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Stratigraphies

A portfolio of intermedia installations exploring
the relationship of place and memory

Jackson Mouldycliff

A commentary accompanying the creative portfolio submitted
to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Masters by Research

September 2020
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Ethics Declaration

No specific ethical considerations were required as this research did not include human participants.
List of Portfolio Works

This portfolio comprises two installations:


Video Documentation: [https://vimeo.com/458146790](https://vimeo.com/458146790)

Video documentation of the 2019 installation - Island Recollections (2006 - 2019)

Soundtrack Mixdown: [https://soundcloud.com/jackson-mouldycliff/sets/island-recollection-soundtrack](https://soundcloud.com/jackson-mouldycliff/sets/island-recollection-soundtrack)

A short (04:57) and long (31:40) mixdown of the soundtrack to *Island Recollections*. The short version is taken from a recording of the installation at the 2020 Electric Spring festival at the university of Huddersfield. The long version is a digital mix containing all of the elements of the composition.

2: *Wilton Quarry* (2020)

Mock-up 1: [https://vimeo.com/458153731](https://vimeo.com/458153731)

Full 16 band video mock-up of my 2020 installation, Wilton Quarry. This installation is intended to be shown as four separate projected videos on a large vertical wall, with separate audio signals at each height level. However due to COVID-19 restrictions in 2020, I had to delay the live showing of this work and have in the meantime created two mock-ups of the work. This first mock-up showcases all 16 video and sound bands compressed into one video offering a more holistic view of the work.

Mock-up 2:

The second mock-up is a virtual environment created inside the unity game engine. This mock-up serves to better emulate (to some extent) the way in which the installation is intended to be interacted with. The environment allows the user to walk around, up and down a 3D space containing the four “projected” videos, in which the mix of the sounds subtly alters depending on your position and orientation. Unfortunately, this version is not publicly available at this time. Screenshots from this version can be found on pg.13.
Acknowledgements

This year (2020) has thrown up its own set of unique challenges, which I couldn’t have overcome without the constant support and encouragement of my family, friends and supervisor.

There are a few people for whom I would like to give a particular mention,

Firstly, thanks to all of the organisers of the Electric Spring for programming/exhibiting *Island Recollections* in the 2020 festival at the University of Huddersfield (Aaron Cassidy, Alex Harker and Monty Adkins)

Also, many thanks to my father, Dr Phil Mouldycliff, for his generosity in offering me access to his artistic materials and archives and my mother and brother for their support and patience.

Finally, I would like to thank my Supervisor Prof. Monty Adkins for all of the time, dedication and enthusiasm put into to this research.

This project is dedicated to them.
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Abstract

Artists have often explored geological/archaeological phenomenon as inspiration for both audio and visual work, from the quasi-archaeological approach of composer Gavin Bryars in *The Sinking of the Titanic* to the exploration of tidal erosion in Mark Dion’s *Thames Dig*. Using the notion of Stratigraphy (“the study of the composition and relative position of artefacts within a defined stratum in order to reveal something about past events and developments” (Mouldycliff, J & Mouldycliff, P. n.d)), the aim of this study is to develop a personal working methodology for making conjectural intermedia installations that can be presented in appropriately sited exhibition spaces. This portfolio will comprise of two installations and a reflective commentary on this work. This research will break down the notion of Stratigraphy into four main components 1) Layering 2) Found Object 3) Memory and 4) Sound in order for it to be analysed on an artistic level.
Introduction

[1.1] Research context

Stratigraphies is concerned with the creation of open form intermedia installations that deal with an artistic reinterpretation of the relationship between spaces and memory utilising the process of layering (strata), grouping and juxtaposition.

Following on from my audio-visual installation Tidelines (2015/16) and my computer composition Geomorphology (2019) I have become increasingly interested in taking inspiration from natural environmental phenomenon/patterns. The initial concept for this application of stratigraphy as an aesthetic principal was borne out of conversations and notes created with my father and fellow artistic practitioner Dr Phil Mouldycliff before the inception of this research project. I have utilised some of these notions from personal documents, but they are also available at, https://philmouldycliff-fragments.weebly.com/notions.html (Mouldycliff, J. & Mouldycliff, P. n.d), a website which I designed and co-authored.

Using the notion of Stratigraphy (“the study of the composition and relative position of artefacts within a defined stratum in order to reveal something about past events and developments” (Mouldycliff, J. & Mouldycliff, P. n.d)), I have developed a personal working methodology for making conjectural intermedia installations that can be presented in appropriately sited exhibition spaces. This portfolio comprises two installations and a reflective commentary on this work. Each installation consists of sound, text and image, which offer only oblique references to the source material, placing the onlooker at one remove from the original associations. It is the audience’s role to engage with the work using their personal experience and memories/contexts to make connections.

Employing the concept of stratigraphy as a methodology for creating intermedia installations is a relatively novel approach. The literature therefore reveals, understandably, that relatively little academic study has been carried out in this specific area. Consequently, this research aims to draw together a number of specific areas of focus employed in this independent and original approach to developing installations by examining:

- The role of the artist as instigator, encouraging the audience to define, correlate and re-structure the complex layers of presented material through their personal experience and reasoning to implicitly make sense of what they see and hear;
- The creative potential offered by the orientation of an individual through a detritus of sensory data;
• The found object as a form to be manipulated to create mise-en-scene.

These areas of focus inform the following research questions:

• How can the process of stratigraphy be applied to the representation of the relationship between memory and place?
• What equivalents exist in the medium of sound for discerning the relationship between layers (strata)?
• How can the presentation of the installations facilitate an opportunity for discovery (giving the audience opportunity to inhabit the space and make their own discoveries/connections)?

This research has concentrated on temporal stratigraphy as intermedia installation incorporating artefacts as triggers to memory: sound as a carrying medium and text and image as an evocation of time and place.

This research has adopted a practice-based approach through the creation and analysis of two original installation works, Island Recollections and Wilton Quarry, seeking to develop new strategies which:

• Highlight relationships between found objects/sounds through time;
• Link specific location with fragments of memory;
• Manipulate the process of temporal decay;
• Employ appropriate matrix to provide framework and define boundaries;
• Create situations that are sufficiently open to encourage audience interpretation.

The programme notes and requirements for each installation are outlined below:


*Annual holidays to the Isle of Wight with my family have always been memorable experiences, due in no small part to the fact that we spent many a happy hour beach combing. Over the years we have accumulated an eclectic collection of found treasures, flotsam and jetsam, maps, photographs and sound recordings which when assembled together provide a composite snapshot of our time exploring the West Wight coastline. Individually many of the items may seem banal or worthless, but each element triggers memories, which collectively give a hint of the sense of place in much the same way as archaeological finds help us reveal the past.*

Four wooden frames with tape players; four attached A4 glass frames; four mp3 players and mini speakers. Installation to be sited in small room with four separated stations.
Wilton Quarry (2020)

Less than a mile from where I live, in the West Pennine Moors, there is an abandoned site from which material was quarried for the surrounding villages. Since production ceased, at some point between the 1930s and 1940s, the locality has been allowed to return to nature and has reformed into a unique environment that is now home to an increasing variety of wildlife and also provides opportunities for local climbers. Over a period of four months spanning from March through June, I captured a series of 16 time-lapse videos from different locations within the Quarry, which I then split into four separate horizontal bands [ground, landscape, skyline, sky]. The accompanying soundscape serves to repurpose sounds captured on location to reveal something about the relationship between the four parts of the environment and the interplay between them, both vertically and horizontally (through time) as well as my own relationship existing within the space.

Four 16:9 ratio videos; 8 speakers; 4 videos to be projected vertically on a large blank wall, with viewing balconies on at least 3 different levels, sound to be played on the speakers at each level of the video.

The nature of the second installation was inevitably affected by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and was unfortunately never presented in a public exhibition space. I have therefore created a virtual mock-up of the installation in the Unity game engine alongside a flat video version. It should be noted that neither of these set-ups are meant to act as versions of the work in their own right, but merely as representations of how the work is intended to be presented.

[1.2] Stratigraphy in context

Art and Archaeology share a common aim in trying to make sense of the world as we find it. In his book Figuring it Out Professor Colin Renfrew outlines the:

> [...] parallels between the way the modern artist seeks to understand the world by acting upon it, and the way the archaeologist seeks to understand the world through the material traces of such actions. The visual arts work through the contact of the artist with the material world. The artist sees that world, experiences it, and then acts upon it, embodying and expressing that experience, and thereby offering us as viewers further experiences. That is obvious enough. What has been insufficiently grasped, however, is that this interaction with the material world has as its exact counterpart the processes by which human societies have themselves, over the centuries and millennia, perceived the material world and then engaged with it through action upon it. (Renfrew, 2003: 8)

One process in particular that is employed by archaeologists to examine the world, that offers intriguing parallels for a ‘found object’ artist, is the peeling back of a surface to reveal layers of time and context. This process in both geology and archaeology is referred to as stratigraphy and is used to study the composition and relative position of elements within a defined stratum.
Similarly, in the arts, practitioners in many disciplines have used layering techniques to examine notions of temporality, memory and frames of reference. Renfrew cites Mark Dion, Susan Hiller and Eduardo Paolozzi as prime exponents of archaeologically inspired working practices.

Whilst little reference is made explicitly to the term ‘stratigraphy’ in these works, through the simplification of this term into a series of core facets, it is possible to build an understanding of how these works, and by extension my own work, operate as analogous to the geological process of Stratigraphy. These facets can be considered in terms of 1) layering, 2) found objects and 3) memory.

[1.3.1] Stratigraphy and layering

In the fields of archaeology and geology, stratigraphy can be observed vertically, as in the layers/strata of a cliff face, and horizontally as in scatter zones and debris fields. These zones, which can instinctively appear as disordered and insignificant collections of detritus, actually reveal identifiable impressions and specific patterns, when observed more intently, that help to build a holistic, if often incomplete, picture of specific events and activities. Based upon the understanding that there is a definable causality, this allows for educated speculation upon possible and probable narratives around the movements and interactions of artefacts, materials and people within a defined area. (Mouldycliff, J. & Mouldycliff, P. n.d)

The Boyle family are best known for their artistic examination of this phenomena in their series of Earth Studies; highly accurate casts that operate somewhere between painting and sculpture, involving the meticulous re-creation of randomly chosen areas of the Earth's surface using resin and fibreglass (as well as real materials from the selected site). In particular the Broken Path and London series highlight the adherence to archaeological practice in the rigorous and disciplined way in which each site is recorded. (Boyle, 1970: N/A)

The layering process, whether vertical or horizontal is in essence, given order and composition by the use of a frame which either arbitrarily or aesthetically focusses attention on the chosen material. This can be manipulated to draw the attention of the audience and can incorporate both spatial and temporal boundaries. In both archaeology and art, grid structures, either explicit or implicit, are often used to provide reference and clarity within that space.

This ‘composite cross-structure of horizontals and verticals’ is a favourite tool of film-maker and artist Peter Greenaway who capitalizes on this mapping technique to place the audience centre stage.

The map is three tenses in one. It can show you where you have been, where you are and where you will be. It can always also show you where you could be and where you might like to be. And all in one plane of reference. (Greenaway, 1993: Section 19)

By regularising the seemingly random into geometric compartments, the perceiver is able to make sense of the objects. The desire for balance, structure and unity is a theme Greenaway carries through one of his early short films Vertical Features Remake (1978) in which four archetypal characters argue over how a piece of incomplete footage predominantly made up of vertical images should be analysed, dissected and plotted on plans and diagrams. Greenaway draws attention to the artificiality of the concept by making the extant verticals and horizons in the imagery, yield intimations of the grid and frame surrounding the picture.

Beyond the frame as plan, archeologists make use of the shelf, tray and cabinet to contain found objects for ease of access, retrieval and storage. The compartmentalisation of material is systematically filed and presented according to a particular method of classification. Similarly, the artist collects objet trouvé as source material for assemblages, vitrines, tableaux, happenings and environments. Often, this accumulation of discarded ephemera creates its own inventories and archives as a direct consequence of the working process.

Joseph Cornell carefully preserved all kinds of material that was surplus but related in some way to his main body of work, keeping it in shoe-boxes and other improvised archive boxes. In 1946 he presented an exhibition called Romantic museum: Portraits of Women which derived from a body of his works that he referred to as his dossiers. These were unfinished works, housed inside document boxes which were intended to be added to and subtracted from as part of his working research process. (Putnam, 2001: 16)

The sculptor Tony Cragg has made it his life’s work to elevate the detritus of our everyday existence into the metaphysical in such a way as to make it possible to visualise the disintegration of its objectification. The gaps that as a consequence that fall between the
materials in his works are open invitations to the spectator to participate in the completion of those works.

The finished work incorporates a mix of artefacts and materials that leads on right back to contemplate the materiality of things. The archaeologist is used to the processes of time, with change the materiality of the past into the poor man’s rubbish, found in most archaeological excavations. Here, with Cragg, as with some other contemporary artists, the reverse happens turning junk into art. (Renfrew, 2003: 151)

Figure 2: Tony Cragg (1975) *Stack.*
Retrieved from: [https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/cragg-stack-t07428](https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/cragg-stack-t07428)
From a philosophical perspective, each presentation of an object in/outside its original setting, perceived context or natural environment will affect the way in which it is read.

Freud was very interested in archaeological research (Schliemann's excavation of Troy, for example) and the collected artefacts, many of which decorated his office and which he frequently showed to his patients (The Rat Man, 1909d) as signs of the preservation of traces of a past that had become unconscious. More profoundly, we find that the methods of the archaeological dig and those of psychoanalytical investigation have followed a similar evolution, consisting in shifting the focus of interest from a privileged object that will be excavated to a gradual discovery of the terrain (stratigraphic method), through which it is possible to trace the thread of history back to its origins step by step. Interest in these vestiges, which constitute "a history without a text" (André Leroi-Gourhan), intersects the work of reconstruction that takes place during analysis (Freud, 1937c). Similarly, the interest in a missing element (doubt in the dream, foreclosed elements in psychosis) evokes this preservation-through-absence that archaeologists experience in what they call "ghost sites". (Mijolla-Mellor, 1993)

The removal of an object or fragment thereof, from its surroundings creates a gap in the narrative. Without its history, or supporting evidence taken from the same time-period or locale, it can be difficult to determine an object’s intrinsic value, utility or significance. Objects grouped together will by inference bond in ways unrelated to their former existence, to create new and previously unrelated connections and narratives. This apparent leeching of integrity, borne out of ambiguity, provides the artist with ideal source material; that is to say, fragments of imagery or sound that taken out of context become formal elements in creating abstract compositions.

Similarly, the surrounding material acts like detritus, bedding down and supporting the artefacts. This analogy is used by Brian Eno in talking about his ambient album On Land (1982). Using a combination of synthesizer-based notes and field recordings mixed together with a complex array of other sounds taken from his own back catalogue, he describes the process as “composting”.

If you think of culture as a great big garden, it has to have its compost as well. And lots of people are doing things that are... not dramatic or radical or even particularly interesting; they’re just digestive processes. It’s places where a number of little things are being combined and tried out. It’s like members of a population. We’re all little turns of the same genetic dice. If you think about music in that way, it makes it much easier to accept that there might be lots of things you might not want to hear again. They happen and they pass and they become the compost for something else to grow from. (Tamm, 1989: 94)

During the three-year process of making the album Eno came to the conclusion that the synthesizer offered very limited possibilities for describing environments, whether real or imagined and his choice of instrumentation shifted gradually through electro-mechanical and
acoustic instruments towards natural sounds such as rock and wood as well as recordings of birds, amphibians and invertebrates, effectively married with material garnered from his audio notebooks.

German composer Heiner Goebbels creates what he terms ‘imaginary notebooks’ in which he records encounters during projects, journeys, personal meetings or in archives. He invokes these found sounds, dialogues, invocations, prayers, appeals, injunctions, speeches or songs to provoke responses: commentary, interruptions, (both supportive and contradictory) from the performers who answer them both individually and collectively. Deliberately putting them at one remove from himself as instigator, he adds a third party to the creative process which he describes an ‘alterity,’ that is something outside of tradition or convention.

Instead of offering self-affirmation to both a performing and a perceiving subject, a “theatre of absence” might be able to offer an artistic experience that does not necessarily have to consist of a direct encounter (with the actor), but in an experience through alterity. Alterity is to be understood here not as a direct connection to something, but as an indirect and triangular relationship whereby dramatic identification is replaced by a rather precarious confrontation with a mediating third party, something we might call the “other”. Absence as the presence of the other, as a confrontation with an unseen image or an unheard word or sound, an encounter with forces beyond man’s control that are out of reach. (Goebbels, 2015: 6)

The way in which we view the world naturally accommodates our lack of omniscience and allows us to base our understanding on incomplete evidence, accepting the existence of the unknown. We create contingencies to paper over the cracks in our personal knowledge. Artists and archaeologists alike try to bring order to the world by filling in the blanks between fragments of what is perceivable. Deciding what is missing is ultimately in the hands of the deducer. Artist Russell Mills, in a 2019 interview for davidsylvian.net, accepts that his working practice can in the final analysis be summed up as “contingency as collage”.

I guess that during the last few years I think I’ve kind of figured out what I’d really been doing all this time. I reached a point where I felt I could now make sense of what my work has been about, and it became evident that what is really central to all of my work (visual and sonic) is ‘contingency’, which I take to mean one action creates a reaction, which creates another, which creates another, ad infinitum. And ‘contingency’ takes us back to my ideas and faith in collage as an idea and as a physical process. In our daily lives, events experienced, and our memories of them, unfold and proceed associatively, digressing, pinballing, fading, slipping, looping, jolting. We experience a plethora of juxtapositions, of ideas, images and sounds, and yet when we attempt to recall them, we mediate and edit them to create another, very different narrative. Our lives and our memories of our experiences are non-linear. This is also how our consciousness works, contingency as collage. This understanding underpins all my work, which utilises the contingent processes of collage in the materials I use and the processes they are subjected to. This way of working, which involves using pre-determined chance, indeterminacy, coincidence, and associative thinking, requires risk-taking and surrendering control. These approaches remove the ego from the work, and acknowledges that stuff happens. (Hillebrand, 2019: Section 5 - Para 1)
[1.3.2] A personal approach to Stratigraphy:

In *Island Recollections* one of the early decisions made was in what way to divide the material horizontally (across the four boxes), therefore dictating the element that would be examined vertically. In the developmental stage of the work, I experimented with a few of these permutations: separation by date, separation by specific location, and separation by aesthetic qualities, such as colour.

One of the benefits of separating by date was the clarity that it provided with regards to the comprehensibility of the temporal aspect of the soundscapes. It is often difficult to identify the difference between two similar sounds recorded years apart and this was one of the sacrifices that I had to make when moving to the model that I eventually settled on. However, whilst making the horizontal stratigraphy more legible, this left the vertical aspect less interesting.

Another realisation I had when sharing very early concepts of the work with peers at the University of Huddersfield, was that for many of the people who would potentially be viewing
this work, separating the material by specific location would have little relevance and it would have compromised the openness of the installation.

Tony Cragg [Newton’s Tones, 1978], Robert Therrien [Red Room, 2000-2007] and Anna Fafaliou [All I can Remember, 2015] have all utilised an arrangement of objects by colour in order to isolate other qualities, such as form and texture and in the case of Anna Fafaliou, using the colour white as a trigger for memory.

![Figure 4: Tony Cragg (1978) Newton’s Tones.](https://www.myswitzerland.com/en-sg/experiences/cities-culture/art-culture/art/newstones-newtons-tones/)

This formal approach did not quite suit the material that I was working with. In the end I decided upon a type of separation based upon different types of interactions within the environment, loosely derived from the interests of the four members of my immediate family: [1] Water, for my mother; [2] Fossils & Rocks, for my brother; [4] Machines & Steam Engines, for my father; [5*] Family, for me. This allowed each station to have thematic distinction from one another, both in the visual and sonic elements. It also accounted for the level of openness that was required. The vertical stratigraphy then became an exploration of these distinct themes throughout the 13 years of collected materials.

Another interesting and unique type of stratigraphic layering that I endeavoured to explore, was the use and interpretation of prebuilt structures as groundwork. An obvious place in which this occurs in the arts is with modern architecture. Daniel Libeskind has often favoured this approach; with the Royal Ontario Museum, he was given the task of designing an expansion to the original Neo-Romanesque building built in 1922. Instead of creating something in the same style to blend with the original, he created an angular structure that intersects and directly contrasts with every

*These box frames were originally part of a set of six and were marked numerically. For aesthetic and practical reasons, the four boxes I selected boxes were one, two, four and five. For consistency between the physical installation and the numbering system, I refer to the box relating to family as box five, despite there only being four boxes.*
aspect of the original build. The interest is borne out of the juxtaposition of the two and together they reflect upon two contrasting approaches to achieving the same goal.

For Island Recollections, the catalyst for starting this project was the legacy of my family interest in the Isle of Wight. This was manifested in the objects, images and sounds collected, but also in some of the direct responses of my artist Father, who started making visual art in response to the island around the year 2006. His interest in creating art concerning the Isle of Wight has lessened over the years as his priorities have shifted. This has coincided conversely with my own shifting priorities concerning my relationship with the Island and this piece represents the continuation of a person family legacy. It made perfect sense therefore, to start the construction of the piece using a set of my Father’s unfinished wooden box frames from a previous installation. This gave me the opportunity to explore and contrast the ways in which my own relationship with the island has changed, through the lens of my family. The weathered boxes sit at the bottom of the work, a foundation layer of the lived experiences of my father, typified by scattered collections of objects, exposed moving tape players and timeworn material. I contrasted these with pristine white frames that represent my more formalised memories that exist almost exclusively in tandem with the attached images.
The decision behind the division of the material for *Wilton Quarry* was arrived at from an interest in exploring the way in which a space is interacted with on many levels, from tactile ground level interactions all the way to more holistic observational behaviour.

Each of the time-lapse videos was split into four distinct horizontal bands, representing the different levels of the environment. Each of these layers allow for an isolated snapshot of characteristics of specific parts of the environment constricted within the separate bands. The bottom band covers the ground layer and draws attention to the foliage, rocks, insects and often has a more visceral sense of closeness. The second band shows the landscape up until the point at which it begins to meet with the sky. This layer gives a greater sense of the geography, the trees, the rock face, the paths. The third band sits at the point at which the land ends and the sky begins, highlighting transitional relationships. The top band is purely focused on the sky, clouds, the weather and light and, being not tethered to any tangible feature of the landscape, deals more in movement, emotion and gesture.
Each individual band carries with it a specific focused segment of the landscape that stays fairly consistent with the visual and sonic aspects and lasts four minutes. Each band is staggered about 30 seconds apart giving a slow and easily observable metamorphosis through the duration of the piece.

Figure 7: Screenshots from the virtual environment Mock-Up of Wilton Quarry 2020
[1.4] Art and Archaeology: revealing the found object

In previous writing, I have discussed the ways in which through...

[...] collecting and placing objects, artists using a variety of media, have developed their own taxonomies and methodologies for processing, interpreting and re-creating the topography of an area. Implicit in this process of rediscovery are the transformations wrought on objects by their exposure to a particular environment. Decay is an important factor in the selection process and practitioners [such as the aforementioned Tony Cragg, Joseph Cornell and Mark Dion] are pre-disposed to highlight attributes such as patina, corrosion or excoriation for purely aesthetic reasons. Similarly, in their use of grids to provide frames of reference, the artist will naturally gravitate to forms that serve to bring attention to particular qualities of the extant material and/ or its surroundings. The idea of re-presenting material is not new, but it uniquely offers opportunities for articulating and developing previously unconsidered relationships between subject and object, artist and audience, composer and performer, space and memory. (Mouldycliff, J. & Mouldycliff, P. n.d)

In juxtaposing found objects, sound and text in a defined space, the choice and number of elements becomes central to the identity of each individual composition and will be contained within a specific site/area. As with American artist Mark Dion’s quasi-archaeological approach each, “[...] installation plays with the surrealist trope of creating unexpected and imaginative connections between found and often obsolete objects.” (Dion, 2005)

![Image of Mark Dion's Thames Dig installation](https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/541980136391050071/)
It is important that the material presented be capable of being perceived in different ways. Multi-media artist Susan Hiller in particular adopted a strategy of providing her audience with increasingly ambiguous aural and visual cues to blur meaning that resonates with my own preferred way of presenting material. Hiller writes:

> My starting points were artless, worthless artefacts and materials – rubbish, discards, fragments, trivia and reproductions – which seem to carry an aura of memory and to hint at meaning something, something that made me want to work with them and on them. (Hiller, 1995: 87)

![Susan Hiller exhibition](https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/541980136391050071/)

Figure 9: Susan Hiller (1991-1996) *From the Freud Museum*. Retrieved from: [https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/541980136391050071/](https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/541980136391050071/)

In a review of Hiller’s *Freud Museum*, the pop singer Kate Bush described her work as,

> [...] the plumbing of the human mind as an act of archaeology, an excavation of the unconscious where nothing is lost and everything is waiting to be disinterred. (Bush, 1994: 87)

This ‘disinterring’ process is potentially the most important factor in defining this working methodology. By encouraging supposition, speculation, divination and guesswork, the layers and fragments contained therein provide a bearing for the audience to engage their attention. Intrigue, curiosity and fascination stimulate the imagination to create a narrative as described by composer Brian Eno who it seems is content to give his listener the dream without the interpretation.
It’s as if you’ve discovered a very dusty inscribed stone somewhere, and you’re trying to scrape off all the muck to find out what’s underneath it, and you keep coming up with one word here, another one there, and you’re trying to imagine what might be in between those words. (Tamm, 1989: 82)

An important consideration in creating an ‘open work’ is that you have to allow the audience a suitable framework in which to reflect and time to make connections. Eno’s ambient music and videos create a correspondingly quiet environment for contemplation.

Structure is being used to refer to the way parts of a work relate to each other, how they ‘fit together’ in the mind to form a particular configuration. This fitting together does not happen ‘out there’ in the objective work; it happens in the mind of the spectator. (Kaye N, 1994: 48)

The manner, order and way in which an individual experiences the different fragments, offers fresh potential and possible ramifications.

Such a process serves to put into question familiar objects, actions and events, where the attempt to read meanings and significance into emerging correspondences and patterns is deflected by multiple possibilities and implications. Here the act of reading itself becomes part of the subject matter of the work, as meaning becomes multiple and elusive, constantly a possibility but always out of reach. (Kaye, 1994: 69)

It is necessary for the participants of an intermedia installation to be able collect, collate and transform the sensory information at their own pace, therefore, events must occur gradually and develop slowly to allow a picture to emerge in the mind’s eye.

The tidiness of mind betrayed by such principles of organisation has more than a little in common with the mentality of a collector or accumulator in its need both to make sense of what might otherwise appear to be random evidence and also to take possession of the material by naming it and then bringing it together with similar objects. (Livingstone, 2009: 222)

Umberto Eco in the “Poetics of the Open Work” (1989) suggests that the comprehension of artefacts and by implication the events which brought them to a particular place and time, gains:

[...] aesthetic validity precisely in proportion to the number of different perspectives from which they can be viewed and understood. As he reacts to the play of stimuli and his own response to the patterning, the individual addressee is bound to supply his own existential credentials, the sense conditioning which is peculiarly his own, a defined culture, a set of tastes, personal inclinations and prejudices. Thus, his comprehension of the original artefact is always modified by his particular and individual perspective. (Morgan, 1998: 231)

Through facilitating a positive relationship between the spectator and the presentation in his landmark exhibition at The Museum of Mankind in the mid-1980s, Eduardo Paolozzi challenged the notion of the passive public and engages them in a thought-provoking but equal exchange of
ideas and inferences. Gone, are the accepted values of the authorities, replaced by an appreciation that all deductions are acceptable.

The pieces chosen by Paolozzi and the ways they are displayed present an unusual view of the Museum’s collections, a deliberate assertion of their power to surprise. In doing that they emphasise the obvious point that the artist’s view can differ greatly from that of the curator. Paolozzi, in making his selection, may happily ignore or reject aspects of a piece, which, for an archaeologist or anthropologist, are its most important attributes.

Divining operates by the combination and recombination of manipulable materials of significance which can be arranged in a large number of different ways to produce different chains of meaning, each of which is ‘read’ by a process of interaction between the new combination, the client and diviner and their changing perception of the situation. (Paolozzi, 1985: 15-16, 43)

This sentiment is probably best summed up in one of the key philosophical novels of the Twentieth Century, Italo Calvino’s Invisible Cities.

Only this is known for sure: a given number of objects are shifted within a given space, at times submerged by a quantity of new objects, at times worn out and not replaced; the rule is to shuffle them each time, then try to assemble them. (Calvino, 1997: 108)
[2.1] Differing approaches to presenting and composing in *Stratigraphies*:

One of the keys tenants of my working methodology for *Island Recollections* was to treat all materials as found objects, including images, texts and sounds. This was possible due to the vast majority of the material used for this project being from family collections spanning, in this case, thirteen years.

As found objects, it is not primarily the content of these materials that drives their selection, arrangement and composition, but the way in which they have been captured, preserved, decayed and weathered. Country band march by Charles Ives typifies this approach:

> This remarkable topical march of 1903 is about amateur musicians and the way Ives heard things happen, rather than the music itself. Ives loved the earnest, let-out spirit of the amateur musicians of his youth in Danbury, Connecticut. In this work he lovingly memorialises their many foibles – their playing out of tune and out of key, their missing beats and rushing the tempo, their impromptu tossing-in of favourite tunes, the near collapse of the ensemble, the pandemonium towards the close, where energies exceed abilities and the final embarrassing goof of the saxophonist caught unaware (Sinclair 2000)

With this mind-set, processing and, digital or physical manipulation is used minimally and sparingly. In cases where the preservation and age of an artefact is not immediately observable, particularly in the case of digital artefacts, manipulations such as superimposition and cross blending are used to create new compound objects that better reflect my memories of them.

This approach does however, come with a set of drawbacks. The found object anchors the viewer into a finite and possibly limited number of perspectives. Conversely there is also the possibility that unintentional, unwanted or unwelcome connotations can become attached to the narrative. It also restricts the overall composition of the assemblage, often pre-determining potential presentations. Therefore, there is always the danger of the installation becoming an amalgamated compromise of visually contrasting artefacts. Additionally, from a practical point of view, physical found objects can be fragile or unstable and difficult to show and store.

This way of thinking shifted, moving into my second installation, in that rather than dealing rigidly with ‘found objects/ material’, there was a much more deliberate intentionality behind the gathering process. For the piece, I decided to forgo the use of physical objects, choosing to focus instead of video and sound (a decision partly informed by complications around the COVID-19 situation). This afforded me the liberty to select and build the visual and sonic material in a more organic and expressive way.

I made sure to consider all the possible angles from which the work could be viewed in order to encourage and reward exploration and engagement in the work. *Island Recollections* was
designed to be viewed from the front or the back and offers new perspectives on the same objects. This is achieved in different ways for the two main components of the work – the wooden box and the glass frame. The box utilises depth and selectively obscures objects to hide and reveal different parts of the work. The back of the box uses a map with a single cut-out rectangle in order to create a small viewing window into the work, allowing the viewer to see things that, on the front side were previously partially or fully obscured.

The glass frame does something slightly different, using translucent layers of acetate sheets and thin tissue paper to allow natural light bleeding to subtly blend the images. This means that different shapes, colours, lines and words become more prominent depending on which side you and viewing from, and the level of both natural and ambient light.

Where *Island Recollections* encourages the viewer to move around the work, *Wilton Quarry* asks them to move up and down. The aim is to create a parallel between the way in which the work was created and the way in which it is experienced. My process often involved climbing up and down the levels of quarry searching for new angles and perspectives and evaluating how the feeling of being in the quarry shifted from being within the basin, up to a vantage point at the top of the cliff face. Due to the vertical height of the installation and with accessible viewing points on different floors, a viewer should feel compelled to move up and down these levels, therefore, actively engaging in the same levels of curiosity that drew me to the piece’s creation.
[3.1] Memory – Landscape and Object

Memory forms a significant portion of the way in which we view the world. When considering stratigraphy, I am looking at two distinct conduits for memory, namely landscape and the found object.

The identity of a place is comprised of three interrelated components, each irreducible to the other – physical features or appearance, observable activities and functions, and meanings and symbols. There is an infinite range of content within each of these and numberless ways in which they can combine. Hence there is no discernible limit to the diversity of identities of places, and every identifiable place has unique content and patterns of relationship that are expressed and endure in the spirit of that place. (Relph, 1976: 61)

Our most enduring memories of landscapes are often triggered by the routine actions that we take within them.

Memories can be evoked through the enactment of both everyday practices and rituals at certain locations across the landscape and along the pathways connecting them. This kind of ‘looking-back’ is not necessarily about accurately recalling past events as truthfully as possible: it is rather about making meaningful statements about the past in the given cultural context of a present as well as evoking aspirations for the future. (Holtorf & Williams, 2006: 238)

We build our own identities of landscapes by existing within them and subsequently forging our own personal connections to their cultural and geographical history. These identities however, do not need to be perceived from first-hand experience. We use what we know to assimilate our surroundings through prior experience of similar, complimentary or analogous circumstances. Relph writes that,

 [...] the depiction of a specific place corresponds with our experiences of familiar places – we know what it’s like to be there, because we know what it’s like to be here. (Relph, 1976: 53)

In dealing with found objects, artefacts, texts, images etc., a similar thing is true. Objects can elicit a myriad of potential histories and connections for each viewer activated by memory through a shared sense of personal value. A 2010 study into digital and Physical mementos discovered a wide range of types of stimuli that were viewed by the owners to have personal value, including incredibly esoteric objects like a pregnancy cast and the ashes of the owner’s father. However, the most fascinating objects were often those that seemed mundane and part of the everyday. ‘Everyday objects become mementos by virtue of what owners have invested in them, be it time or emotion.’ (Petrelli & Whittaker, 2010: 7)
In her 2007 book ‘Scissors, Paper, Stone’, Martha Langford explored how photographs can be perceived in a similar capacity to memories. She writes that,

[...] photographs bring visions of the past into the present. In that respect, they are felt to be like memories, though no sane person would think they were the same. Memories are neither recorded nor preserved by photographic technology. They are, however, expressed and activated by photographic works of art. (Langford, 2007: X)

Using the model of the game of scissors, paper, stone, she goes on to theorise that our relationship with memory is more complicated than a simplistic reductionist view of memory being like a simple piece of recording apparatus by assigning each hand position in the game to different mode of memory. Langford writes:

Scissors becomes the joust between remembering and forgetting; paper, the meeting ground for memory and imagination; and stone, the relationship between memory and history.

Paper’s fragile evidence of the past cannot hold against the mental scissors that fragment the subject. Scissors cut paper. But, and there is always a but, photography’s capacity to preserve a fugitive reality and carve identity in stone claims to defeat fragmentation. Stone blunts scissors. But as we also know, the imagination can prevail over history, and generate another memory, or at least a might-have been. Paper covers stone. (Langford, 2007: Xiii)

Each artefact requires an amount of openness to be able to accommodate a range of perceptions. This allows the viewer to build personal narratives through their unique perspective as they subconsciously utilise memory in different ways to disambiguate each artefact or layer; one might accept a particular object/image as a historical fact but override the history of another with their own personal lived experience.

The way in which this interaction takes place between artefact and spectator has kinship with, pragmatist philosopher, Charles Sanders Pierce’s model of tripartite signification. In this model, Peirce suggests that there are three core semiotic elements, the sign, object, and interpretant. A sign (or representamen) is a signifying element; a colour, a written word, a shape or form etc. that signifies an object, which is the subject matter of these signs. The interpretant, can be described, “as the understanding that we have of the sign/object relation. This makes the interpretant central to the content of the sign, in that, the meaning of an artefact/object matter is manifest in the interpretation that it generates.” (Atkin, 2006: Section 1)

The openness of an artefact is therefore determined in the interplay between these three components and the frequency of interpretants that can be generated from the signs of the object. The distinction between objects/events and the ambiguity implicit in the way in which
we remember and interoperate those objects/ events is important. This ambiguity allows artists to imply associations and create links.

This notion of ambiguity and openness is exemplified by Gavin Bryars who, inspired by the story of the musicians on the RMS Titanic who continued to play even as the ship went down, created an open-form work in which he imagines the sounds continuing to reverberate through the water sometime after the sinking. Bryars deliberately exploits the ‘doubt and speculation’ and ‘various possibilities and conjectures’ of events to present a framework for a multitude of plausibilities. The Sinking of the Titanic (1975) accommodates an audience not as witnesses to the actual event, but as a channel through which to perpetuate the often incomplete and imperfect memories, myths and legends that continue to reverberate through the passing of time. Embedded in its many layers and sediments are the seeds of a reality now opened up for personal reimagining. (Bryars, 1990)

[3.2] The function of memory in Stratigraphies:

My projects serve to highlight two approaches towards dealing with memory within a place, firstly through found objects and then through the landscape itself.

One of the primary challenges when dealing with found objects is selecting objects that promote intrigue and belie generalisation. The key is in choosing material that telegraphs a type of memento rather than solely a specific personal item, such as, assorted rocks and fossils to represent collections, maps to represent journeys and locations, and personal holiday photos to represent equivalent holidays and time spent with family. This openness leaves room for tangential connections to be made.

A specific example of this from Island Recollections was a small Duplo figure, placed on top of the box marked with the number five, which, at some point, my family and I had found washed up on one of the island’s beaches. This was not necessarily an item that I had much of a personal connection with, however, at the showing of the work at the University of Huddersfield, this item drew a lot of interest and elicited a variety of reactions and conversation points. These included: bringing up memories of playing with Duplo; speculation about how this item might have ended up washed up on the beach; and making comparisons to similar unusual objects that had been found beachcombing.
Items that were too esoteric or idiosyncratic were less useful and there were many items that were dropped from the project for this reason including a leaflet about red squirrels, a plastic gun from Blackgang Chine amusement park and a scavenger hunt list from the Fort Victoria model railway.

Wilton Quarry contains little explicit reference to my own memories in the way that Island Recollections does. The simplicity and focus of the layers and the naturally evocative qualities of the environment serve to build curiosity and activate tangential memories within the viewer.

I experimented near the end of the development of the piece with drawings and texts from my notes superimposed onto the video. Something akin to this might have offered an additional layer of interaction and interest, however in the specific context of the work, these elements simply confused the aesthetic and were barely legibly to an extent where they would have potentially compromised the immersivity of the piece.
For preference, it is important for my practice for me to be able to step back from the objects being used and view them at one remove; that is to say the elements of the composition have to become formally abstracted to some degree to open up the possibility of multiple narratives. Ultimately, the significance of the accumulated elements should be attributable as much to the onlooker as to myself as instigator, accruing new meanings with each viewing.

This came naturally in the creation of *Island Recollections*, as members of my family had captured some of the material, and other materials were far enough in the past that I could disassociate myself from them to an extent.

However, for *Wilton Quarry* this working situation had to be artificially instigated by naming and dating my audio files, categorising them by sound-type and then leaving them for about four weeks. This meant that when I returned to the creation of the soundscape, I could build it in a way that would be parallel to the intended viewing experience, exploring and discovering connections and using memory and personal experience to evaluate the sounds. I find it important as an artist to try and keep the intended audience experience in mind at all stages of the creation process.
[4.1] The sound object in context

The sound object [...] has been fractured and remade into a shifting open lattice on which new ideas can hang, or through which they can pass and interweave. This is one metaphor. Landscape is another - a conjured place through which the music moves and the listener can wander.

Musicians have always reflected their environments in ways that are incorporated into the music’s structure and purpose. (Toop, 1995: xi)

Whilst this notion can apply to all different forms of music composition it is taken to the fullest extent by experimental sound recordists such as Douglas Quinn, David Dunn, Hildegard Westerkamp, Francisco Lopez and Chris Watson. These artists focus heavily on the selection process, placing emphasis on the qualities and characteristics of sounds within an environment. Chris Watson explained his process in an email to David Toop:

On location, to perceive what I may later regard to be memorable sounds, there are two significant characterises: 1 Clarity & 2 Depth. Clarity being not coloured by other irrelevant sounds or interruptions. Depth being the ability to follow the sound, or its reverberation, into the distance’ [...]In particular, I enjoy atmospheres at night in wild places as they point up an exciting, secret world upon which we can eavesdrop, appreciate and enjoy, but not necessarily understand and I think that sense of mystery and awe is an important detail which is missing in much of our daily lives. (Toop, 2004: 51-53)

David Toop goes on to further this notion:

Audio Atmospheres are mysterious; not just because much of their content may be invisible and implicit; not just because their cumulative effects come from elusive and under-researched phenomena such as pressure changes, infrasound, ultrasonics and other barely perceived sonic signal, aligned with subtle transitions in the acoustic environment; but because they are thick with imaginings, memories, utopias, foreboding. (Toop, 2004: 54)

One of the benefits of the, sometimes, equivocal nature of sounds is realised in the sound artist’s ability to blend natural and fabricated sounds into textural combinations that can suggest developments of the context of those natural sounds. In their 2018 collaborative piece our seasons reverse, Bruno Duplant and David Vélez combine audio recordings from across the world, with the sounds and textures of ‘hacked’ Theremins, organs and electronics in order to emphasise a sense of the disruption of our climate. Although one is aware of the presence of these additional fabricated elements, it is often very difficult to distinguish them from the natural recordings.

By being aware of the fundamental characteristics of sounds, composers can synthesise or recreate new sounds that imitate these characteristics. Artist and composer Shawn Decker does this in his 2013 sound installation Prairie, with small electrical components and metal rods that
vibrate and click mimicking and evoking the sounds of insects, grass, wind and rain. The listener can actually become more involved in the work when there is certain level of disconnection from the authentic source, in this case, the soundscape of a real prairie. They now have to use their own personal understanding and interactions with similar environments/ sounds to make sense of this soundscape. This seems to follow in the footsteps of David Tudor’s seminal 1968 work Rainforest in which he created a series of electronic gestures that worked with the same mechanics and timbres as the sounds of a rainforest.

In combining sonic and visual elements, the complexity of interactions increase. The way in which we perceive objects, events, relationships etc. fundamentally differs between our senses. Michel Chion notes that:

> Visual and auditory perception are of much more disparate natures than one might think. The reason we are only dimly aware of this is that these two perceptions mutually influence each other in the audio-visual contract, lending each other their respective properties by contamination and projection’ (Chion, 1994: 9)

Therefore, in creating an audio-visual piece in which the sonic and visual elements are not from the same source, it is necessary to understand the function of the relationship between the two. In reflecting upon the ways in which we interact with sound in a visual world, Artist and writer Brandon Labelle cites the writings of Salomé Voglin:

> In particular, she draws out a consideration of “sound’s invisible formlessness,” and its capacity to upset and reorient the politics of visibility. Sound and listening are subsequently put forward as a dynamic framework from which to interrogate “the surface of a visual world” (Labelle, 2018: 1)

Sound can aid in the activation of visual elements to encourage a deeper level of interaction. It does this in several ways. Primarily, it acts as an audible clue as to how visual elements might be approached through volume, timbre and position. It also underpins and frames the visual sense to provide assurance or create contradictions in what we perceive. It can hold one’s attention or conversely drive away the recipient dependent on the quality and or quantity of sound. Given that, unlike visual elements, sound occupies temporal space and has a finite duration, it leads the participant from A to B. This ability to move an audience in time provides the potential for dynamic narrative as opposed to static/ silent contemplation. That is to say, the listener is moved to follow the changes inherent, particularly in musical composition and this in turn progresses the dialogue between the visual and audible components. Obviously, the more complex the visual composition and audio elements, the more protracted the interplay between the various stimuli.
French composer Luc Ferrari approached his music in a way that reflected more the approach of the visual artists of the 20th century, treating his sounds as objects and therefore dealing with the associated implications:

To incorporate the social within sound, to capture the voice of people talking in the street, the metro, the museum ... we are like wandering ears stealing sound in the same way you would take a picture. That voice then becomes a found object within a dramatic form. So that means incorporating society, intimacy or an expression of feelings ... These sounds represent an image, a memory; they are objects that take part in a creation. I feel a closer affinity with the visual artists of that era than with the composers. (Caux, 2012: 36)

[4.2] Sound and Stratigraphy:

Wilton Quarry was a deliberate shift in the creative process towards sound providing context for the visuals as opposed to Island Recollections in which much of the sound was from historical family recordings and therefore necessitated the visual elements to provide a framework from which to disambiguate the more obscure sounds.

This also influenced the fundamental way in which I approached assembling the soundtracks for the two works. In Island Recollections I was treating the sounds as found objects and was therefore, dealing in notions of presentation more than musical composition. This included position in time, duration, prominence, frequency of repetition and relative balance across the four stations. With every sound, it was imperative to assess a number of key attributes in order to decide how to proceed with their placement and manipulation: how much personal meaning does this recording hold; how much information (specific and general) can be perceived from this recording; what sort of texture does this recording provide. These kinds of questions essentially build upon the ideas discussed by Chris Watson of clarity and depth.

Once these answers had been decided, then I could move on to specific electronic manipulations like filtering and compression to add clarity to important sounds; creating impulse responses for convolution reverb to heighten atmospheric sounds; using granulation and delay to obscure certain sounds that might pull someone away from the intended experience (i.e. spoken words); automating volume and filters to emphasise a type of movement like the pulsing of waves or the blowing of wind.

The other key element of the soundscape of this work is the intervention of the tape loops. Each tape contains a combination of two main types of sound, audio recordings of direct physical interaction with boxes (scrapping, rustling, hitting etc.) and a tonal synthesised element. These elements were designed in a way to facilitate possible and unforeseen interactions with the soundscape.
In *Wilton Quarry*, I took a more active role in the soundscape, actively seeking: new sounds, interesting sonic interactions within the space and purely textural and synthesised elements.

Dealing with the concept of layering in the medium of sound brings with it a different set of challenges to that of in the visual arts. There were two different approaches to layering that I tried: altering the physical position, number of sound sources and relative distances of the sounds; and filtering frequencies and combining textural sounds within one sound source.

With its lack of vertical height *Island Recollections* focused on the horizontal layering of sound, using the physical distance between each station to create interplay. Each individual soundtrack was on its own independent loop between 20 and 32 minutes running through the sounds in chronological order. These loops help to facilitate moments of incidental interaction and provide a unique mix of the four soundscapes at any given moment of the installation.

*Wilton Quarry* offered more opportunities to experiment with the spatial positioning of sound on a larger scale. The installation was conceived of with a specific locale in mind, the atrium of the Richard Steinitz building at the University of Huddersfield. The geometry of this space, with its open plan nature and three points of elevation in the form of balcony style walkways on the 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd} floor (in addition to the ground floor), provided the perfect opportunity to explore the extremes of verticality. The plan was to place speakers at each level to coincide with the corresponding video.

The sounds were designed in a way to fall into distinct frequency bands, with the lowest frequency sounds at the bottom and highest at the top, exaggerating the spatial separation and providing each layer of sound with its own distinct space in the soundscape. This was done mostly through the instinctive composition of the various elements, with filtering and EQ being applied to reinforce this.
[5] Conclusion

The past 12 months has seen me further develop my interest in exploiting subject matter which is in some way linear or compacted, such as in geological strata and tidelines. The act of closely examining a specific geographic location has allowed me to concentrate my efforts in developing pseudo-archaeological strategies which place emphasis on the audience as an active participant in articulating the installations. This has enabled me to create pieces which make of use the aesthetic qualities inherent in the landscape such as repeated patterns, decay, patina and found objects to draw the onlooker into creating their own specific implicit narratives. This has in hindsight made me consider the possible approaches to reading the presented material that might be adopted e.g. collected or discovered, sought or salvaged, selected or unearthed, claimed or disposed, admired or analysed, accumulated or stripped, displayed or contained. This research has also highlighted a greater personal interest in the often-ambiguous nature of the relationship between object, observer and memory.

It is now my intention to build upon the foundations of this research into a PhD that explores this relationship in greater detail using speculation and extrapolation as key tenants of a developed methodology for further installation pieces that expand and elevate the dynamics of the ‘found object’ in artistic practice.
**List of Exemplars:**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>David Tudor</td>
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<td>1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gavin Bryars</td>
<td><em>The Sinking of the Titanic</em></td>
<td>Various venues</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony Cragg</td>
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<td>1975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony Cragg</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brian Eno</td>
<td><em>On Land (album)</em></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Therrien</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daniel Libeskind</td>
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<td>Heiner Goebbels</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bruno Duplant and David Vélez</td>
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<td>Unfathomless – US4</td>
<td>2018</td>
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