe;
I call upon Them to come on,
And wend me, laughing ho, ho, ho!...
By wels and gils in medowes greene,
we nightly dance our heydegies
And to our fairy King and Queene
wee chant our moone-light harmonies.*

From a song about Robin Goodfellow (to the tune of *Dulcina*), attributed to Ben Johnson, circa 1628.

The concept of nature sprites inhabiting and working magic on our crops is widespread across cultures. The figure of Robin Goodfellow, or Puck, is well known in England, immortalised by Shakespeare in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, first performed in 1596. But his Welsh counterpart *Pwca* and the Irish *Phuka* point to earlier origins (as do *puki* in Old Norse, *puke* in Swedish and *puge* in Danish), all deriving from 'devil' or 'evil spirit'. Another example is the English West Country native, the pixie. Tales of unwary travellers lured, or 'pixie-led', by lights to their deaths reference a longstanding association of nature spirits with balls of light.

They are also an ideal metaphor for the pursuit of paranormal phenomena and its underlying tension between expectation and mischief.

The antiquarian John Aubrey once came across a similar phenomenon, which he described in his *Natural History of Wiltshire* (1686):

Ignis fatuus, called by the vulgar Kit of the Candlestick, is not very rare on our downes about Michaelmass.

Biding in the north lane of Broad Chalke in the harvest time in the twilight, or scarce that, a point of light, by the hedge, expanded itselfe into a globe of about three inches diameter, or neer four, as boies blow bubbles with soape. It continued but while one could say one, two, three, or four at the most. It was about a foot from my horse's eie; and it made him turn his head quick aside from it. It was a pale light as that of a glowe-worme: it may be this is that which they call a blast or blight in the country.

John Aubrey 1686

Floating phosphorescent light phenomena of this kind carry similar associations. The relationship is best illustrated by the names they are known by: Will O'the Wisps, Jack O'Lanterns, *ignis fatuus* (Latin for "foolish fire", also defined as something that misleads or deludes – an illusion), fairy lights, elf lights, pixie lights, spook lights and corpse candles to name a few. Corpse candles are specifically described as small flames and are generally seen at night near churches and graveyards, as they are said to be harbingers of imminent death. These supernatural associations also extend into modern-day study of UFOs, or Unidentified Flying Objects, and 'balls of light,' or 'bols,' are often seen around crop circles.



A ball of light at twilight, Avebury Avenue.

Silbury Hill, 13th August 2011

I wonder from Rob's interesting photos, whether the orbs which make crop circles go in and out of a wormhole under Silbury Hill to access our current spacetime? The idea certainly seems suggestive. If those were natural balls of electricity, they should not show such discrete, orthogonal arcs of electricity. [...] I have always thought that Silbury Hill may have been built 5000 years ago, to safely cover up e.t. technology for the future. Who is going to move all of that dirt and rock? Also it is the epicenter of the crop circle phenomenon, which uses a 'conduit' through space and time. Maybe those 'orbs' which make crop circles go in and out of Silbury Hill, like we send remote probes to Mars?

Red Collie aka Dr Horace R. Drew III,
retired molecular biologist, pers. comm. 17-18/08/11.

William James wrote:

...it is obvious that [transubstantiation] will only be treated seriously by those who already believe in the 'real presence' on independent grounds.

James 1907/2009: 93



Left (detail) & Right: Light on Silbury Hill, under a full moon.



Likewise, the mystery of a photograph of anomalous light phenomena is embraced by those who already believe in the 'real presence' of what the phenomena represents to them. Consequently, the image defines further expectations of what such phenomena 'should' look like. This confirms Gadamer's observation that even a representation of a well-known mythical event is:

raised to its own validity and truth. With regard to the knowledge of the true, the being of the representation is more than the being of the thing represented.

Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (1975)

12th September 2012 7.30pm Stonehenge

As the Lead Artist on *Measuring the Land*, a Heritage Lottery Funded project aimed at introducing teenagers and young adults to the maths and geometry of the ancient and more recent heritage of the Wessex landscape, I attended an evening field trip to Stonehenge. As we were leaving the site I took a photograph of the interior. Later, I noticed that it had captured a few spots of rain. These were visible only in the centre of the image, where the rain drops aligned with the camera's lens were illuminated by the flash, reflecting it directly back.

I posted the image on Facebook's 'Crop Circles-UFO's-Ancient Mysteries-Scientific Speculations' page using the pseudonym Harmony Blue, with the caption 'Orbs at Stonehenge,' along with time and technical data. The image received an immediate response. Within a few hours of its initial posting, it had received over 300 'likes,' 150 'shares,' and numerous comments, indicating that most respondents accepted that the image showed strange phenomena.

(Right) 'Orbs' dancing at Stonehenge.





Viewed in terms of its mythical relevance, as Harmony Blue I had serendipitously captured a unique image of ‘orbs’ performing inside Stonehenge. Its uniqueness was magnified by the fact that this inner sanctum is hidden from most visitors due to restricted public access, and so, on some level, the image offered a glimpse into a secret world cohabited by sacredness and wyrd phenomena.

In Hindu cosmology, wherever water drips or pours into the inner sanctum of a temple it represents the water’s heavenly origins, and a revelation of the divine presence in that place – a hierophany (Eck 2012: 20). Such manifestations are regarded as *acheiropoietic* – i.e., not made by human hands – but, observes Eck, are said to be spontaneous eruptions of the divine, whether godly, devilish, or as a local divinity. In my photograph, the orbs established its life (*praña*) as an image of divine presence in the eyes of believers. The photograph of such an event is an especially powerful medium in attracting believers and pilgrims to a place, because it may be taken at face value as scientific evidence that “the sacred appeared here, spontaneously, unbidden, self-manifest” (Eck 2012: 22).

In legend environments, it is at this point that deeper tensions emerge between ontological belief and semiotics, and the literality or metaphoric interpretation of phenomena. Plato’s issue with poets (artists), that art is often indistinguishable from reality, is relevant here. Photographs of ‘spirit orbs’ or balls of light, like ghosts and UFOs, have become part of the modern grammar of sanctification. They disclose an underlying message as if to say, what other hidden marvels reside there?

(Left) A ball of light floats over a crop circle at Milk Hill.

Cley Hill, near Warminster 2010/11







A novel approach to crop circles: 'Ghost' geometry as spectral traces of generative energies

by **Harmony Blue**
A speculative research paper, Spring 2011

Introduction

Our natural environment cannot cope with all that we demand of it. It is out of balance, and humans are partly responsible. Over the last four hundred years we have become increasingly detached from nature – indeed, modern society defines itself by this separation. It is our responsibility to solve these problems, and in order to do this we must change our attitude towards our natural resources and the way we exploit them. The solutions require that we look at the problems in a different way. A novel approach is necessary, a shift from current paradigms to new ways of thinking. We do not advocate abandoning modern science, but it may mean looking to the ancient past and to the roots of human experience and traditional knowledge in order to realise a better way forward.

Recent research into crop circles poses unique questions about our relationship with the natural world. It indicates that the possibility exists that geometrical harmonics plays a role in revitalizing and amplifying specific natural forces, and that by understanding how this works we may advance to more mutually beneficial ecologies.

Background

We are told that it is acceptable to modify the genetic make-up of the 'staff of life,' grasses such as wheat and barley, and vegetable crops such as oilseed rape. We are also assured that the chemicals commonly used in

agriculture do not cause any irreparable damage to the fabric of the soil, and nor to us. Yet, the evidence shows otherwise. By-products of nitrogen fertilizers in common use today are acknowledged as a major contributor to atmospheric and water pollution. The process of nitrification (that is, the biological oxidation of ammonia with oxygen into nitrite followed by the oxidation of these nitrites into nitrates) is crucial to fertility, but, as so often, artificial processes fall short of nature's intent. For example, nitrous oxide is a greenhouse gas that is 300 times more polluting than carbon dioxide, and dangerous nitrates derived from artificial fertilizer often leak into water courses. According to the recent (2010) European Nitrogen Assessment, which looked at the causes of nitrogen pollution across Europe and the costs of cleaning it up, two-thirds of the problem can be attributed to farming practices. This presents us with a paradox, because without nitrogen soils would become depleted and everyone would starve.

In accordance with current agreements, by 2050, British farmers have to meet the Government's climate change targets by reducing greenhouse emissions by 80% of 1990 levels. This means that over the coming years radical alterations will need to be made to the ways farmers encourage crop yield. More efficient use of nitrogen sources for growing crops will significantly contribute to

this reduction. Present best practice is the development and use of nitrification inhibitors which act on the microbes in the soil that produce polluting by-products, slowing down the rate of conversion and allowing plants to access the nitrogen more effectively before it is emitted as nitrous oxide. But this is really a measure designed to counter a systematic imbalance. Instead, the challenge is to strive for a balanced system throughout.

Research

Recent preliminary laboratory studies have shown an increase in nitrogenase expression on the rhizosphere of roots found immediately below 'ghost' crop patterns and the surrounding field. This indicates that enhanced nitrogenase activity was associated with changes on the surface, matching the geometrical schema, i.e. the pattern of effected crop. Subsequent analysis of the soil at certain sites suggests that this effect extends through the nitrification process contained within the geometric field. It is our intention to continue this research during the 2011 cereal-growing season with fresh crop patterns.

Geometric Field Theory

Speculations about the nature of this activity range from chemical and/or biophysical changes within the soil caused by an as yet unidentified energy source that lays the crop in geometric patterns, to trace energy generated by the presence of the geometry itself. The visible pattern may be a physical response to a force, the plants behaving just as iron filings do when they form a pattern on paper over a magnet to reveal the two dimensional form of a magnetic field. Alternatively, the geometry may be an expression of a field that is self-generated. The geometry we see is limited to the flat plane of the ground surface but the field actually exists in three dimensions extending above and below this plane. Crop circles are catalysts of conviviality, and it has occurred to us that such fields may be activated by human interaction, an idea supported by previous research into human relations with plants. Another consideration is that the field is revitalized trace 'memory' of an earlier presence. The relationship between sacred geometry and acoustics is also noted, and sonic resonance will be integral to our ongoing experiments.



Some people have reported sensing geomagnetic energies through dowsing, and ancient ceremonial sites have been rediscovered through the equienergetic space they share with crop circles. We are re-evaluating the extent to which existing theories based on purely material principles are capable of explaining such effects. Microbiological research into subatomic phenomena has revealed a deep-seated interconnectivity at every level in the physical world, forming a relationship where matter and antimatter exist and interact in unity. In existing field theory, physical phenomena are explained by a combination of fields and energy, not in terms of either one. Energy may cause the field to change but the way it changes, and the form it takes, depends on its spatial structure. In other words, they act as geometrical or spatial causes, which, we propose, may have the power to affect their immediate environment.

Spectral Traces

New, potentially useful speculations unfold when we follow this line of inquiry. Did crop circles first appear at the heart of England's wheat belt in response to depletion of natural soil nutrients? Are the energy patterns reported by dowsers spectral traces of earlier, more powerful systems? The late John Burke (formerly of BLT Research) led an intriguing study into this territory. He concluded that sites such as Windmill Hill/Avebury were used to store cereal grain, and that something inherent to these places invigorated the seeds, maximizing future crop yields.

This was in response to soil depletion in the Bronze Age, not dissimilar to what we are witnessing today. Accordingly, ever-present energies are generated naturally by well-known forces but are magnified locally by geological structures called conductivity discontinuities,

which create geomagnetic variations and affect telluric fields. Aquifers beneath chalk downlands are one such example, and these have been cited as a causative factor in the appearance of crop circles.

What if these energy fields are attracted or otherwise interact with relational geometry? (Could the light spheres seen in and around crop circles be manifestation of this energy, or even attracted by it?) Were ancient power systems designed to generate energy fields in order to replenish the land? Our findings suggest that this is plausible. As we become reacquainted with the idea that geometry defines sacred space, and that our ancestors were aware of this and were able to manipulate these energies, it is worth asking what potential can be released for ecological benefit.

Landscape as a Temple of the *anima mundi*

Ongoing studies indicate that whatever the cause of crop circles enhances or intensifies, rather than depletes, the site's natural vitality. Evidence of this on the surface of crop circles has included the appearance of cobweb-like material in abundance. This is a promising sign of enhanced microbial activity, which, where agricultural and ecological benefits are concerned, is a key to efficiency; increased soil nutrition and plant growth ultimately leads to a reduction in the need for artificial stimulus. If we can learn from this and find and develop creative ways to harness these energies in subtle ways that are not detrimental to the environment – rather, the opposite, perhaps by controlled circle making experiments – it might mark the beginning of a revolution in our relations with nature, and supernature.

At various sites it was also noticed that animals seemed to be attracted to crop circles. This first became evident by tracks, but one site in particular was visited by field

volunteers regularly over autumn and winter months, and deer were witnessed repeatedly visiting the site. Birds were also attracted, but this may be explained by the fallen seeds on offer. The avian distribution of seeds would also explain the abundance of wild flowers and fungi that have been noted at harvested sites. Nevertheless, these observations invite questions as to what else might make crop circles attractive to creatures that retain their 'extrasensory' capabilities.

Anyone who has witnessed a climbing plant seek its nearest support, or a root seek moistness, or a carnivore's pickiness at which insects it consumes, knows that plants are capable of intent; they are able to perceive and to react to their environment at a level of sophistication that surpasses present human understanding. Plant behaviour represents a rich vein of potential for ESP research. What if traditional botanical associations with the supramaterial world of cosmic beings, known to Vedic sages as devas, and to Westerners as nature spirits, are allegorical representations of a real truth? This is what Stella Kramrisch (1976) means when she writes that sacred places:

are potent sites where a presence is felt to dwell. Its support is in the place itself. Whatever makes the site conspicuous or memorable is reinforced in its effect by the attention of the people directed towards and concentrated on that spot. In such places (according to the Mahabharata) "the gods are seen at play."

Kramrisch, *The Hindu Temple* (1976)

Kramrisch identifies important correlations in Vedic scripture between such sites, the ground itself and "the vital assimilation of energies of the soil into the grain and plants," its consecration as holy ground, and the

subsequent demarcation of the templum, of which the Vastupurusamandala (its ground plan) constitutes the metaphysical prototype of its various spiritual rhythms, giving the widest margin to their possibilities.

Relations between the patterns that inspire temple builders and the way nature operates unhindered by human intervention lays at the heart of ancient thinking. The ratios and proportions that define the way natural organisms develop and unfold are precisely the same as those that underpin various ancient buildings, and some crop circles. Crop circles are helping us to recognise a relationship between the geometric field and symbolism of the sacred realm, as manifest in temples, mosques, and cathedrals, and the way nature itself is structured and behaves, as manifest in flowers, shells, and other living organisms.

Studies have linked the recognition of this synonymy with the realignment and restoration of neural pathways, giving rise to corresponding experiences where subjects report a strong sense of wholeness within themselves and an enhanced sense of unity with other living things: a natural state known as vitalism. They invite immersion in natural wonder, revealing nature's integration into the spiritual life force that humans manifest creatively through such activities as art and architecture, religion and symbolism, returning deep philosophical insights into the meaning and purpose of nature and the cosmos, and our place within it.

We argue that when disciplinary approaches are integrated co-constitutionally it can result in promising outcomes for practical knowledge. Empirical science often assumes authority outside its own bailiwick, excluding voices that play a valuable social role by articulating philosophical and aesthetic considerations. But, just as empiricism puts those elements to its test, so each should do the same in relation

to the others. Once primacy is given to one above all and it begins to intrude into other domains the epistemological system breaks down. We can see physical manifestations of this in tilled soil, and throughout nature.

The present research is still in its infancy, but it indicates that the study of geometric fields has a role in future sustainable methods of soil nitrification. This thinking is based on the idea that bioactivity is triggered by a new type of causation through the agency of morphic fields (Sheldrake 2009). For example, diazotrophs (bacterial micro-organisms that fix nitrogen) demonstrate the ability to change their metabolic activities in swift response to changing conditions. As unlikely as a ‘power of geometry’ hypothesis sounds, we do not discount it simply because earlier research into the influence of two, three, and even four-dimensional shapes on local environs stands rejected by mainstream science.

Taking our lead from David Bohm’s notion of an unfolding dialogue that gives breathing space to ideas, as scientists tasked to look beyond these self-imposed limits we are committed to look into ways that may restore this harmony and to keep in mind philosophical and artistic considerations in evaluating the integrity of natural, or supernatural phenomena. We have taken the pragmatic decision to approach this subject from the philosophical stance that the natural world is an immanent, vital, emergent force, which reflects human action upon it, and that this constitutes a reciprocal exchange where we may expect to see phenomenal manifestations in return. We are determined to take a more radical approach that is more in keeping with the nature of our subject matter. In our view, novel approaches of this kind may lead to the novel solutions that are required right now.





the cobwebs...

Michael Glickman: *The detail of the true crop circle – the lay, and overlay, and underlay – is breathtaking. The surge, the flow, is simply of a scale that is unimaginable by simple stomping down. And, above all, the details... the local nests, and tufts, and circles, and doughnuts, at the centre... the cobwebs... are so varied, and so particular, and so meticulous that it's simply unthinkable that this is done by humans.*

Rev. Richard Coles: *Some people have spoken of that same phenomenon in connection with sacred sites, or ley lines, or other phenomena like that, but do you think there's something distinctive about crop circles?*

Michael Glickman: *Yes, and this is only my view; it's a hypothesis. But what the crop circles are telling me is that there is, somewhere, an intelligence superior to our own, further evolved than our own, and that it seems to be gently pushing love letters under the door.*

Heard on Radio 4 Saturday Live 14/8/10

East Kennet, May/June 2011



Viewed from West Kennet long barrow, a passer-by surveys the scene as researchers investigate a strange substance in a crop circle at East Kennet, half a mile away.

17th May 2011

A crop circle at East Kennet

At the risk of injecting some balance into these discussions, there was no really impressive crop picture until May 17 last year (2011) in soft green barley, not far from West Kennet long barrow. It showed thin, delicate lines in many places, where no one could have walked. There was a strange white substance at its centre. On June 23, it went into Phase II and grew to about twice the size. I visited it around June 25, and have no doubt that it was paranormal in origin.

Red Collie aka Dr Horace R. Drew III,
retired molecular biologist, on Facebook 21/04/12

Immediately I was struck by the crosshatch nature of the young barley's lay. At ground level one can't help but be impressed by the intricate pattern of fully standing, curved (recovering) and totally submissive stems. In the center I met Antoinette and Derek and we had a very pleasant chat. Antoinette runs the Avebury Life B&B and made two striking comments. One that crop circles are positive in bringing man back into nature, spending time in fields and interacting with crop. Her other comment was that a human's experience of a crop circle is enormously impacted and influenced by the nature and landmarks that surround it.

After she and Derek had left I snapped a few general photos and only while reviewing them on my computer did I realise that when standing in the exact center of the circle, the sun was setting precisely between the West Kennet long barrow and Silbury Hill. Her words were profoundly apt.

The Crop Circle Cyclist

<http://www.cropcirclecyclist.com/2011/05/east-kennet-190511/>





It was clear after meeting people in this formation that they were thrilled by its simplicity. It almost took people back in time to a place where there was no politics in crop circles, no negativity, no cynical view points. It was a time when people just enjoyed the circles and were happy to gather in them as people do at places such as Avebury stone circle.

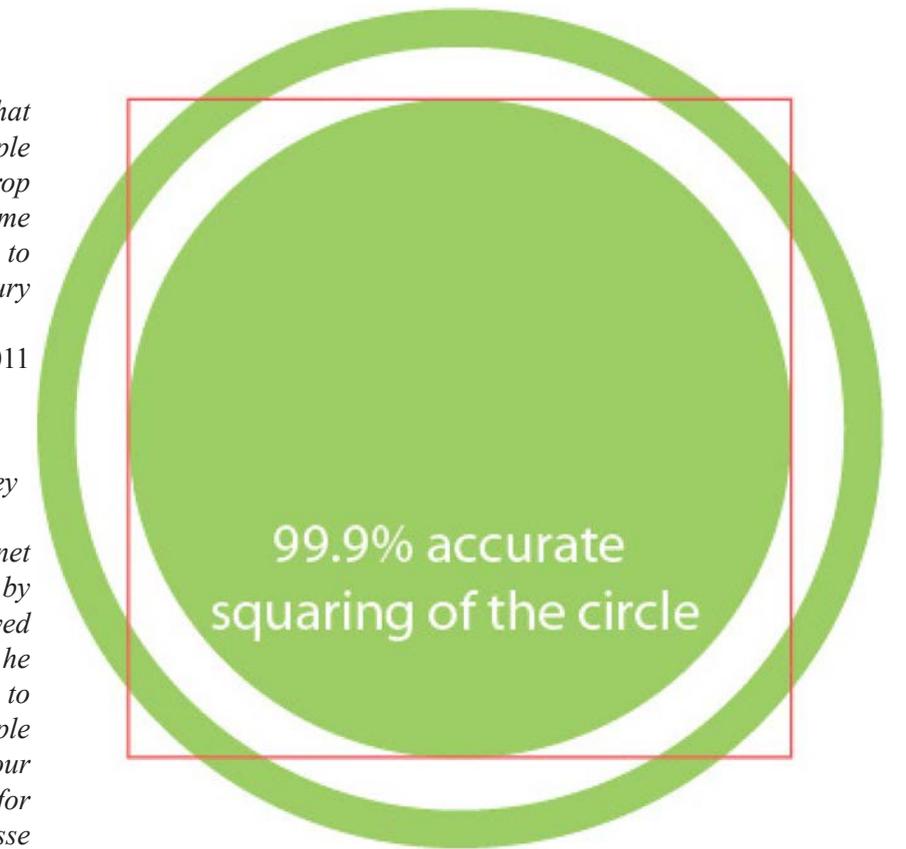
Steve Alexander, crop circles researcher, 2011

Simplicity Itself...

East Kennet, Wiltshire, Reported 17th May 2011. Barley

It appeared that the simple ringed circle at East Kennet had been there one to two days before it was spotted by circles researcher Bert Janssen. However, the eagle-eyed farmer spotted it almost straight away; luckily for us, he put an honesty box inside and acquiesced to visitors to his field. I can't tell you how cheered I was by this simple act. I can't imagine what it must be like to have your crops modified each year into gigantic patterns, and for hundreds, if not thousands of strangers to arrive en masse on your private land to visit them. However, what I do know is that the crop circles have been appearing for a very long time in this area, and I can see no sign of them stopping completely anytime soon.' [...]

We have rarely seen such circular simplicity in recent years. The crop circle phenomenon does, now and again, offer us some retro designs reminiscent of years past, but we have of late been used to a blistering procession of the gigantic, the complex and the mind-blowing. In 2009, I thought the pace was particularly uncomfortable; it seemed that the amazing circles we were being presented with were being forgotten as soon as something new arrived. There was no time for scrutiny, pause or contemplation. Most of all,



Bert Janssen's analysis of the geometrical ratios.

there seemed no time to appreciate what we had before we were giddily off looking at the next. I realise this is probably a personal thing – as I have openly admitted I am a bit of a plodder – but I think time to appreciate what has been put before us is important and is particularly helpful when it comes to learning not to take things for granted. Steve and I drove up from the South coast to see this circle. The barley was already at an advanced stage of recovery: phototropism causes the plants to try and right themselves towards the sun when they have been flattened. There was a beautiful spoked, or ribbed pattering in the



crop. This happens in most barley formations when the crop is of a certain maturity, the circle is created, and then the crop has had 2-3 days to recover. In fact, I think this only happens in barley formations full stop, I've never seen it in another crop type. But it does look very pretty. It was hard to explore the circle, you couldn't walk around it in the traditional sense, only the very centre was truly flat, but you could walk the tractor-lines and around the outer ring (if you were careful). It was a lovely location; we heard the call of pheasants and watched swallows riding the thermals on the strong breeze. We had great views of West Kennet long barrow and to the top of Silbury Hill. [...]

Sometimes crop circles have hidden numbers or proportions within them. I found to my delight a decagram (ten pointed star), which when touching the outer perimeter of the ring, perfectly defined the size of the centre circle.

Karen Alexander, Temporary Temples blog 17/06/2011

...and there it was!

(Left) A few days after the arrival of the circle, a hoary cobweb-like material appeared amongst the tufted stalks at its centre. Samples were taken for scientific analysis.

We were the only two people in the formation and again it did not feel right to step off of the two tram lines that run down the middle. Therefore, we decided to concentrate on taking pole shots and looking more closely at the centre. And, there it was. A pure white lacy looking substance woven around the base of the few stalks that denoted the centre of the circle. We are both almost certain that this white powdery lacy looking substance was not there the day before, on 18 May 2011. Just after our discovery two colleagues arrived, Glenn and Cameron Broughton, and we showed them the substance. We looked at the adjacent tram lines to the circle to see if there was any white substance, and found nothing. It was only present on a few stalks of young barley in the centre of the West Kennet circle. What is this white substance? An enigma, a natural occurrence, or an elaborate joke? Where did it come from? Is it something obvious like milk? Or, fake snow that you spray on Christmas trees? Or, fake spider webs that you spray on haunted houses for children at Halloween time? Can it be a real spider web or a caterpillar that made it? OR ????????

One thing is for sure, both Heather and I will be 'haunted' by "What Is It?" for a long time.

Bert Janssen, crop circles researcher,
Crop Circles Connector website, 18/05/2011

KAlexander

West Kennet long barrow

Silbury Hill

Tumuli along the Ridgeway on Overton and Avebury Downs



Alignments

Panoramic view from the centre of East Kennet crop circle.



Compton Bassett

Yatesbury Yatesbury, SN11, UK

Winterbourne Monkton

Windmill Hill

Site of Yatesbury crop circle

Avebury

Site of crop circle overlooking Fyfield Down, to the east

Tumuli along the Ridgeway

Oldbury Castle at Cherhill

Beckhampton

A4361

Silbury Hill

B4003

West Kennet

Site of crop circle at West Kennet

West Overton

West Kennet long barrow

Site of crop circle at East Kennet

East Kennet

A361

A4

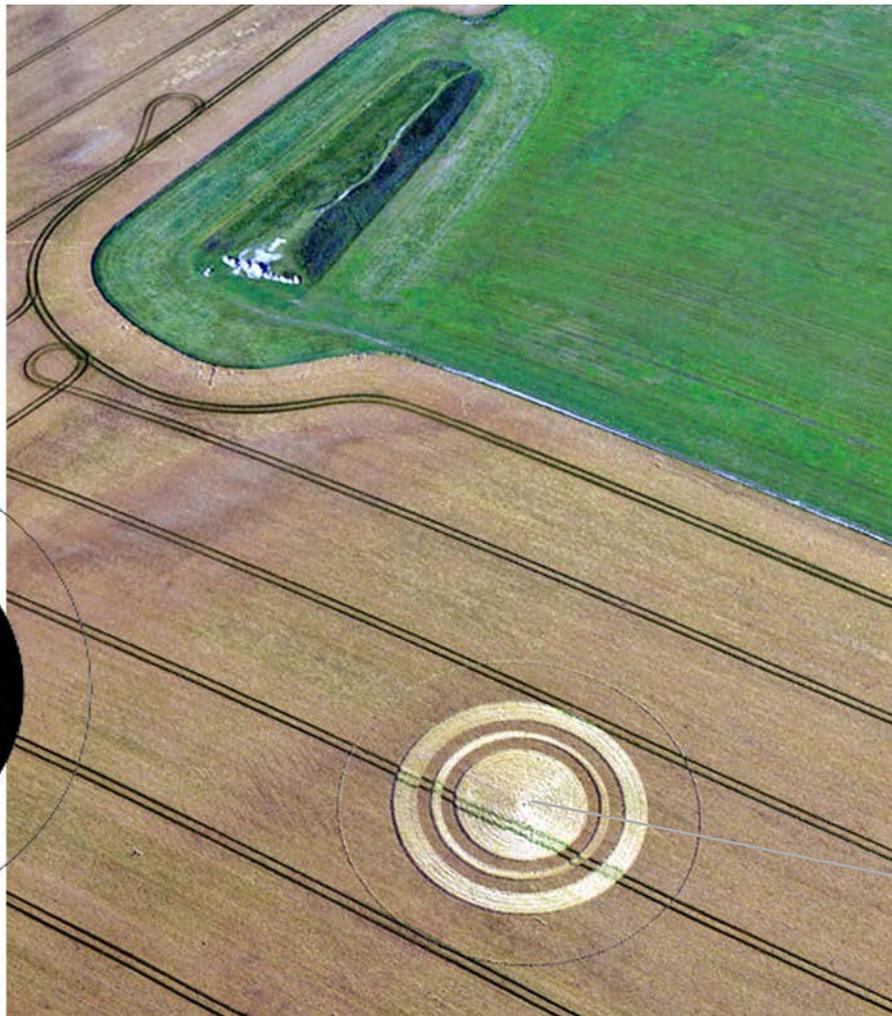
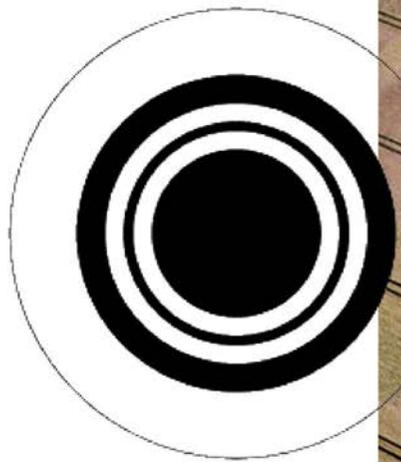


Photo: Bert Janssen

West Kennet, July 2011



Image © 2012 Getmapping plc
© 2012 Google



I was in awe of its simplicity...

I flew over this today, I was in awe of its simplicity yet powerful pull. Silbury Hill towered in the background and the barrows lurked on the ground. I was so enchanted by the view and the ideas rushing past me that I failed to take a photo.

This formation calls to me, invites me to release myself from the chains of expectation and grandeur. I am faced with interaction, landscape and art, subtle interactions between the two, both talking to each other, whispering and wondering if anyone can hear them.

Justme, Crop Circle Connector forum 26/06/2011



...its placement, the invisible lines that joined it to the long barrow and Silbury...

There were a few circles last year that I liked, but the one that I really loved was the one by West Kennet. The whole 2 weeks I was in Wiltshire as I drove down the road I marveled at that formation, so simple, so unsung yet so powerful. Everyday we drove past that formation, and everyday there were loads of people in it. My eye was drawn to its placement, the invisible lines that joined it to the long barrow and Silbury, moving past that horizon. When I finally got to go and walk in it I was taken by the perspective, the circle vanished, it became more about my placement, my view, that being a position not normally visited. Standing in the formation I was able to perceive an alteration of perspective, to realise the interplay between the land, the people and the monuments if you will, the juxtaposition. Watching others in the circle I could see how they were silhouetted against the raise of Silbury in the background, it occurred to me in that moment that a crop circle need be nothing more than an invitation, take that up and a whole new view on things can appear. No one needs to explain that really, no one needs to spend hours designing some intricate piece, no one needs to explain the reason behind it, because once you're in there it speaks for itself.

Justme, Crop Circle Connector forum 22/02/2012



Geopathic stress, geopoetic flow...

One year in Wiltshire [my family] stayed at the church cottage in the graveyard. Long story short there was a “something” in there. Our friends came to visit, both dowsers, and I told them roughly of the previous night’s proceedings. I never told them which room this was all focused on, but within a very short time they had pinpointed the room and then extrapolated on that to a line leading out from that room into the graveyard. It was fascinating to watch them dowsing the area and the house. I really believe that dowsing can work in the right hands. A few years before, these friends had taken us out to a crop circle, one that was created in the day with the farmers permission, they demonstrated how the dowsing rods crossed at various points. I tried it, closed eyes walking around, and without ever having seen the pattern from the air or knowing it from the ground my rods crossed at each intersection, it blew me away. It was in that manmade circle that I felt the most “energies” that I have ever felt in a circle, and also in there that I took the strangest photos, small blob, orbs, insects, but always positioned in extremely odd places.

I’ve been able to fly over a few circles, once in a small plane that I managed to pilot, nightmare, but my camera did break, at the exact moment we flew over it. The same happened this year: See circle, position camera, ready for shot... camera shuts down. It happened in the West Kennet formation for a few seconds, and also to another there. I do find myself wondering if there isn’t something in the alteration of the landscape that effects things we don’t really understand.

Justme, Crop Circle Connector forum 19/11/2011







Ohm shanti ohm ohm shanti ohm...

I notice a woman placing objects at the centre of the circle, so I ask her about this. Her name is Rosaline. She is from Holland and she is with an Austrian man, Thomas, whom she has just met in the circle. Rosaline arranges “spiritual tours” all over the world. Next she is off to ancient Greece, and then “Hopi territory.” She tells me that she came to Wiltshire for the first time last year and felt a spiritual connection with the place. She explains the array of “personal objects” placed at the centre of the crop circle: One is selenite or Pillar of Light; the card is the Angel of Truth, bought from Rosslyn (from which she knows she got her name), and a Hopi talking stick. The smaller crystal was placed by Thomas.

Ann from Belgium arrives, adding objects to the altar, including her jewelry, which she wants to re-energize. Then she produces two condor feathers. I ask her if she wouldn't mind filling in my questionnaire. As I am explaining it to her I'm asked to stop talking because Katherine, a sound healer from Bath, is about to start her ceremony and wants to do so in silence. She has an impressive gold crystal bowl. Rosaline explains that it resonates with the heart. I shut up and take photographs. Ann proceeds to dance around the altar, blessing those sitting there. As Katherine fingers her bowl, more people arrive and tune in, making a sound between singing and humming: *Ohm shanti ohm ohm shanti ohm...* repeated 108 times. Even my taking photographs feels intrusive at this point (though they did thank me for asking), but it's a free crop circle isn't it?

During the course of the next few minutes, Ann blesses Rosaline with condor feathers. As Katherine the sound healer tends to the altar, Ann's partner performs a sound ritual over her and her daughter, a swooshing sound that reminded me of ocean waves. Through all this, Ann's dog snoozes at the altar.

Notes, West Kennet July 25th 2011



At the central 'nest' of the crop circle at West Kennet, various items have been placed there in the belief that their energies will be revitalized by the circle. (Right) Ann's partner performs a ritual over her and her daughter.





Sandals left at the entrance to a crop circle at West Kennet, 2011.



The Ridgeway

A Ritual Walk

July 2011

I am standing on the Ridgeway, one and a half miles north of the Sanctuary looking west over Avebury. From here, I can map a straight line running from the western horizon, from the centre of Oldbury hill fort (now marked by an obelisk, visible for miles) through one of the inner sanctums within the Avebury stone circle. It dissects a pair of small tumuli on the hill opposite (on Avebury Down), through a larger tree-covered tumulus in the same field, continuing on through where I am standing and across the Ridgeway into a field sloping eastward. To the northwest, I can see another alignment connecting the distant causewayed enclosure at Windmill Hill to an adjacent tumulus situated a few hundred yards from where I am standing. The lines intersect behind me, in a wheat field. At this spot, a crop circle appeared in July 2011. As the place is remote to anyone without suitable transport, visitors to the circle had to park at the Sanctuary, where the Ridgeway meets the A4 road, and walk along the Ridgeway to reach it. One visitor, Stuart Dike, wrote:

The walk was long, but boy... was it worth it! It's a fabulous location, on a remote field on the high downs next to the Ridgeway. [The trip] felt like a pilgrimage with people from all parts of the world. Whatever you think creates crop circles you cannot take away the experience you have within these wonderful creations. It was a spiritual experience, watching people relaxing and meditating. It is very peaceful and uplifting.

Stuart Dike, Facebook 20/07/2011

Within days of the crop circle's appearance, around 700 pilgrims made that journey, drawn not only to the mystery of the circle's appearance but also to experience both place and journey. In the circle, looking east towards Fyfield Down, it was impossible to see the visual alignments that defined the circle's placement. The Down displays an outcrop of sarsen stones. The field is marked on the map as Grey Wethers, so called because from a distance the stones resemble sheep. The circle drew people to experience a place of significance (within the context of the ritual landscape) that is rarely seen because it faces the less visited side of the Ridgeway, but exists as an extension of the same system. The visual alignment made a physical connection embodied by people in the context of the artwork's placement within a ritual landscape, and thus between the living and an ancestral 'other.'

The ritual process of the long protracted walk is as much a part of the pilgrimage experience as the sacred objective – as the layout of the British Museum's recent (2011) *Treasures of Heaven* exhibition emulated Beckett's shrine in Canterbury Cathedral, the visual experience of the journey designed to titillate and tantalise (curator James Robinson, in conversation at UCL 2012), so it is with the layout of Avebury's avenue in relation to the inner sanctums of the central circle. As in mediaeval times, when architectural form played a key role in the notion of enshrining the sacred, likewise topographical features – natural and man-made – enshrined the sacred within Avebury's prehistoric ritual landscape.

Crop circles tap into this system not only by making special a particular physically placial/perceptually spacial environment which invites religio-aesthetic response to its immediacy, but also by offering different 'insights'





Silbury Hill

Stone Avenue

Avebury stone circle

Cherhill Obelisk

Windmill Hill

and perspectives on the surrounding environs. In doing so, such events subvert the dispossession of Neolithic monuments as memory associations, first through Roman and Christian occupation and subsequently through the emergence of modern approaches to agriculture, which gradually turned a ritual landscape into an industrial one.

As Thomas observes:

[This] requires a consideration of the positioning of persons in relation to the monuments. [...] Vision is important for the appreciation of these monuments,

but in terms of the interplay between what is open to view and what is concealed, which is instrumental in the reproduction of privileged positions with respect to social and cultural knowledge. Thus what is seen has to be understood in the context of movement from place to place, and that of non-visual experiences.

[Thomas (Bender, ed) 1993: 30]

Having obliterated so many remnants of earlier ancestral significance, agriculture is now contributing to its revival

inasmuch as people are going to places – cereal fields – that are normally prohibited to them, in order to experience the surrounding landscape from a different perspective (both literally and metaphorically), thereby subverting conventional notions of in/outside, in/external, ‘us’ and ‘other.’ So it was with the intervention of this mysterious event within a ritual ecosystem; it emphasises ‘being there’ in the presence of something special, assuming *praesentia* as the first principle of the contextual nature of interaction with a special landscape, rather than as an absent presence to be pieced together through remote analysis.

(Above) Looking across Avebury towards Cherhill, from the Ridgeway.

Grey Wethers

The crop circle overlooked Fyfield Down. Colonel Richard Symonds wrote of the sarsen stones scattered across Fyfield Down in his diary for 1644:

They call that place the Grey-wethers, because a far off they looke like a flock of sheepe.

E. Herbert Stone, *Stones of Stonehenge*, 2003: 50

I never saw the country about Marlborough till Christmas, 1648, being then invited to Lord Francis Seymour's by the Hon. Mr Charles Seymour.... The morrow after twelfth-day Mr. Charles Seymour and Sir Willima Button met with their packs of hounds at the Grey Wethers. These Downs look as if they were sown with great stones, very thick, and in a dusky evening they look like a flock of sheep.... 'Twas here that our game began.

John Aubrey, quoted in Thomas (2005: 98-9).

Th[e] old [Avebury] monument does as much exceed in greatness the so renowned Stoneheng, as a Cathedral doeth a parish church: so that by its grandeur one might presume it to have been an Arch-Temple of the Druids. It is situated in the countrey of the stones called the Grey Weathers: of which sort of stones, both this Antiquity, and that of Stoneheng, were built.

John Aubrey, *Wiltshire: the topographical collections of John Aubrey, 1659-70*; corrected and enlarged by John Edward Jackson (1862).

(Right) Looking across Fyfield Down from the crop circle.





Grey Wethers, Fyfield Down.



Filamentous cobweb-like material known as ‘angel hair’ found at ancient sacred sites

by Harmony Blue

Previously, we reported the appearance of filamentous cobweb-like material on the surface of crop circles. This suggests signs of increased microbial activity at such sites, leading to speculation that whatever their cause enhances or intensifies, rather than depletes, the site’s natural vitality.

A brief survey of ancient sacred sites that comprise the ritual landscape of the Avebury complex has revealed more examples of this phenomenon. This can be said to indicate the existence of a link between some established sacred sites and crop circles. We suspect that one aspect that links these sites is their organic nature, and that the phenomena manifests as a response to some kind of energetic activity present in the immediate vicinity.

Swallowhead

In the following example, the material is attached to a moss-covered willow tree trunk at the heart of the location. The substance resembled a delicate floss. It gave off a weak musty odour, which reminded our investigator of a passage in Professor Robert Plot’s treatise on mysterious ground markings, ‘fairy rings’ and the like– in *The Natural History of Staffordshire* (1686) – where he noted the interspersions of “a white hoar or vinew much like that of mouldy bread, of a musty rancid smell...”.

Angel Hair

Similar material, described as ‘angel hair,’ has been associated with UFO sightings. A 1954 report tells how Ramon Estrada, of southeastern Australia, collected samples of a filamentous material which he sent to the headquarters of the Australian Flying Saucer Bureau (AFSB). The AFSB report described the material as:

...white in colour, silky in formation, though harder in texture. It was odourless, warm on touch like cotton, and different from cobwebs, which, after a time, are sticky and grey. A microscopic examination revealed a mass formation of uniform threads of a very fine type. A comparison with the microscopic analysis of cobwebs showed that the filaments were coarser. There was some resemblance to white raw silk or even nylon.

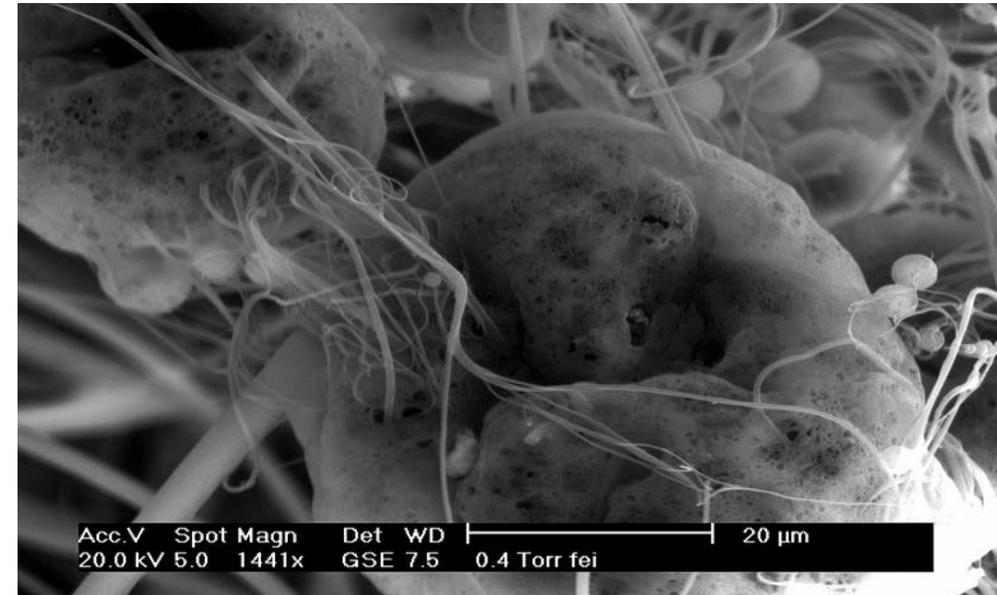
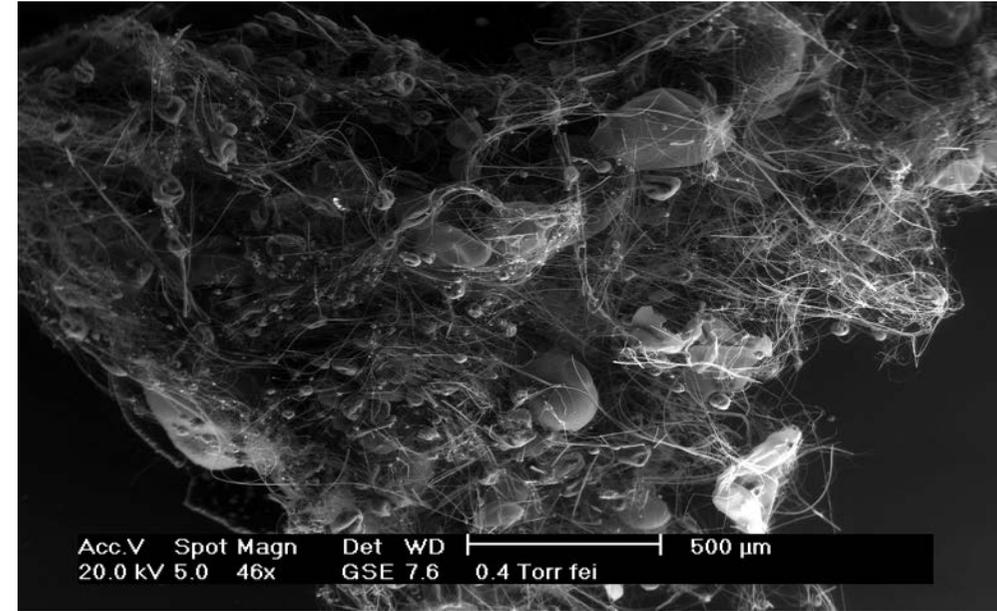
www.project1947.com/kbcat/kbangel.htm

Specimen 1

The first specimen was taken from a tree trunk at Swallowhead spring, near Silbury Hill.

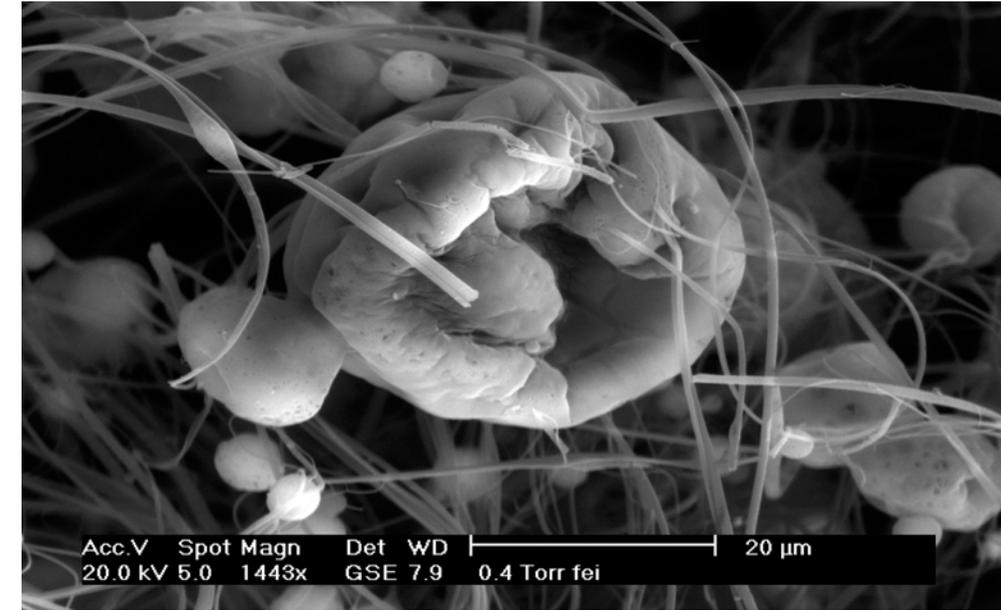
Specimen 2

The structure of the filamentous web-like material, or ‘angel hair,’ revealed in this analyses seems consistent with that of earlier specimens collected in September 2010 from the site of a crop circle at Cley Hill, Wiltshire. In this example, the material appears to have enveloped a growing mushroom.



Specimens 3/4

Another sample came from inside the central standing tuft of a crop circle which appeared in a barley field in East Kennet, Wiltshire, on May 17, 2011.

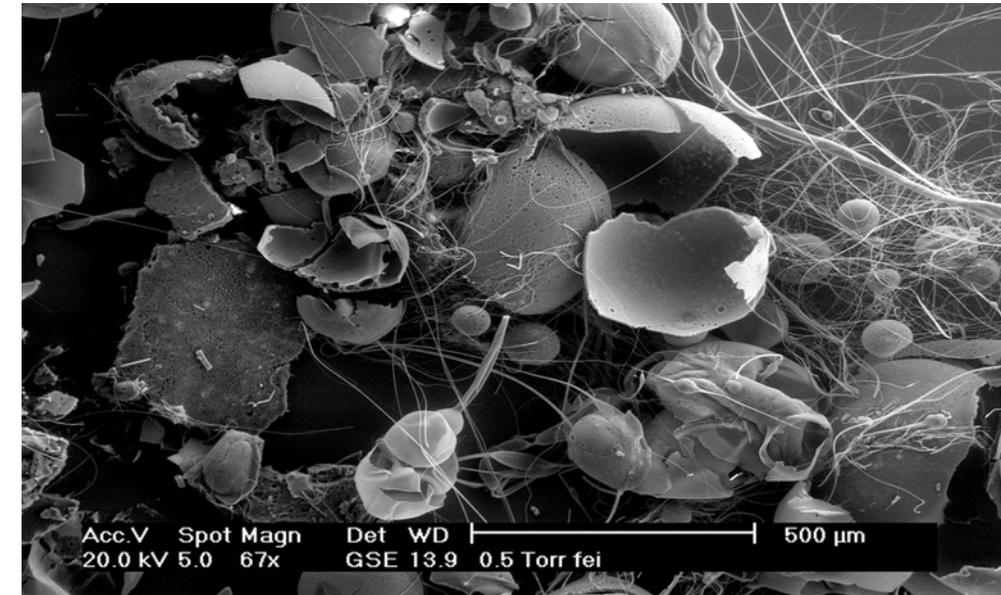


West Kennet 2011

Specimen 4 came from a circle near West Kennet long barrow. The design of the circle was identical to the second phase of an event that occurred in June 2011 at East Kennet – a single ringed circle.

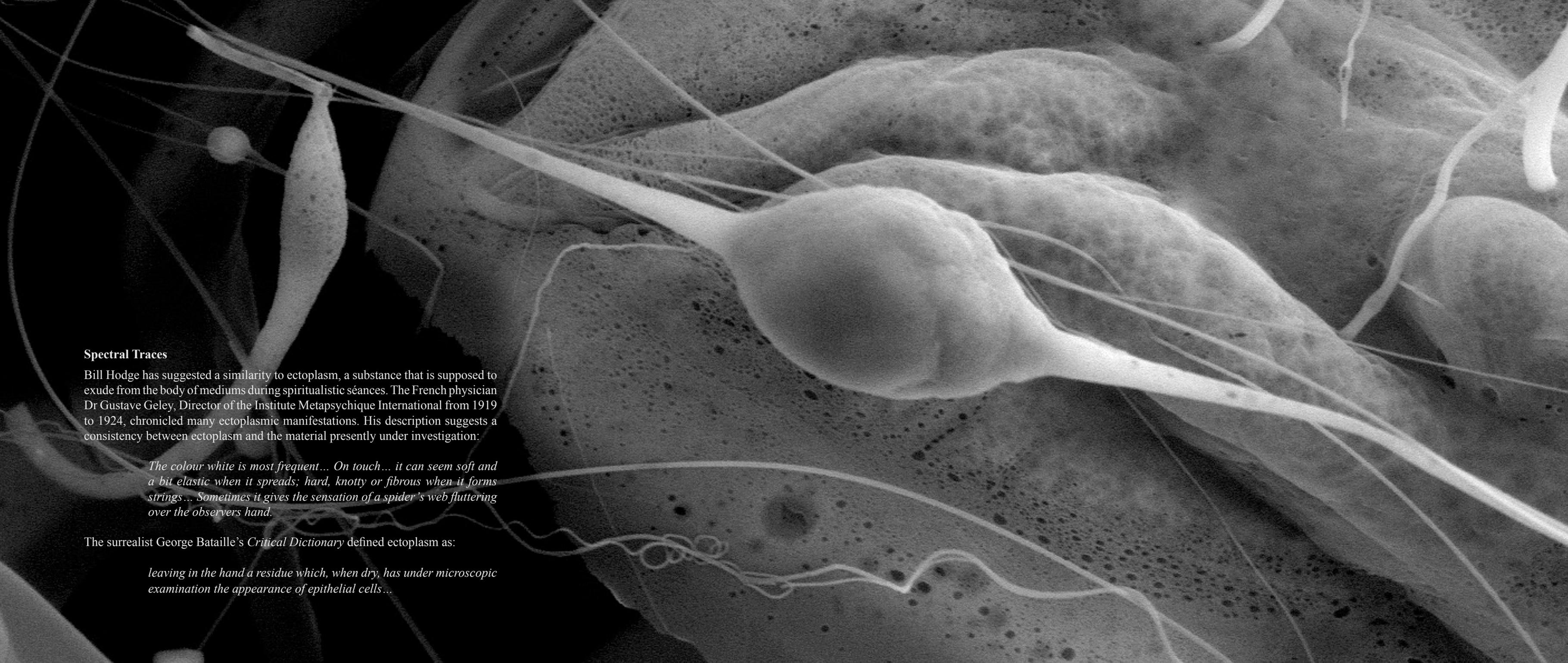
We took samples on the afternoon of July 25th, the day of the circle's discovery. At this time, the site was busy with visitors, many of which were attracted to the centre of the main circle. Subsequently all that was left to sample was what Mariusz Szymaszek described in his initial report as “crystallized white residue on the spider web and all plants.” This is consistent with what was discovered at East Kennet.

Photo: Mariusz Szymaszek.



Scanning electron microscope images of material taken from West Kennet crop circle.





Spectral Traces

Bill Hodge has suggested a similarity to ectoplasm, a substance that is supposed to exude from the body of mediums during spiritualistic séances. The French physician Dr Gustave Geley, Director of the Institute Metapsychique International from 1919 to 1924, chronicled many ectoplasmic manifestations. His description suggests a consistency between ectoplasm and the material presently under investigation:

The colour white is most frequent... On touch... it can seem soft and a bit elastic when it spreads; hard, knotty or fibrous when it forms strings... Sometimes it gives the sensation of a spider's web fluttering over the observers hand.

The surrealist George Bataille's *Critical Dictionary* defined ectoplasm as:

leaving in the hand a residue which, when dry, has under microscopic examination the appearance of epithelial cells...

Imramma

June 27th 2011

The organisers of the Australian Imramma group had invited me to talk about my work, and we arranged to do this at West Kennet long barrow. My initial introduction was not very friendly; they had not told the group their next guest speaker was a crop circle maker.

I began by explaining how my perception had changed when I started to think about hiddenness and its playful relationship between people and things, stories and visual stimuli, in the sites that make up this ritual landscape. I pointed out Windmill Hill's visual relations with Silbury, and explained its significance both historically and in terms of my own work. At this, Sharon, who described herself as a visionary artist, could not disguise her disappointment in the matter-of-fact way I described my practice, and she told me that my talking about crop circles as cultural artifice or works of art devalued them. It seems that whenever Sharon shares perceptual space with an object of mystery the outcome is rooted in fantasy, and opens into broader mysteries. It was clear to me that, for her, beauty and mystery are bedfellows, and in discussing my role as a circle maker I had just kicked the mystery, and its beauty, out of bed.

If I had a Wonder-o-meter to measure levels of wonderment at this point, it would have measured Sharon's as zero. What I was saying was not what Sharon came all this way and paid all that money to hear. This was also disappointing for me; I have a lot of sympathy for her relationship with wonder. My intention was not to debunk Sharon's preconceptions of this place, but to rearrange them and thus invite her to look at it in a different way.



On Windmill Hill with the Australian Imramma tour group.

I reminded the group that the majority of the prehistoric sites we regard as sacred were man-made, but that this does not make them any less mysterious. Mystery lives in the question of what compelled ‘us’ to make the sites, and how they were used. I explained that I now see this landscape as a map to be read from ground level, from a human perspective, and that the way the sites presented themselves visibly (or invisibly) in relation to each other created a kind of matrix or system which makes it possible for us to enter and connect with it. In doing so, the crop circles present an invitation to see the landscape differently, perhaps more intuitively. The group had visited the East Kennet crop circle the previous day and had noticed that the long barrow and Silbury Hill could be seen from there. I mentioned the importance of the tumuli along Overton Hill, also visible from the circle. I suggested that placing ourselves into this system is a way of physically engaging with the decisions of our ancestors in conceiving it. I spoke about *darshan*, and how accordingly the act of ‘seeing and being seen by’ sacred objects is traditionally regarded as a form of touch. Moreover, it would not be unreasonable to presume that the people who occupied this area during the late-Neolithic shared religious sensibilities with such remnants of today’s traditional (pre-Christian) cultures, such as Hinduism, and that the visual was as important to them as it is to us... and indeed may have defined the ritual landscape and their relationship to it.

During this conversation Sharon told me that her emotional response to what I was saying went from hatred to love. She agreed that what I was saying now deserved more than a zero on the Wonder-o-meter. I went on to mention the web-like material that had been discovered in the East Kennet circle. “Ectoplasm?” suggested Sharon. Others in the group asked what ectoplasm was, and Sharon and I summarised the concept. I thought this interpretation was



Rob Irving (second from left, seated) with the Imramma group at West Kennet long barrow.



interesting because it fits the model of human circle making I had described, analogous to spiritualist contact with the dead, i.e., in terms of a séance. I talked about the scanning electron micrographs of the substance on the Harmony Blue blog, mentioning, half-jokingly, that the impressive level of fine detail visible at increasing magnification led me to imagine that if we could only build a microscope powerful enough it might be possible to see a nature spirit (our ‘good neighbours’ of the quantum realm) – that what I had heard a channeller say years ago might actually be true: ‘*They are but a breath away.*’

That night, I noticed an increase in traffic on the Harmony Blue blog. The ectoplasm metaphor works conceptually, and interestingly it sounds plausible within the context of this legend framework. Having now restored the ‘magical’ element to the narrative, this addition seemed acceptable to the group. However, I sensed that doubts remained. The mythic imagination requires a choice to be made between literal and metaphorical interpretations of legendary phenomena, and some prefer the immediacy of the literal rather than the deeper insights which may be gained through metaphor – for some, all that glitters is gold. As we moved on from West Kennet to Windmill Hill, Sharon told me that her Wonder-o-meter reading had now been restored to about a 7.

June 28th 2011

The following evening I went to dinner with the group. Natalie told me that she was interested in ectoplasm and was surprised she’d never heard of it before. She had looked at Harmony Blue’s micro-photographs and, just as I had suggested, had found a fairy. My sense was that this was a form of entertainment for her/them; it was said quite light-heartedly. I don’t think they really believed it was a

fairy, just that they enjoyed the idea and that perhaps it contained a metaphorical truth that satisfied their reasons for coming to this place.

The group had spent the day at Avebury stone circle. I asked the organisers if what I had talked about the day before had affected the way the group perceived the surrounding landscape and they agreed that it had. "I used to see the sites as existing individually, but now I see them as part of a larger system," said one. On Windmill Hill I asked the group to respond to a brief questionnaire: here are some examples of their answers.

Have you experienced any feelings of attachment or connection to this area or its visible features? If so, how would you describe this?

Deep connection, like it is in my genetic heritage. I am Australian, and feel that my visit to 'Avalon' (magical perception) has greatly expanded my conscious awareness and understanding of 'earth energies.'

Has your visit to this area reinforced (or weakened) any beliefs you had before you came? If so, in what way?

It has reinforced and expanded upon beliefs, as real experiences with orbs, fairies, ley lines and crop circles, their energies create wisdom, not just belief.

The whole area is the 'heart chakra' of the Earth, and she is being given assistance and healing via the crop circles, so that she is able to successfully complete her ascension into the next dimension. We humans, as part of the Earth, are also experiencing healing, expansion and ascension via these energies.

(Right) The Imramma group works with my questionnaire on Windmill Hill.





Photos: Gavin Maxwell



Yatesbury

In July 2011, a project that had been two years in the planning came to fruition with the making of a large crop circle at Yatesbury, Wiltshire, about a mile from Avebury as the crow flies. *Measuring the Land* was supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, and initiated a wider maths educational project entitled *Break 3*, based in Frome, Somerset. Its aim was to introduce teenagers and young adults to the ancient and more recent heritage of the Wessex landscape, and the geometry that underlies it.

I led a team of young people who had never made a crop circle before, but had also never even ventured into a wheat field. We began the circle at dusk, when these photographs (opposite and overleaf) were taken, and continued into the night using only natural light. It seemed a good idea to use the mystical geometrical and mathematical properties found in some crop circles, and the relationship of the circles to the local landscape, as a way of engaging young people with their environment. As well as the technical skills, it was useful to pass on the importance of planning, teamwork, spatial awareness, and other aspects involved in circle making. The team responded exceptionally, and their hard work was reflected in the result.

The event also provided me with an opportunity to demonstrate the dynamics of the legend landscape. Legend has it that bent nodes on the plant stalks in a crop circle signify its 'genuineness,' as a non-man-made occurrence. Normally, with the maker's identity hidden, this would validate the circle as having mysterious origins, as a semiotic object – and this is exactly what happened.

While this consensus spread among croppies, the farmer on whose land the circle had appeared was insisting that the event had been planned – so adding an anti-legend into the dichotomy of belief as to the circle's origins.

I wanted to give my cohorts a flavour of the dynamics of what happens when a circle is discovered in this part of the country, so I decided to take a Puckish approach and not immediately support the farmer's story, thereby allowing a drama to unfold and to take its course before we issued a press release revealing our involvement. This provided a valuable opportunity to experience this aspect of the circle making experience, and the relinquishing of ownership of the artwork. It also allowed me to observe the usual script run in reverse. Protagonists for the crop circle's non-human origins disbelieved the farmer's story – after all, they had proof! The farmer's anti-legend turned to legend, and, in this environment, became subject to dispute by diehard legendeers according to the dominant ideology. Interestingly, the response of some croppies to the press release was to argue that man-made circles should be made outside the Avebury area because they contaminate its association with 'genuine' crop circles.



(Left) The Yatesbury crop circle in view of the Cherhill monument.



(Right) In Gavin Maxwell's photo, the artist works with Finn and Nic.





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