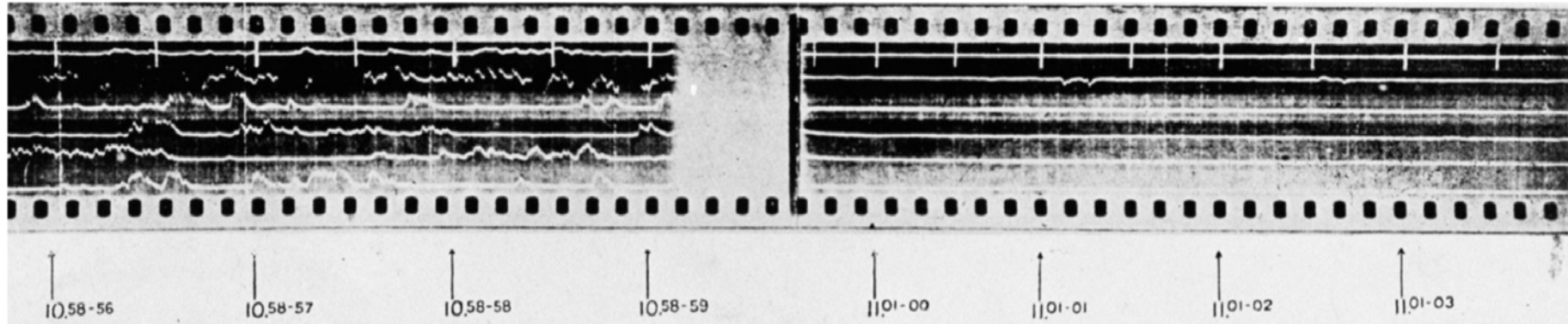# Melancholy Artefacts

A Music Theatre piece
Devising, direction Tim Hopkins
Music, Judith Weir
Lighting, Wolfgang Goebbel
Sound, Danny Bright

For
A - live performance
B - mediated / mixed reality format

6 musicians
1 actor

C - online 360 film short version

10,58-56   10,58-57   10,58-58   10,58-59   11,01-00   11,01-01   11,01-02   11,01-03

Melancholy Artefacts focuses on three objects created out of desperate ingenuity during the last months of WW1.
The piece has no characters, only evocations of the objects themselves, performed by musicians,
appearing as unnamed figures.

The Objects:

1 (above) A strip of cine-film, part of a system for recording the intensity of artillery bombardment. This used
microphones to pick up sound, translating it into electrical signals which were recorded on film by a stylus writing
with a beam of light.   Active on 11th November 1918, the artefact records the last three seconds before 10:59, and
the first three seconds after 11:01. But the critical two minutes, bridging war and peace, are unrecorded, are missing.

2 Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR). A forerunner of automatic weapons (e.g. the AK47)
it contributed to mobile tactics, aiming to overcome the stalemate of trench warfare at the war's end.

3 A film shot from a French observation balloon showing an infantry attack. Groups of pale dots (soldiers)
move from crater to crater, each surge of men leaving a few dots behind, until, as the action has crossed
from one side of the frame to the other, most dots have stopped moving.

These historic objects have technological kinship with our own times

Performance reflects this using techniques from now:
VR, 360 video, designed audio, mobile performance, digital processing
The piece observes the past through the present.
The audience become like battlefield observers, (of then, and now).

The performance work is presented in two formats:

(A) a live music and media theatre performance (season)
(B) a mobile, mixed reality experience (tour).

This addresses different kinds of audience at different times,
- contemporary theatre and music festival audiences for A
- additional diverse audiences for B including media theatre, heritage, gaming, and chance encounter

This dual aspect also relates to themes of then and now, experience and recall,
and the missing space between.

A third, shorter version derived from the material is released as a 360 video (C)

Note on Themes

*The modern battlefield is like a huge, sleeping machine
with innumerable eyes and ears and arms, lying hidden
and inactive, ambushed for the one moment on which all depends*

*Then from some hole in the ground a single red light ascends
in fiery prelude. A thousand guns roar out on the instant,
and at a touch, driven by innumerable levers, the work of
annihilation goes pounding on its way.*

Ernst Junger   Storm of Steel 1920

*In November came the Armistice....[...]
The news sent me out walking alone along the dyke
above the marshes of Rhuddlan (an ancient battlefield, the
Flodden of Wales) cursing and sobbing and thinking
of the dead.*

Robert Graves   Goodbye to All That 1929

There are two forces pushing this piece in the direction its taking -
a drive to tell the story of objects and experience - and the impossibility of really telling it.

Junger's enthralled description speaks of the war's technological
landscape of menace and energy, both figuratively and literally as a machine.

Graves' spare recollection of his reaction at the moment of Armistice
suggests isolation and exhaustion - disrupted, overloaded perception.

All three artefacts in this piece systematised violence, and distanced the operator.
But the photo strip, recording the last moments of war and first of peace,
has a particular impact, and frames this project.

This is because it denotes a momentous event, and yet interrupts itself
- as if switched off at the critical moment.
The unrecorded time is not all peace, but the war/peace threshold
- a coincidental parenthesis, an out of phase anticipation of our 2 minutes silence.

An image of missing sound, missing time, of effaced perception.

Graves' words suggest the impossibility of processing his experience in the moment.
But its also impossible for us to recall the experience too.
Then, emotionally un-processable. Now, practically unrepeatable.

Accordingly, this piece cannot recall the real experience, but focusses on
the disrupted perception, striving to reconnect (or avoid) reality.

Images - auditory and visual - suggest missing sound,missing time, missing actions
trying to channel each other -
as literal artefacts and experiences bumping into hallucinatory versions of themselves

It suggests a gulf, or bridge, or line between objects from the moment,
our co-existence with their descendants, and the missing.

Note on Music and Sound

The film strip is a visual record of sound - in effect a score.
Our use of sound and music reflects this centrality of the auditory, both to all three artefacts and the hinterlands of experience, and aftermath, they imply.

All performers are classical musicians (interpreters of sound) They have other abilities and tasks in the piece, e.g. video capture, but their musical artistry is prominent.

Sound images suggest various aspects - effaced and recovered memory, struggles to reconnect in a damaged auditory world –
through the presence of banal objects, technological hardware, and musical instruments - sometimes used like 'noise-exploring' tools,
sometimes in their more familiar musical roles.
Images are like memory-divining tools, stuttering into action - then running with a life of their own - then forgotten themselves.

Three kinds of sound interweave
i) incidental sound - created by action, and interaction with audio technologies (media and instruments)
ii) deliberately pre-composed sound (including recorded and live created sound)
iii) overtly musical sound

When overt 'music' is present, it usually dominates - becomes a vessel for a particular kind of concentrated space.
Other sound sometimes anticipates, feeds or depends on it – then afterwards notes (laments?) its absence.

How

a) pre-composed material for each instrument created by composerJudith Weir.   The process responds to aspects of the objects, physical and thematic.
Includes music for virtuosic abilities, and frameworks for further development by players
b) this is explored by the musicians in intitial rehearsal / workshops. These also explore theatrical aspects - performance, practical media operations.
Judith responds, further shaping the music
c) musical 'score' evolves to a version for final rehearsals.

Other parts of sound world evolve in tandem - responsive to the same artistic framework, facilitated by a sound artist, looking at how sound is produced
and in performance (A), and captured and represented andfor the mediated version (B).
a) pre-devised material, including prototype hardware technology, mediation models (such as mics, strips) and content, made by Danny
b) artistic, practical interaction with performers in context - feeding back, shaping.
c) further structuring and editing process towards a final sound 'design'

After A, captured music and sound are translated into a design for the mobile presentation (B)

Note on Storyboard

A and B are different and seperate experiences, presented perhaps weeks or months apart.

B is based on a multi-media capture of A. Both experiences are artistically autonomous, but also functions of each other.
B is like a memory of A, or the future of A

Audiences can see either, or both.

A - live performances in non theatre site
   (1 or 2 weeks, or parts thereof)

B - Mediated experience in 40' container*
(several presentations per day at location,
touring to different locations -
expected and unexpected, public spaces,
cultural and heritage spaces,
service stations, supermarket car parks,
schools, drill halls)

A - 45 mins / 1hr +
(not everything that happens in A will be translated into B)

B - 30 mins.

200-1200 per show

16 per show x 6 per day x 40 days +

A

A: live performance space

- A non-theatre space (shed; hanger; drill hall)
- arranged in traverse format
- performance area approx 6m × 12m (could be smaller)
- 'open' at one end for truck/container
- to be rigged/fitted out as necessary
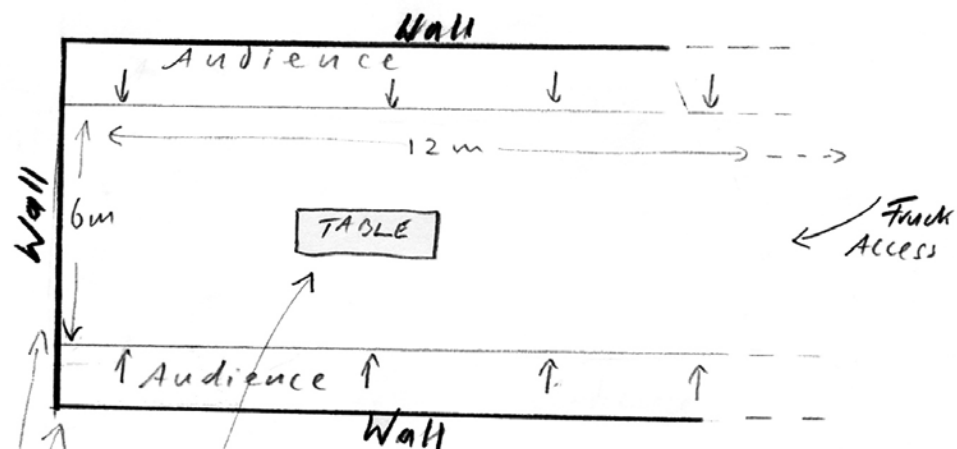
a table resembling a miniarised battlefield with a fabric surface. (2m × 1m)

- Walls behind audiences are rough projection surfaces
- Wall at 'closed' end of space is projection surface

B

B: Mediated space (40' 'High cube' container; drill hall; other?)

mirrored internal surfaces (veiled or camouflaged at start)

length internal 12m

Width internal 2350mm

Hidden chamber

Doors

Black Sandbag wall (removable)

audience (seated) at table. 16 people?

each place has screen (monitor or laptop)

mouse

mysterious box (containing props and VR set)

VR Headset in here

2D screen

← 30cm →

each place has tactile 'interface' (¼" magnetic strips of audio tape)

A

1 Lorrry enters - 'beep, beep, vehicle reversing '
   6 Performers emerge from lorry with cameras

2 Approach table - a miniature ruined landscape of
   cloth, wire (see appendix). Camera image projected onto
   spaces above audience (they are in 'middle' of landscape...)

3 Lucifer Matchbox on table. We hear tick tick tick of a watch,
   A hand stops it at 10:59:00

4 a sleeping figure awakes, exhumes ammo box, pulls
   film strip through its 'mouth', oberved with cam...
   our re-creation of **Artefact 1,** its surface reveals a text 'explaining'
   what it is,.. but another voice is visible, trying to get through...
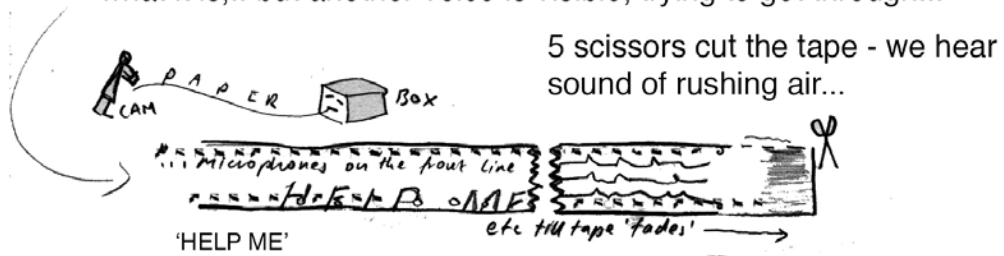
   5 scissors cut the tape - we hear
   sound of rushing air...

'HELP ME'

21/8.2

B

Foreground	Background	Props
1 2d viewer (laptop/monitor) shows camera view from A - interior of lorry - (i.e.'where we are now')	Interior is veiled or camouflgaed	BOX containing Watch VR Headset Scissors
	Lucifer brand matchbox	
	'Real-time' visualised data (e.g. transport network?) projected onto black sandbags at end wall (see appendix)	
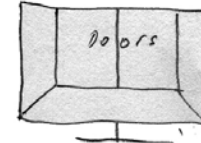
2 Lorry doors open revealing space and table etc at A
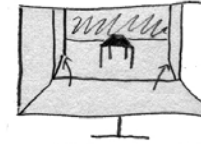
3 A voice says 'tick tick tick' - (sounds translated as words)
   We see the matchbox, watch being
   stopped at 10:59;00 . Silence
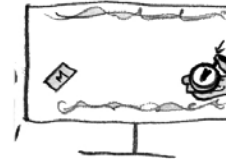
4 We read the **film strip**, **(Artefact 1)**, the mysterious text, its
   visuality ...
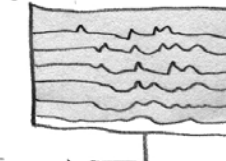
5 until the strip is cut on camera by the scissors.

   We hear the sound of air   Screen instructs us to 'open the box...'
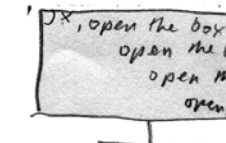
A

1 Emerging from lorry, 360 Cam follows journey of
small vitrine containing bullet as it is carried around the space
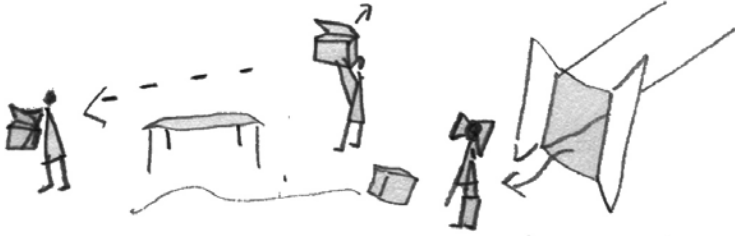
Performer opens and closes vitrine like a mouth -
sound of air, crackling comms, static - ventriloquising
a geigercounter-like quality. 2-D cams observe this also

2 BAR **(Artefact 2)** is exhumed from soil - laid next to
a BW stick like an archeology survey pole

6 MICS descend from above (Historic designs)
sound of activities heard by microphones relayed
as if 'sound showers' around/above audience

In passing, performer re-starts the watch,
tick tick tick

Another figure sleeps

B
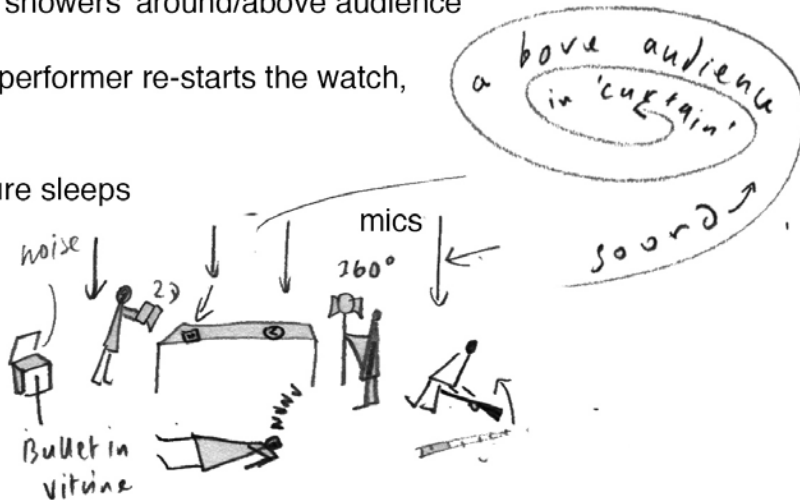
Foreground	Background	Props
Audience put on VR specs as instructed on screen	Stet	As box opened, clatter of sound

= = = = = = = = = = = = =
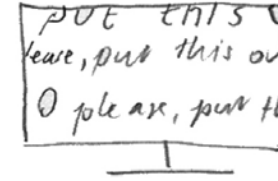
Audience into **VR # 1**

VR Specs taken out

1 Audience see view as from 360 Cam in A

2 The watch is restarted
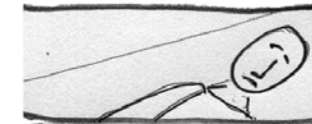
sleeping figure wakes
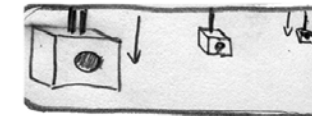
historic mics descend

A

1 BAR is prepared to 'fire' , carried into lorry
   360 cam remains outside
   Bullet vitrine is on table
   Watch operator standby
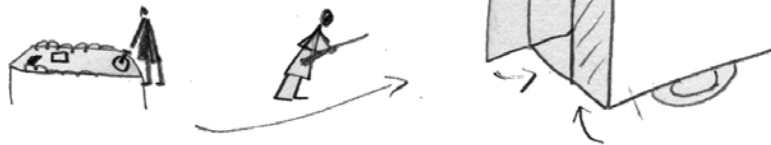
2 BAR is fired ('fired'?) inside lorry
   Loud Bang
   Watch stops at 10:59:20

3 4 performers put on cardboard VR specs (as if 'sightless'
   without them) They describe arc in the air with their arms
   as if they can see something audience cannot

4 6 mics 'sway'   as if with force of sound waves

5 Far wall 'registers' sound of BAR *for just an instant* as if
   sound has travelled and 'printed' across space
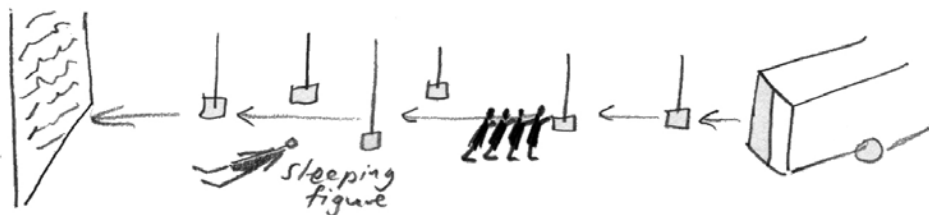
6 4 performers remove specs, make 'probing' **instrumental sounds**,
   and 're-create' what they 'saw' - a Nevinson-like exploded contour

21/8.4

B
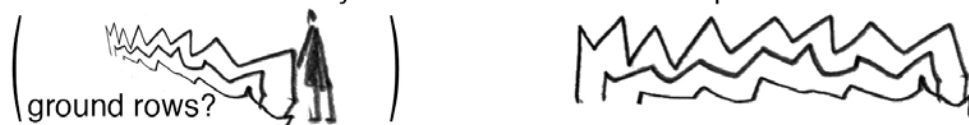
	Foreground	Background	Props
1	360 view continues	Stet	Box closed
			Film strip prepared
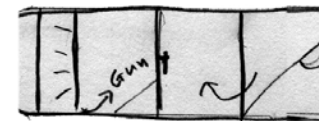
BAR into container

2
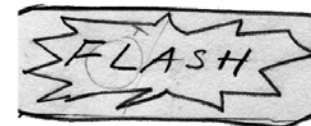
+ wave of sound inside B from doors to other end
View roams around A - e.g. stopped watch
                              at 10:59:20

1:1 BAR in vitrine
set on table
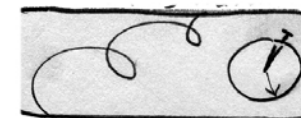
3 Performers put VR specs on....
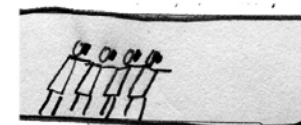
Screen crackles - as if their perception interrupted,
or denied us.   Text appears, asking questions ...
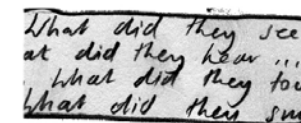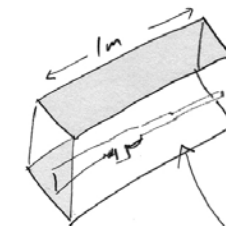

text dissolves...sound of questions
spoken ...'What did they see...? etc.

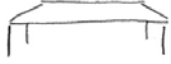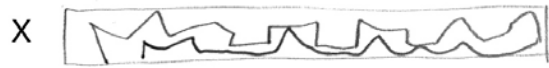Audience EXIT **VR # 1**   'Real-time' visualised
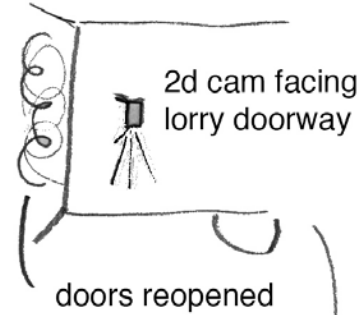   data OFF

=====================

A

1   As this is built we hear **music -** as if what sleeping figure hears

2d cam facing lorry doorway

doors reopened

cam image projected above audience X

X

X

2   Cam brought on tripod into space to view 'blast' structure being constructed
    ... but image at X gradually fades, layer by layer, as if media not capable, or channelling another dimension (use pre-recorded clips) **music fades**

3   Figure emerges from Lorry, banging a small dinner gong, but we hear nothing. - *the purgatory of the missing...?*
    Sleeping figure stirs and wakes

21/8.5

B

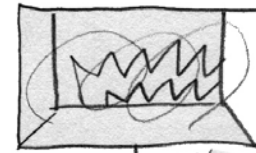| Foreground	Background	Props

1   Audience back to 2D
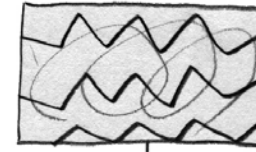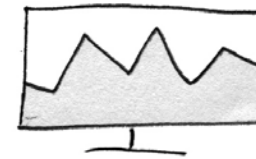

Music as A
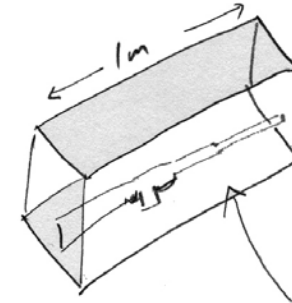
1:1 BAR in vitrine on table

2   zoom out shows cam is inside lorry looking out

film strip roll at every place

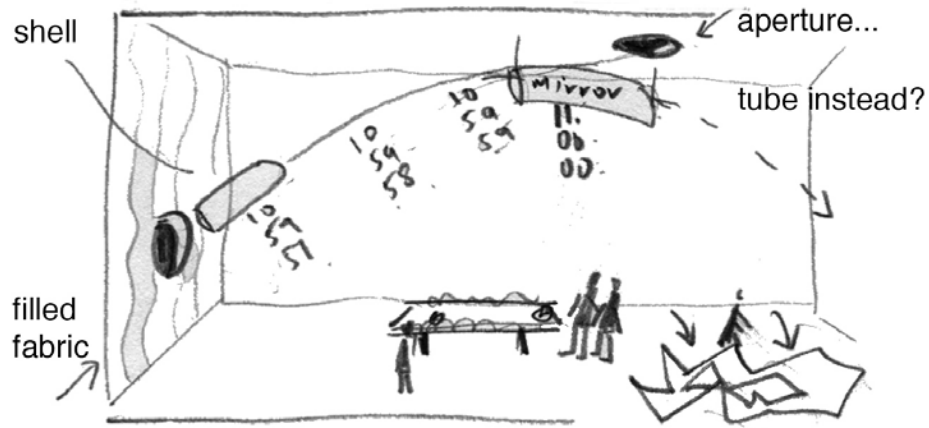'Lucifer' matchbox slid open to reveal tiny sleeping figure

3   Image fades (as A)

4   POV Cam as exits lorry and observes muddy figure with gong

(as if emerging from the earth, escaping, *from what, to what ....?*)

A

1 **Space reveals new aspects of itself** *(images of suspended or 'wounded' time)*

shell

aperture...

tube instead?

filled fabric

- shell comes slowly through hole and 'flies'
slowly in an arc - calibrated as if it shows time passing
...towards aperture in ceiling? or 'vanishes' into a mirrored tube?
- as if 'it disappears' for '2 minutes' (as slow as we wish.)

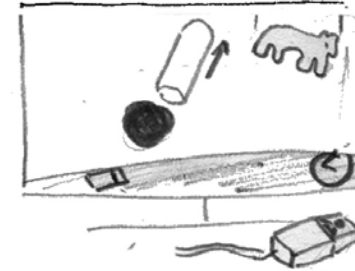2   As shell goes vanishes, creatures and objects from the constellations
slowly descend

B
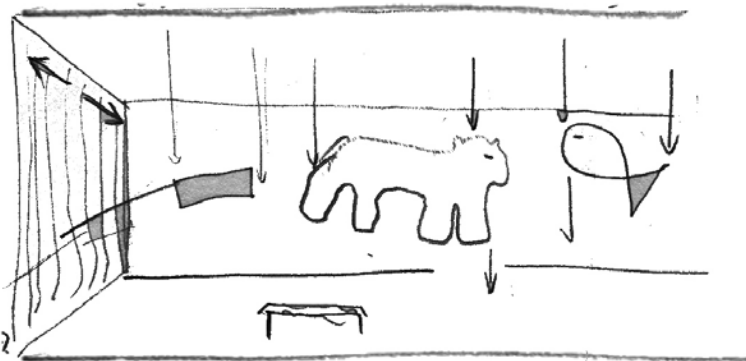
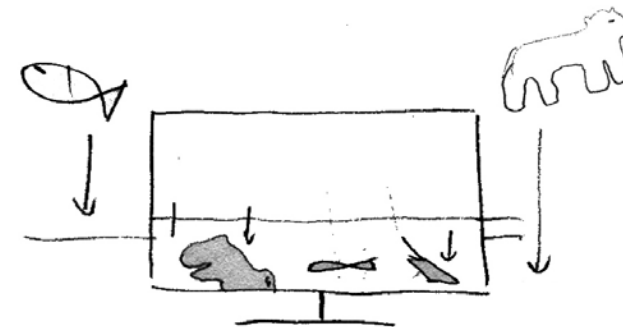Foreground   Background   Props

1   *'open thebox, o open the box'*
pleads a voice - audience hear ticking watch

2   audience see events from A:
shell flies, constellations fall
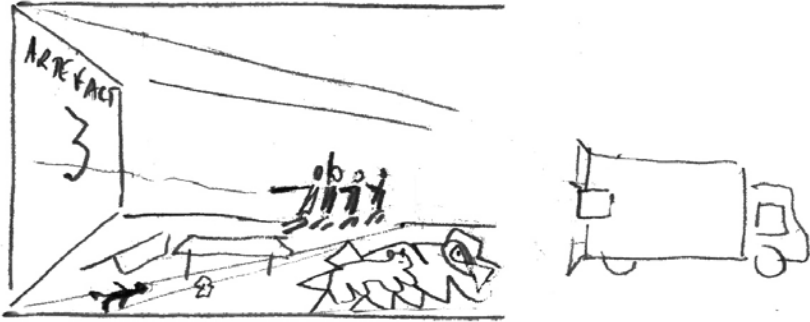
3   miniature constellations also descend in container

ticking stops

A

1   Projection of **Artefact 3**   (historical clip aerial view of battle)
      as if from lorry

      Performers look on
      have instruments
      but *can make no sound*

      Stillness.   Silence

2   Sleeping figure moves towards table on all fours -
      pulls on a feature-effacing mask
      Other Performers move to table's edge
      Their fingers touch magnetic 1/4" tape strips on the table's edge -
      table is an 'instrument' - actions converge sounds and
      beams of light on the mini battlefield table - as if a fearful duty.
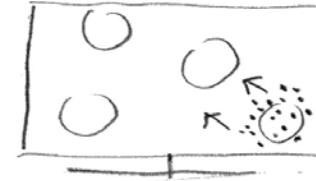   Cameras observe

B

Foreground	Background	Props
1 **Artefact 3** (aerial clip of battle)	Also projected onto black sandbags	
	Silence	

As clip ends, shot out to show POV *mute instruments*
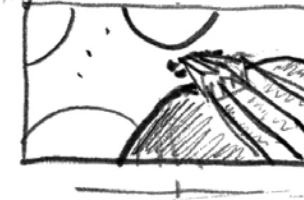
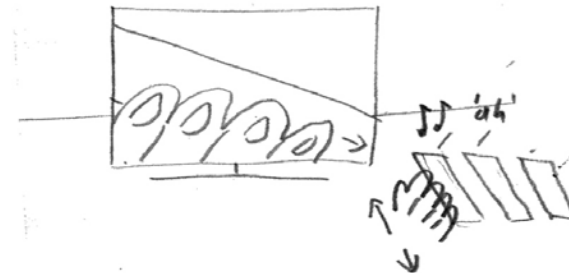| Foreground	Background	Props
2 Screen follows action of A. hands encourage audience to use their strips	Space responds to audience interaction	1/4" mag tape strips

historic, garbled verbatim
voices, sounds and lights interact

A

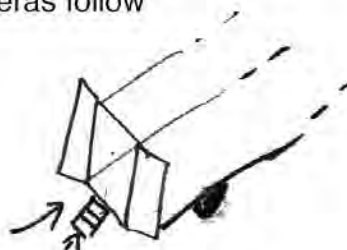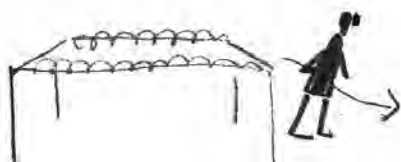1   Sleeping figure puts on VR set and goes under the table

2   Figure comes through table - performers cluster round - sounds from table devices joined by their live playing -

Music - urging the figure on

3   Figure leaves table and goes to lorry - cameras follow

B

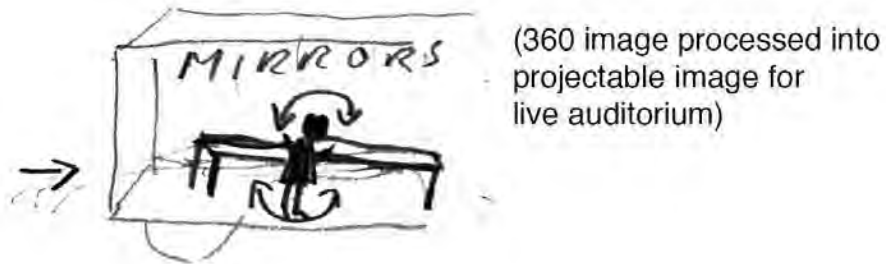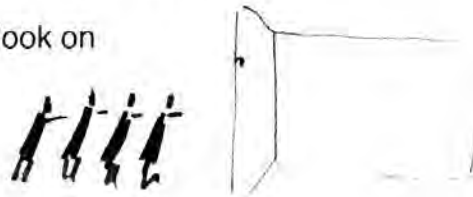| Foreground	Background	Props
1 Audience put on VR specs		
====================		
Audience into **VR # 2 Interactive**	Prepare mirrored background surface	Audience use:
Imagery, colour, sound interact with audience motion (head and hand) instrumental **music** from A dominates	Actor (soldier) enters secretly	VR headsets
2		tactile strips
Figure through table		
As Cam from A, following figure, then CUT to figure's POV - as if we see what he sees		
3 "**11:00:00**" whispers a voice ...		

A

1   POV figure reveals that inside lorry is MIRRORED
     A table (bit like B) has been set up

(360 image processed into
projectable image for
live auditorium)

2   **Performer lies on table and removes 'VR Headset'**

     A Climactic Musical event - a VISION

3   Other performers look on

B

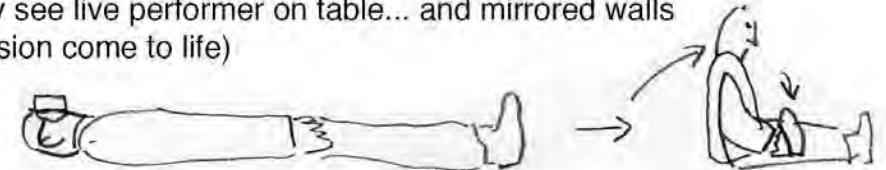|	Foreground	Background	Props
1	**Audience still in Specs** 360 of performer from A - seems to be entering a container (like 'where we are') But now surface in VR world is MIRRORRED	Prepare mirrored background surface **[Performer lies on table]**	On table army blanket, wire arrangement like table in A

2   **Screen performer removes headset.**
     Audience remove headset.

3   **A Climactic Musical event - a VISION**
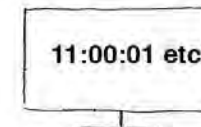
     Audience EXIT **VR # 2**
     ====================

4   They see live performer on table... and mirrored walls
     (a vision come to life)

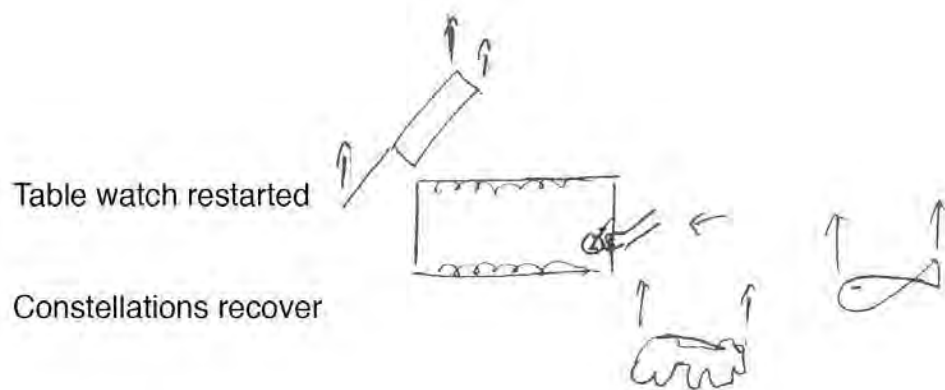Takes head set off

'Is this the purgatory of the missing?'

11:00:01 etc   Screens show time passing

A

1   minute of Music ends

2   Performer exits lorry

Darkness

3   Silence

Table watch restarted

Constellations recover
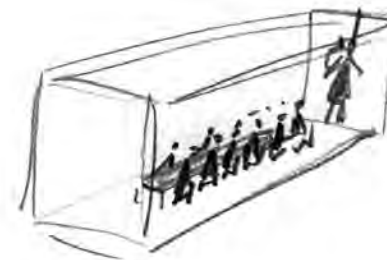
21/8.10

B

Foreground	Background	Props

1   Performer descends from table and moves
    towards door as if to go.
    Faces audience, encourages them to
    put on VR specs

Audience enter **VR # 3**
=================

2   Performer POV
    as if opening door

Blackness / Greyness ?

performer hides

Then   Mirrored surfaces   Watches started
'Tick tick tick...'   veiled once   by hidden hands
                         again

                         Blanket and wire
                         on table remain

A

1 Performers gather

Infiniity of mirrored lorry interior projected above
Mini battlefield has gone
Mapping of battlefied casualties
in its place (see appendix)

Performers tear this up
But another is laid in its place

Cams observe casualty map

Players make music and interact with suspended mics

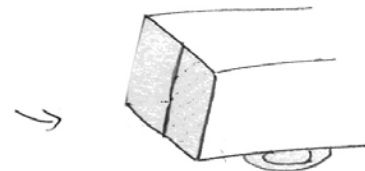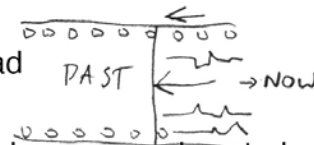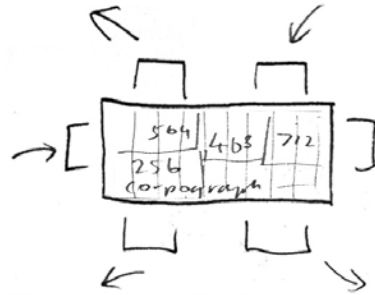2 Projection shows 'photostrip' live-created by this music-making

As B, as if moving image is tracing line from Then to Now
and slipping behind Then

Music/sound as if film passes playhead
at the moment of **loss**

3 Projections above audience of current drone ground control
capsules (like our lorry)
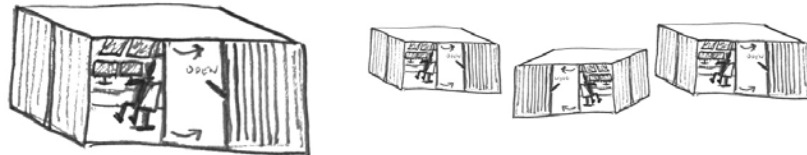
4 Lorry leaves space .
END

21/8.11

B

	Foreground	Background	Props
1	360 of container wall		

| 2 | Audience out of **VR#3** | | |

==========================

3	Performer has gone		Match box gone.
	Mirrored surface veiled		Filmstrip remains
	2d Screen shows hand drawn		
	survey of casualty figures in		
	(pencil on printed map)		

4 projection
as if moving image slipping 'behind'
fixed image - tracing time from
'then' to 'now'.
or like moving clip is sliding out through
slot in container side, out into the present...
music/sound as if function of 'playback'
and split is playhead

5 END

Appendix 1

Reference for table
landscape

No Man's Land (2017)
by Margaret Proudfoot

Army Blanket
Barbed Wire
Wire blanket stitching

No Man's Land (Margaret Proudfoot 2017)

No Man's Land [Detail] (Margaret Proudfoot 2017)
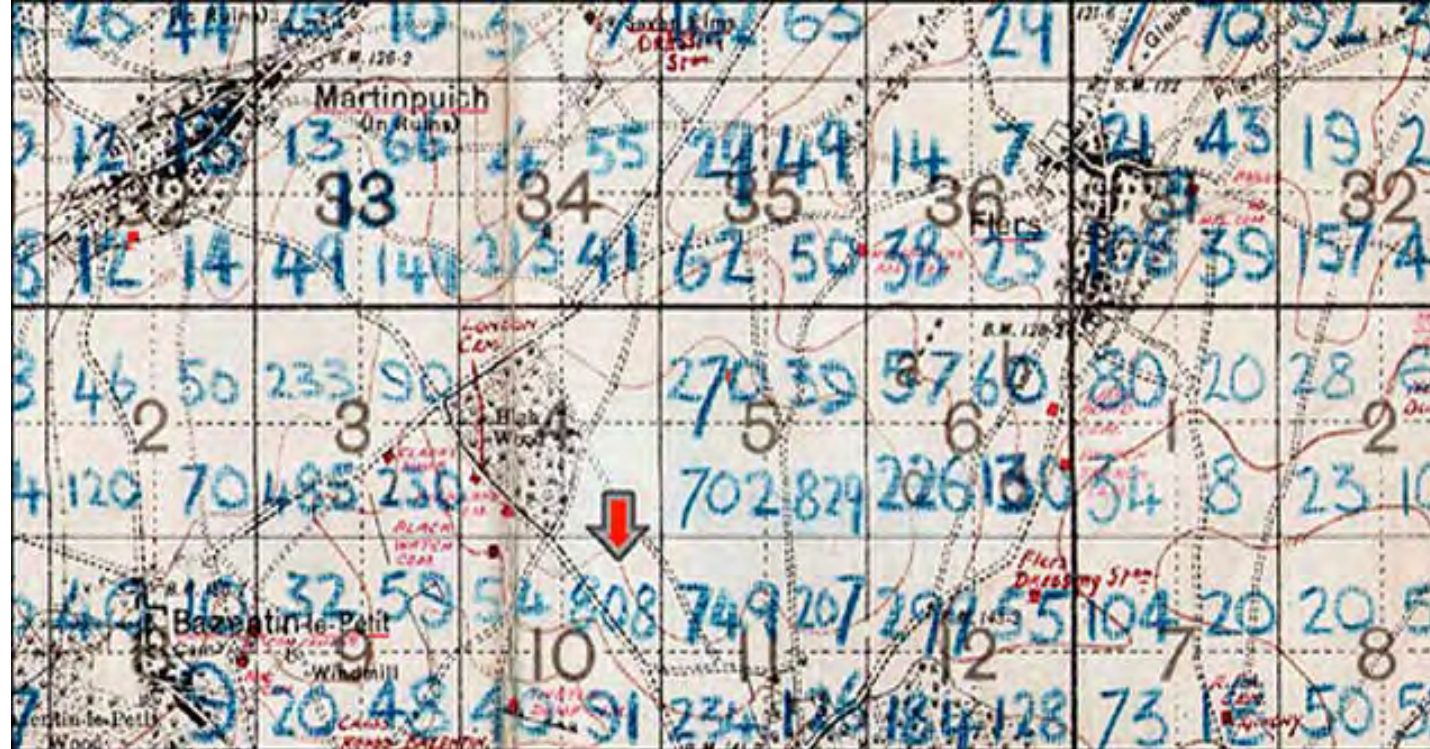
Appendix 2
Data map,
(Air traffic control)

Image from artwork
created by Wesley
Goately

Appendix 3
Body-density map,
High Wood, Somme

Compiled Mar-Apr 1919
(first survey)

Locations B, C, D etc