



Art *S*way

THE WORLD OF OUR LANDSCAPE

## DELUGE: IN AUDIO-VISUAL SPACE

Commissioned Video Installation by artist Tony Sinden.  
This exhibition launches 'The World of our Landscape' three  
year programme.



### THE WORLD OF OUR LANDSCAPE

'The World of our Landscape' is the title of an exciting three  
year programme of exhibitions, residencies and commissions  
funded by the Arts Council of England's 'Arts for Everyone'  
main scheme through the National Lottery.

*We have set in motion a theme to our work over the next three  
years which will raise the dialogue about landscape and all  
references to it. The New Forest is an area steeped in traditional  
views, where landscape painting of a romantic nature prevails.  
Often the landscape is seen as an aesthetic for conservation and  
heritage. The area is in danger of becoming a preserved museum  
piece. The Forest is peddled as a 'romantic' image, reinforcing the  
false concepts embraced by sentimentalist philosophies which have  
glamorised the past. This is a universal problem of tourist areas of  
beauty the world over, and raises many questions about man's  
relationship to the earth in the next millennium.*

*As a venue promoting contemporary art, we want to enter into the  
dialogue about the origin of these ideas, thoughts and notions;  
how they affect our thinking and the work of artists.*

Linda Fredericks 1998

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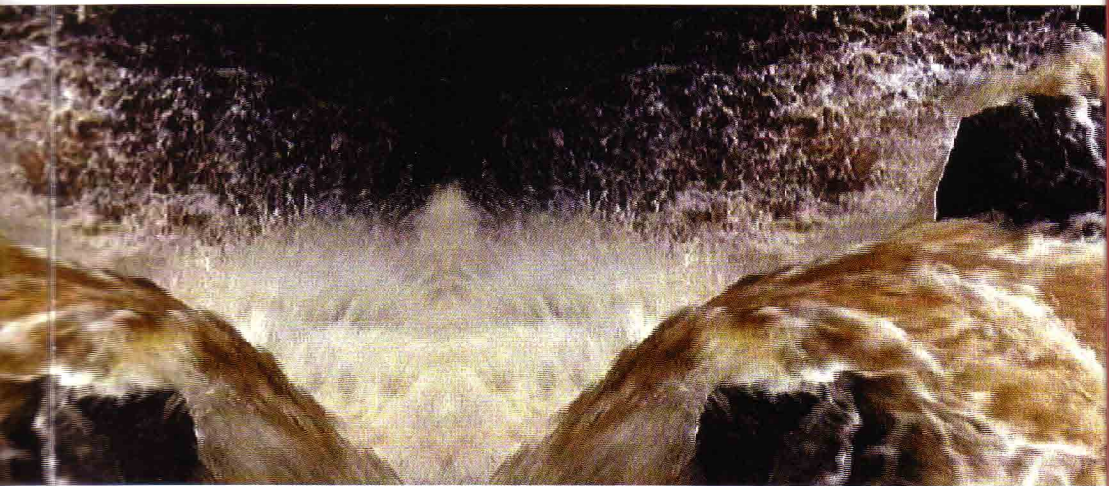
## FOREWORD

RICHARD CORK

Nobody could pretend that landscape provides the overriding theme for British art at the end of the twentieth century. Rural references were hard to find in the *Sensation* exhibition at the Royal Academy last year, a survey charting the concerns of young British artists predominantly involved with modern urban life. Animals associated with the countryside appeared in the work of Damien Hirst, but their sliced, eerie fragmentation evoked the commercial efficiency of the abattoir rather than nourishment in open fields. As for Jake & Dinos Chapman's *Tragic Anatomies*, where alarmingly distorted female nudes frolicked in a bosky tableau, the grass and foliage were nothing more than a stage-set far removed from any first-hand engagement with the natural world.

In the past, authentic experiences offered by landscape lay behind many potent images produced by British artists. Turner, our most outstanding painter, was driven throughout his career by an ever more radical, prophetic and all-encompassing vision of elemental forces. He seems, however, to have exhausted as many possibilities as he opened up. Landscape painting in Britain since Turner's death has been more of a sporadic affair than a sustained continuum.

Ignored by the avant-garde extremism of the Vorticist movement at the beginning of the present century, the countryside subsequently provided David Bomberg with an alternative to the dehumanisation of machine-age slaughter in the Great War. Landscape gave Stanley Spencer a respite from figure painting, but it never formed a central part of his ambitions. For Ivon Hitchens and Graham Sutherland, it was a vital preoccupation throughout their long careers. Down in St Ives, a passionate exploration of the interplay between earth, sea and sky pushed English painters towards freewheeling abstraction, and Patrick Heron is still continuing the headlong involvement with the Cornish countryside pioneered by Peter Lanyon before his untimely death.



Since the Second World War, though, landscape has not played a dominant role in British art. Francis Bacon, the pre-eminent painter of the post-1945 period, showed only an occasional interest in its potential. Both he and Lucian Freud, the most distinguished of our senior living painters, are obsessed by human figures playing out their lives in stark, often claustrophobic interiors. Some sturdy individualists, as diverse as John Virtue and Peter Doig, continue to pursue their own distinctive fascination with landscape as a vehicle for intense emotion. But other artists now are more likely to view the countryside from a metropolitan vantage. Just such a perspective prevails in the recent work of Rose Finn-Kelcey who, after spending her childhood on a farm, has lived in London for the last thirty years. Rural surroundings may have shaped her imagination at a formative stage, but Finn-Kelcey now attempts to explore the friction in what she describes as 'the space between the rural and the urban.'

All the same, it would be a mistake to conclude that British art's traditional fascination with landscape is sliding towards an irreversible decline. After pointing out recently in *The Times* that 'for so many painters now, the whole territory of landscape is considered not only "done" but also unfashionable and irretrievably doomed', Melvyn Bragg concluded by insisting that 'the obituary of landscape art was premature.' Any predictions about the future of art can always be confounded by the work artists themselves proceed to make. By deciding to launch a three-year examination of 'The World of our Landscape', ArtSway cannot be accused of stumbling into a cul-de-sac. By opening up this neglected territory once again, the gallery's initiative may well be able to uncover evidence of a fresh, bracing interaction between artists and the land.



FOUNTAIN 2



HIGH FORCE 2

After all, Richard Long was able to introduce a new way of looking at the terrain he explored on epic journeys, and similar initiatives can surely emerge today. Before Long began working over thirty years ago, his profoundly original vision would have been impossible to predict. No one imagined that the apparently simple act of walking through the countryside could overturn all existing ideas about the form that landscape-based art might take. But Long managed to locate a hitherto untapped means of working with the natural world and his discovery has changed our perceptions in the most surprising way.

That is why ArtSway is wise to stress, at the outset of this tonic venture, that stereotyped approaches to landscape will not suffice. The gallery's seductive New Forest setting could easily become a snare, reinforcing wearily predictable attitudes rather than fostering a spirit of discovery. Precisely because the area is so prized by conservationists, it encourages defensive notions about rural life. The countryside is regarded primarily as a place to be protected from the myriad dangers posed by pollution, urban sprawl and all the other proliferating ills of a society too often carelessly destructive. The New Forest is now, mercifully, well-butressed by law, local loyalty and ecological awareness against the threat of further encroachment. But the preservation of such historic territory should not mean that ArtSway feels bound to consider its surroundings in an ossified way. On the contrary: the gallery should be dedicated to nurturing the vitality of visual arts in the New Forest at their most unpredictable. No good will come from perpetuating lazy, sentimental images of the landscape. The emphasis should always be firmly placed on the living, changing dynamic of nature, just as Turner himself did when he produced his revolutionary work in the early decades of the nineteenth century.

He would surely have understood why ArtSway is commencing its ambitious project with a series of video installations. Although such a technological resource was undreamed-of in Turner's day, he always remained open to innovation. His audacious temperament led him to experiment with new ways of experiencing the forces around him, a priority epitomised by his celebrated desire to lash himself to a ship's mast and thereby become exposed to the full fury of a storm at sea.

The urge to push experience to the limits, and find new ways of sharing it with the viewer, likewise informs Tony Sinden's decision to set up his equipment beside a Teesdale waterfall. The images he has recorded, and then edited with concentrated finesse, confront us with the energy of nature in a work at once exhilarating and disorientating. Far from viewing his turbulent subject at a cautious distance, Sinden leads us into an ever more direct encounter with the fury of the High Force Falls. Having established their identity at the outset, he proceeds to immerse us in the water's overwhelming thrust. We find ourselves so caught up in the vortex that it is no longer possible to decide on our position. Are we inside the flow looking out, or vice versa?

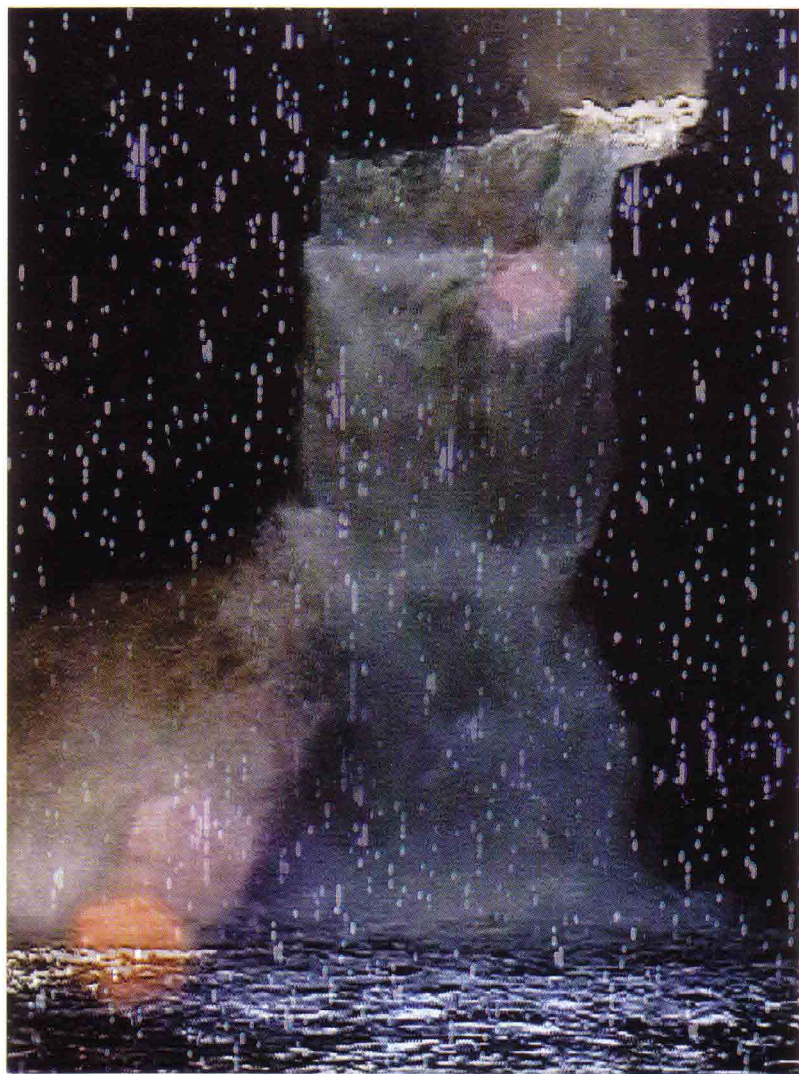
Sinden does not tell us, but he leaves no doubt about the water's sheer unstoppable. Seen close-to, its lines of force resolve themselves into wiry patterns, vigorous enough to explain why he feels a kinship with the lean, simplifying severity of Hokusai. Sinden has long been committed to the quintessentially contemporary medium of video; but the influence exerted by the Japanese master's great woodblock sequence, *Going the Round of the Waterfalls in All Provinces*, shows how open he remains to art from the past. Indeed, Sinden's *High Force: descending* also owes a fundamental debt to the British painters and watercolourists who defined and then revelled in the Sublimity of similar scenes during the Romantic period.

But that does not mean he is a backward-looking artist, timidly purveying a nostalgic vision of landscape. After all, his exhibition is called *Deluge* and assails us, relentlessly, with a cataclysm of images and sounds alike. At its most tumultuous, Sinden's installation is immensely demanding to watch. We feel dazed by its impact, and almost incapable of following the water's irrepressible momentum with our eyes. *High Force: descending* is at the furthest conceivable remove from landscape art at its most soporific. Sinden presents us with an invigorating vision. It challenges anyone who basks in cosy preconceptions about nature to put them to the test. Direct, accessible and ultimately mesmerising, *Deluge* deserves to be seen by the broadest possible audience, from the New Forest and far beyond. It will inspire viewers to return to the gallery, and find out how other artists in the ArtSway programme interpret the multifaceted character of the landscape. Ultimately, though, it helps us to realise that, as Henry David Thoreau wrote in his *Journal* at the end of August 1856, 'it is in vain to dream of a wildness distant from ourselves. There is none such. It is the bog in our brains and bowels, the primitive vigor of Nature in us, that inspires that dream.'

April 1998



HIGH FORCE I



HIGH FORCE: DESCENDING

HELEN WATERS

In 1917 Marcel Duchamp shocked society by attempting to exhibit a urinal in an art gallery. The piece, entitled *Fountain*, was intended to challenge the viewer into questioning the criteria of a 'work of art'. By taking an everyday object and placing it in a different context, he was highlighting the élitism evident in the art world at the time. By appropriating a simple urinal, putting his signature on it, and situating it in a gallery, he was attacking the institution of art and all that it stood for. The effort of avant-garde artists like Duchamp was not to isolate themselves, but to reintegrate themselves and their art into life. Duchamp's series of 'ready-mades' have had a resounding effect on artists and art historians alike in their exploration of art, its theories and its boundaries; if indeed such limits exist.

In 1975 Tony Sinden, together with David Hall, exhibited a piece in the Serpentine Gallery, London. The work consisted of and was entitled *101 TV Sets*. Sinden and Hall were challenging convention, in true Duchampesque style, by placing television sets - and their programmes - in an art gallery. Football matches and television soap operas of the day ran alongside each other in a cacophony of contemporary creativity, under the banner of Art. Throughout the twentieth century it seems that the traditional concept of 'high' art has been consistently deconstructed - from Duchamp's *Urinal* and Carl Andre's *Bricks* to the deformed mannequins of Jake & Dinos Chapman and Damien Hirst's art of exhibiting dead animals - leaving the general public more than a little bemused.

The advent of film, video and new technologies has led artists to abandon their brush and palette and seek to express themselves and their ideas in different ways. Video Installation is now an accepted 'genre' within academia and yet when it first arose it was seen as the way to open up art and its high-brow agenda. In his essay *Video Installation, Conceptual Practice and New Media in the 1990s*, Charles Esche discussed the early hopes that 'video might permit the "democratisation" of the art experience through ... the involvement of a wider audience'.<sup>2</sup> He proclaimed the fact that it has lost its early radical potential precisely because it has now reached the heart of the academic establishment. Whether or not one agrees with his remarks, it does seem to be the case that, once a work of art has been 'institutionalised' within the confines of an art gallery, it changes intrinsically in meaning and value. Video, after all, is a medium well-known to most of contemporary, western society; it is a form of well-loved entertainment and a means of cheap and easy reproduction. Why is it then that, when placed in a gallery context, it often becomes inaccessible and incomprehensible? Through his work, Tony Sinden attempts to lead us back to the fundamental questions about art and its role in society; the questions that Duchamp left unanswered; the questions that we all ought to be asking ourselves, within the art gallery and outside - in what we define as the 'real' world.

In his presentation of natural phenomena using technology, Tony Sinden's art might appear solely to be made up of simple and beautiful associations. However, if a little time is spent with the work, much deeper resonances will be discovered. His





why, more often than not, the spectator is able to view the back of Sinden's images, as well as the front, and why the technology, the 'raw' material is not hidden away. Indeed, with the piece *Terrestrial Stream*, it is the presence and position of technology in the form of the monitors which actually deny the illusion. The image is partially obscured by the slate (a natural material whose form has been shaped by heat, wind and water over millions of years) and revealed only by the repositioning of the spectator. Thus the viewer is encouraged to take an active role in the work of art and its interpretation. The monitor offers us the image, first of the fading blue light and then of the water, and we can hear water all around us, yet the replication of the monitors distances us from the illusion that we are surrounded, for we can surround them. It is this fusion of sound and vision, light and darkness which brings about a synaesthetic encounter. Nevertheless we are constantly reminded that Sinden's work is more than an art of seduction; the technology is ever present and forms part of the experience.

Sinden offers us a holistic, sensory experience of the work which he then partially deconstructs. Within the work itself he uses the video 'noise', the blank signal, the raw sound and sight of the 'empty' screen as a distancing technique. He calls it his 'interval': a chance for the audience to move back from the piece and reflect; a reminder to them of the material thing that they are looking at. Like the process of cleaning a painting, the restorer has stripped back layer after layer of the touched up paint and varnish to reveal the bare material of the original canvas beneath. However, the video noise is more than an interlude. Its sound blends subtly with the roar of the waterfall and the movement of the water on screen is merged with the lines of the 'blank' signal. In fact, the editing renders the interval an integral and very necessary part of the work. The realisation that we are watching a projected image - a 'blank' screen - reminds us that the waterfall too is just an illusion: another projected image which has the ability to stimulate and surround our senses.

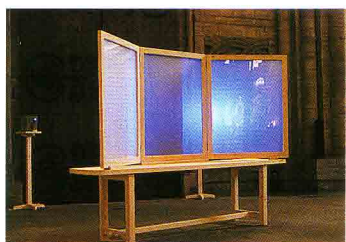
In *High Force: descending* music is used to similar effect. Instead of the noise of the shopping 'galleries' we hear an almost ambient sound which helps to distance the image from reality, from the urgency of the activity and slow it down. We become, instead, almost hypnotised by the movement of the escalator, the contra-flow of the waterfall that is *human* deluge. If the spectator spends enough time with the work, s/he can begin to see these patterns of movement repeated away from the gallery - in everyday life - in both natural and urban situations. The people on the escalators are being watched by the hidden eye of the camera and by the spectators in the gallery who, in turn, become the spectated. This human element, present within an otherwise natural content, invites us to consider the tensions between the natural and the man-made (of which Sinden is ever mindful in his choice of representing natural imagery with overtly man-made media). *High Force: descending* also explores the relationship between two and three dimensions (in the projection of a 3D image



Tony Sinden, Lulu Quinn  
& Stan Steele

Fallow Field  
Royal Festival Hall 1994

Approaching The Dissolve  
Durham Cathedral 1995





Deceleration/Desire  
Housewatch event  
London 1992

Previous work by Tony Sinden  
and members of Housewatch<sup>5</sup>



Pedestrian Colours  
Housewatch event  
London 1986

onto a 2D screen) and the oppositions of transparency and solidity. Sinden chooses to project *High-Force: descending* onto material which can move and which can be seen through. The effect is similar to the illusion of something which is solid melting into air.

A similar effect can be discovered with the piece *Fountainhead*, where a triptych of projections presents us with three images which, again, we can view from either side. On closer inspection, however, these three images are actually *mirror-images* of each other. The camera is viewing the waterfall from a variety of confusing angles which disorients the spectator. The result is an almost abstract, dizzying piece of work which defies gravity and challenges our expectations, our viewing positions and perspectives of the world. Yet there is also a symmetry in the piece which reminds us of the symmetry in nature. The inclusion of the garden sprinkler momentarily stops the flow and redirects the water, but this time nature is not in control. Sinden again seems to be highlighting here the clashing forces of man and nature in his use of an implement, which has recently come to represent the waste of our most precious natural resource.

Duchamp and Sinden differ slightly in their views with regards to the actual development of the work of art. Whereas Duchamp privileged the thinking over the making of the work, the ideology behind Sinden's art means that the 'making', the actual installation of the work is fundamental to his art and its significance. For Sinden, the gallery or site is the starting point. The space where the work is installed is, in a way, where the real creativity happens. This is what is meant by site specificity: that each work is made in response to a site, to some extent within that site, which once taken down can never be repeated in the same way again. The installation creates a moment, a fleeting experience which is the fusion of the work with the space and the audience. This is necessarily momentary and finite in nature. Unlike the restorer, Sinden is not concerned with prolonging the life of his art, rather he celebrates its transience. In this regard he advocates the beliefs of Duchamp who also claimed that a work of art is - and should be - a thing of impermanence. In a society where people are increasingly pressurised into achieving the impossible, where time really is 'of the essence', Sinden presents to us a world in slow motion where we can take respite, relax and meditate. That is not to say that the images he portrays are slowed down; it is the time he takes and asks us to take in contemplating them which requires a temporary renunciation of speed.

And yet for Sinden this process does not necessarily have to take place within an institution such as an art gallery; much of his work is exhibited outside, in different kinds of environment. In this way he is upholding the avant-garde ideal of reintegrating art into society, by removing preconceptions about what art should be and where it should be found, allowing people to encounter his work in unexpected everyday situations. *Deluge: in audio-visual space* is an exhibition in an art gallery, but much more, it is an installation in a space - a space which people visit

with certain expectations. In challenging these expectations he invites us to think about the way we view art and the world. He hopes that when we leave the piece we will take away something which will have greater resonance in the future, an experience which will change the way we see landscape. Sinden's work, therefore, goes some way to achieving the democratisation of the art experience, for he encourages an individual response within a temporary space and a changing world which is of equal value to everyone and which, in contrast to the values of our modern-day consumer society, might just prevail. In this sense, he may be called a true restorer.

April 1998

- 1 This text is based in part on an interview with the artist, 26 March, 1998. At the time of writing work was in progress.
- 2 Charles Esche, 'Video Installation, Conceptual Practice and New Media in the 1990s' in Julia Knight (ed), *Diverse Practices: a Critical Reader on British Video Art*, 1996, p196.
- 3 Peter Burger: *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. by Michael Shaw, 1984, p50.
- 4 For further reading on the impact of film on the spectator see Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in *Illuminations*, 1970.
- 5 The Housewatch Collective is a group of artists who have worked on collaborative projects since 1985.

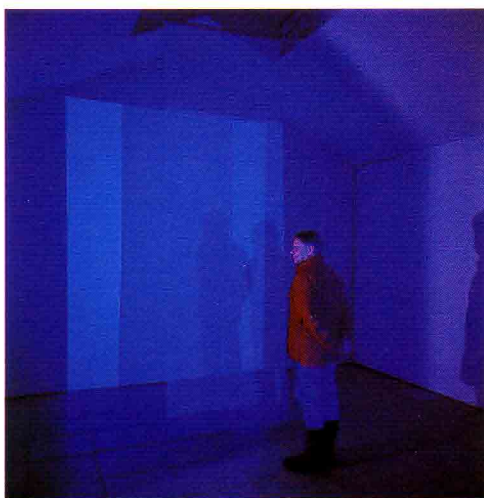
#### FURTHER READING

Michael O'Pray (ed), *The British Avant-Garde Film 1926 - 1995*, 1996

David Curtis (ed), *A Directory of British Film and Video Artists*, 1996.

Arts Council of Great Britain Catalogue, *Film as Film: Formal Experiments in Film 1910 - 1975*, 1979.

Tony Sinden at ArtSway, 1998



# DELUGE: IN AUDIO-VISUAL SPACE

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*The artist would like to thank Andy Moss of Picture This for his production assistance, and Lulu Quinn for assisting in the digital processing.*

ARTSWAY, established in January 1997, is the new venue for contemporary visual arts in the New Forest. It comprises purpose-built galleries, education studio, outdoor sculpture areas and artists' studios in the grounds. Within its first year it has established a rich and varied programme of exhibitions of the highest quality accompanied by an education programme for all.

ArtSway operates a highly effective and skilful technical support team of volunteers who assist and advise in the installation of exhibitions, and to whom we are indebted.

Linda Fredericks	Director
Hannah Bilton	Administrator
Helen Waters	Exhibition/Education Officer

RICHARD CORK is chief art critic of *The Times*. Between 1992 and 1995 he was the Henry Moore Fellow at the Courtauld Institute of Art. Chair of the Visual Arts Panel at the Arts Council, he was Slade Professor of Fine Art at Cambridge University, 1989 - 1990. He has organised many exhibitions, including major surveys at the Tate Gallery, the Hayward Gallery and the Royal Academy. His books include a study of *Vorticism* (1976), *Art Beyond the Gallery* (1985), *David Bomberg* (1987) and *A Bitter Truth: Avant-Garde Art and the Great War* (1994). He opened ArtSway on 31 January, 1997.

HELEN WATERS joined ArtSway in December 1997 as the gallery's Exhibition/Education Officer. She came directly from the Courtauld Institute of Art, London, where she completed her MA in Art Museum Studies, culminating in a dissertation entitled *Structuring Experience and Release: the Football Museum as a Site of Secular Pilgrimage*.

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