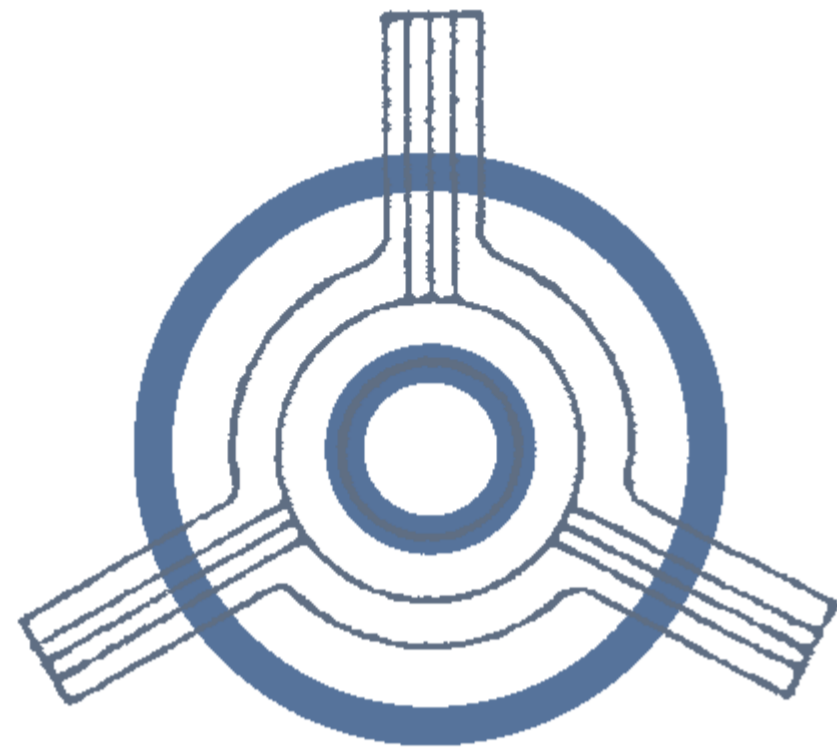


TRIG POINT

51.4134 N 00.2115 W



WIMBLEDON SPACE, LONDON

FEBRUARY 3RD - 25TH 2020

FORSTER & HEIGHES

Ewan Forster and Christopher Heighes are makers of site-specific performance and installation. For more than twenty-five years they have been developing new methodologies of performance in relation to the built environment. Their early works involved the retelling of often forgotten or neglected architectural histories. More recent commissions in the UK and abroad have been developed out of complex networks of research using arcane presentational devices that challenge architectural orthodoxy.

They have presented work at The London Festival of Theatre (LIFT); Hebbel Theater, Berlin (HAU); Liverpool Anglican Cathedral, and King's Cultural Institute, Somerset House, London. They are Creative Research Fellows at The University of Roehampton.

'Trig Point' and the performance lecture 'On the Hoof' are part of a larger ongoing research project by Forster & Heighes into the relationship between architectural design, creativity and learning.

The work has been commissioned by Wimbledon Space with generous support from Wimbledon College of Arts, University of the Arts London, and the University of Roehampton.

Special thanks to Clare Mitten, Simon Betts, Richard Allen, Adrian Kear, Ashleigh Pearson, Jo Howcroft, Dave Shipway, Adrian Heathfield, Graham White, Stephanie Laryea, Simon Hiscock, Angela Lucas, Simon Josebury, Steven Wilson, George Cuthbert, Tony Barbary and the WCA Estates Team.

PRIMARY / ANCILLARY

It just felt like perhaps it was time to finally address some of this.

Field Note 1: Laying a Base Line

What is the student's relationship with rehearsal and production space? Fractured and constantly disrupted? The time-restricted rehearsal slots, the requirement to share floor space and the need to always put chairs back on the rack, take their toll. It means that they can never properly settle or dwell in a work environment of their own design like a sculptor or carpenter can in their workshops - tools and materials close to hand, half-finished works standing present as inspiration. The theatre student has to constantly clear and reassemble, seldom having the pleasure of stepping back in where they left off. Accelerated use and over familiarity seems too to diminish the atmosphere and status of the rehearsal studio as a whole, as a special place for collective showing and reappraisal.

The idea that theatre and performance should just make do with whatever space is available is deeply ingrained. Drama, in British state schools of the 1970s and 1980s, was made to feel grateful for its shared access to the gymnasium or assembly hall with that other educational delinquent, Physical Education. The assumption that these two deeply destabilising second tier subject areas, which regularly upturned classroom hierarchies and unravelled carefully constructed educational streaming systems, simply needed accommodating in a particular volume of cubic metreage, strategically set apart from the rest of the establishment, was widespread. The temperature, aroma and acoustic of dramatic experience instilled a kind of refugee bravado in the secret societies of children for whom drama was the only educational lens that brought the eleven-year old's world into focus. Little wonder then, with their client base groomed to accept these temporary accommodations, that colleges and universities, eager to cater for the burgeoning number of mid-tariff students corralled towards the performing arts (to safeguard both their own and their school's results profile), developed a simple, scalable, low cost formula for the provision of studio space on their campuses: identify mid-size seminar room, de-carpet, paint black, repeat.

Field Note 2: Broken Ground

Performance practice is by nature avaricious; it can feel raucous and ill-mannered. It interrupts, reinvents and challenges modes of expression, appropriating (stealing) technique and methodology from multiple disciplines. It can distil itself to a solitary individual or co-opt groups and whole communities in the creation of not single art objects or entities, but rather a rich flow of events with which spectators intersect. Its strength is that it consistently pushes the bounds of what is possible, but it consumes and takes up space, not only conceptually, but physically too - so how should we accommodate and resource such a raw, mutable discipline without it becoming a cuckoo grotesquely arching its naked back to push fellow disciplines out of the institutional nest?

It was in the ten years after the Berlin project that the practice of teaching had for the first time outweighed the practice of theatre making. We hadn't realised it at the time, but this pivot point would start to weigh heavily on the

creative outlook of the partnership. The original, generative sites of performance that characterised the projects between 1993 and 2007 (pavilions, settlements, cathedrals, etc.) gradually gave way to a series of homogenised educational drama studios that had been specifically designed or modified to erase all sense of place - the majority were hot, dark, mute and geodesically neutral. They excited no magnetic oscillation in either student or tutor, suggested no orientation, axis or mark point. But like it or not we found ourselves in them, pacing their dimensions, clearing their boundaries, reconfiguring their redundant technologies, while cohorts of students came and went untouched by their environments.

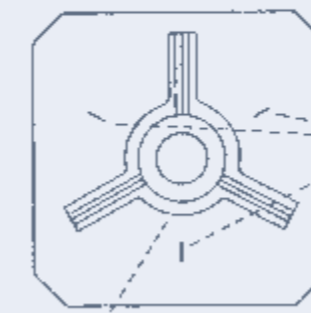
Most of the teaching projects had been so transitory in nature and so geographically diverse that it seemed churlish after the event to file a set of bullet points for each institution that might guide the procurement committees of the future. We were normally just grateful to be out the other side, licking our wounds, desperate to return to a wilderness semester of domestic projects; collapsed walls, faulty boilers, tax returns and seed germination. But the residue of architectural disfunction had built up to such an extent that we resolved to find a creative vehicle that would allow us to try and get some of it down on paper, for our own mental well-being if nothing else.

Field Note 3: When to take Angles

Keeping 'on track' isn't always the most efficient route to knowledge and self-realisation, particularly for what we like to call, a student-prospecter. Some need, and seek, more uneven terrain in which they can speculate, dig in, and noisily drill. A learning environment that encourages wrong turns, points to the long way round, and helpfully shows those with promise from the smooth to the rough. This is particularly true of creative disciplines like performance and theatre-making, where the doubter, the obsessive, the impatient, and the chancer should always be encouraged to apply. Prospectors are either first on the scene, or last to arrive, they prefer a territory not too overworked with expectations, or one rich with debris they can pick over unobserved. There is the early morning solitary type, barefoot, stretching, holding a newly found bird's nest as the floor polisher finishes up; or the late night gambler who hangs stolen bricks from microphone stands, shouting the poetry of Verlaine as their flatmate films. Short-lived private bets, quickly abandoned but essential to construct a fragile bridge from the hypothetical to the actual, and as such, institutions need to risk, cultivate and design in porosity, access points between the security walk round, motion sensor activation and lockdown, to allow their own students to intrude, stumble and break-in upon themselves.

In the age of the smart academy and the digitised student pathway, the project had a glorious sense of irrelevance from the outset. "A Survey of the Spatial and Material Resourcing of the Teaching of Performance" had just the right low-level threat profile needed to disable an institutional firewall and quietly introduce its malware via a woefully unprotected portal - the monthly rotating gallery commission. Within a month we'd have set of master keys

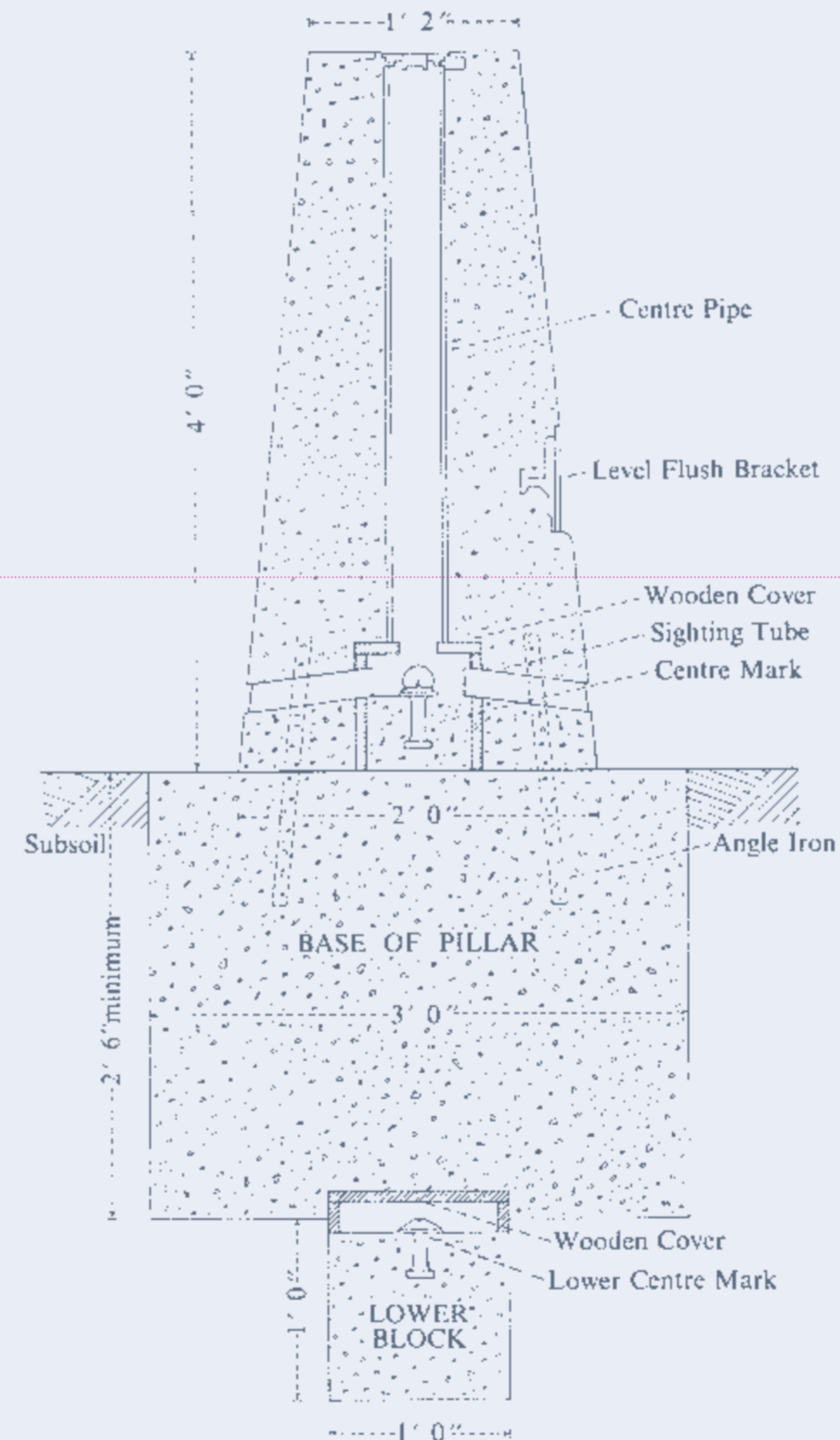
TOP OF PILLAR



Brass Loops
(Tops sunk 1/4" below Spider level)

Brass Fitting to hold Theodolite

SECTION



A trig point, or more correctly, a standard concrete triangulation pillar, used to mark the primary stations of the Ordnance Survey's retriangulation of Great Britain 1935-62 - a project that sought to improve the accuracy of the country's maps. Trig points have now been replaced by global satellite navigation systems. Although redundant, they still remain powerful objects in the landscape.

plus out of hours and weekend access. We signed without hesitation and made our way back to Dundonald Park where the alignment of three sets of goalposts suggested a potential site for a primary station from which the field survey of Wimbledon College of Art(s) could begin.

Field Note 4: Primary Observations

How to contextualise the rehearsal studio and production stage not just as separate experiment and dissemination spaces but as nodes within a network of interdependent, creatively energised spaces across the campus? If everything is potential performance then students must feel they can go and be everywhere, combining their academic close reading, with a close roaming, developing a nomadic, 'slow caravan' attitude to their place of learning; on occasion, allowing intuition and animal agency rather than room allocation and online space booking to suggest where they might squat, linger, watch, make, listen, and encounter others. And when this wayfaring and period of itinerancy ends they might unconsciously begin to survey and audit themselves differently and begin to rethink how, where, and with whom, they might start to produce work - it is a different type of 'touching in'.

The irony was that for many years it was the art school model that we used as our gold standard for the scathing critiques we were making of the provision of performance studio space in the modern university - no excuse here presumably to be unaware of one's own haptic potential, surrounded by makers, fettlers, inventors and their attendant materials and processes. This bold educational experiment at Wimbledon was not risk free. The genes of an academic entity more normally sustained in a culture of soft humanities - English, Creative Writing, Modern Languages - were going to be edited into the remains of a more rarified organism - the college of art and design. The first stage appeared to involve the creation of an hermetically sealed nest of studio spaces in the south west corner of the campus that would sustain a small group of pioneer students in temporary isolation from the rest of the college. At the same time all practice not related to or adapted for performance would be gradually relocated until the new hybrid form emerged, match fit and ready to meet the growing demands of Netflix, HBO and Amazon Prime. We had been given unofficial sight of a set of drawings that proposed how the new clusters of disciplines might be assembled once performance practice had been allowed out of quarantine. It was into this discussion that we planned to introduce a set of geomantic mark-points, hand cast in the bathroom at Kennington and placed with acupuncture precision around the campus to create a kind of chakral acceptance of the new discipline, thereby reducing the chances of its outright rejection.

Field Note 5: Scale and Orientation

'Trigs' (the word sonically suggestive of a hook, or a stitch) - a modern invocation of the Roman festival of Terminalia, during which communities would garland a post or standing stone (a terminus) to reconfirm a boundary and increase fertility. Small cement pillars, cast in the proportions laid down in The Ordnance Survey for the Retriangulation of Great Britain 1935 to 1962, to reinvigorate the threshold between

the known and the unknown, a point where the visible and the invisible might harmonise and the cultivated and the wild coexist. The laying out, visitation and maintenance of such boundary markers, and their connecting lines (rays), creating an understanding of the dynamics of site habitation, reminding us of the importance of the margins, the power of the periphery and what we might encounter or conjure in our minds when we journey there.

Studio space, the principal, primary space of creation for painters and dancers and woodworkers is generally provided without controversy - there is at least some common knowledge that, for those disciplines, daylight, flexible flooring or benching should at least be considered when providing for them. Theatre and performance always have a tendency to rock up in a space with neither the clarity of, nor assertion for, a fundamental requirement. How many theatre studios have drainage points in their concrete floors? How many rehearsal rooms can change the height of the ceiling from two to twenty metres or provide daylight from two sides and views of the city or countryside? How many have access points for running water, propane or compressed air? How many are directly annexed to level-access side rooms big enough to house whole ideas in process or monumental and expensive mistakes? How many have underground warehousing for unspecified ephemera, chair and table libraries, domestic lamp stores, shirt, coat and shoe repositories? Our primary spaces for the teaching of theatre and performance are generally enfeebling - a few are beautiful, some are useable, the majority are unremarkable. And as for those of us that use them? We still tend to just throw our blazers on the floor, hang one handed from a wall bar and just wait for something to happen.

Field Note 6: Plotting of Offsets

Ancillary, from the Latin ancillaries, from ancilla - maidservant, can be used to describe a space of support and service, one attendant to a need. Incidental spaces, rather than being subordinate, offer essential holding points (places of self care?) for creative thinking to emerge. A muddy path worn diagonally across a playing field, a swinging dust extraction tube, a scuffed red oxide concrete floor, the kitchen with its deep steel sinks, the warm interior of a wooden shed, or the illuminated glove box of a car are all increments on a gradient of spatial intimacy - threshold, beforehand, or component spaces that can suggest new methodologies, processes, and compositional rhythms. They overlap, and interconnect; you often hear them before you see them. If you are denied your own atelier, take time to dwell in the in-between, and construct one in your mind.

Perhaps finally here - on The Merton Hall Ley - performance was going to find its true alignment within higher education. Cutting through the college's ninety years of architectural accretion, its lungs filled with the aroma of pine sawdust and printing ink, high on polyurethane and impact adhesive, draped in bales of uncut calico and festooned in showers of angle ground sparks, it might finally emerge, blinking, into an unimagined space of its own making.

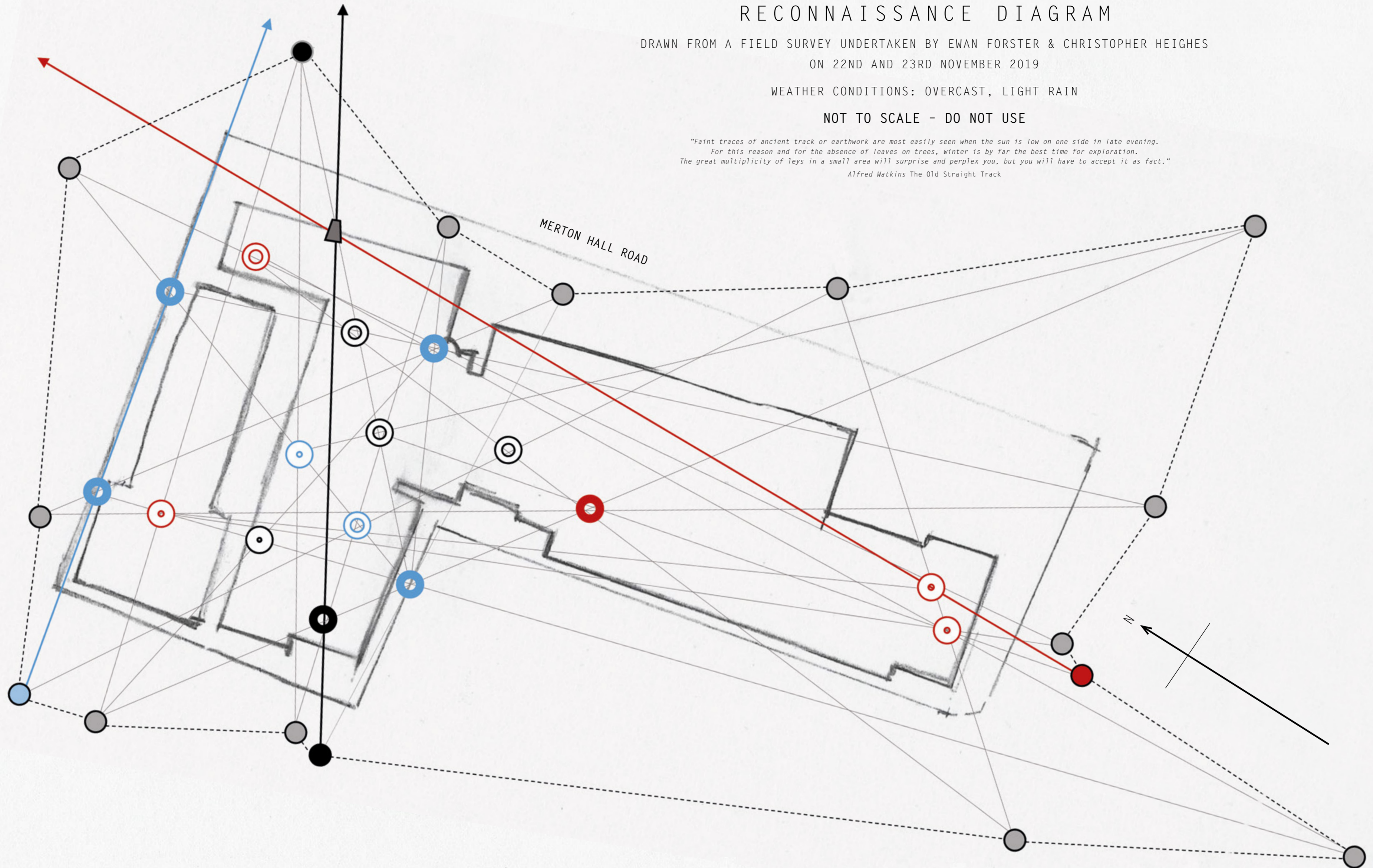
THE REALIGNMENT OF WIMBLEDON COLLEGE OF ARTS RECONNAISSANCE DIAGRAM

DRAWN FROM A FIELD SURVEY UNDERTAKEN BY EWAN FORSTER & CHRISTOPHER HEIGHES
ON 22ND AND 23RD NOVEMBER 2019

WEATHER CONDITIONS: OVERCAST, LIGHT RAIN

NOT TO SCALE - DO NOT USE

*"Faint traces of ancient track or earthwork are most easily seen when the sun is low on one side in late evening.
For this reason and for the absence of leaves on trees, winter is by far the best time for exploration.
The great multiplicity of leys in a small area will surprise and perplex you, but you will have to accept it as fact."
Alfred Watkins The Old Straight Track*



- | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|----------------------------|---|--------------------------|---|-------------------------|---|---------------------|-------|
| Primary Station | ● | Ground Floor Primary | ● | Ground Floor Ancillary | ● | Ground Floor Unimagined | ● | Interconnecting Ray | — |
| Edge Station held fixed | ○ | * Theatre | ● | * 3D Lab (bench room) | ● | * Boundary Wall | ● | Dundonald Ley | — |
| Primary Mark Point | ● | First Floor Primary | ○ | First Floor Ancillary | ○ | * Oak Tree | ○ | Merton Hall Ley | — |
| Ancillary Mark Point | ● | * Lecture Theatre | ○ | * Lecture Theatre Foyer | ○ | * North West Void | ○ | Caesar's Well Ley | — |
| Unimagined Mark Point | ○ | * Performance Landing | ○ | Second Floor Ancillary | ○ | * Lightwell | ○ | Survey Perimeter | - - - |
| Trigonometric Point (speculative) | ▲ | * Performance Studio (Lge) | ○ | * East Stairwell Landing | ○ | Second Floor Unimagined | ○ | | |
| | | Second Floor Primary | ○ | * Seminar Room 211 | ○ | * Vent Stack (roof) | ○ | | |
| | | * North East Studio | ○ | * Water Cooler | ○ | Third Floor Unimagined | ○ | | |
| | | | | | | * Water Tower (roof) | ○ | | |