

A background of a topographic map with black contour lines on a white background. The lines represent elevation and are more densely packed in some areas, indicating steeper slopes.

PLATFORM 3

halsey burgund : scapes



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Audience participation has grown as a core component in art practice since the second-half of the twentieth century. This strategy developed, in part, as a means to empower public engagement and cultivate a conscious citizenry in the context of increasing alienation, isolation, and pacification in the post-war period. Avant-garde composer John Cage (1912–1992) and artists associated with the Fluxus movement, for whom Cage was an enormous influence, used commonplace objects and actions in their work and developed scenarios and opportunities for the public to collaborate in the art making process. The resulting artworks upended the traditional hierarchy between artist/author and viewer, and proposed alternative ways to make meaning from and within surrounding environments and social contexts.

Massachusetts-based artist and musician, Halsey Burgund uses new technologies to give agency to the public voice, placing his work in dialogue with this participatory lineage. In his composition *elements | response*, 2009, for example,

Burgund designed an online system that invited people to use their personal computers to record and post their thoughts on the scientific and sublime aspects of the universe. Selected fragments from Internet contributions as well as in person interviews became the framework for a live performance by Burgund's music group, Aesthetic Evidence.

For PLATFORM 3, Burgund has specially designed *Scapes*, 2010, a sound piece that operates through an interactive application loaded on smartphones for use in deCordova's Sculpture Park. Building on his earlier work with systems, collected voices, and participation, *Scapes* is Burgund's first project to incorporate Global Positioning System technology (GPS), expanding his exploration of sound as fundamental to our experiences of space and place. Participants wear headphones and use handheld devices to make audio recordings that the *Scapes* system then codes by location and immediately assimilates into a collective databank for other Park visitors to access.



As participants walk through the Park, they respond to prompts on the *Scapes* interface that invite them to reflect on their surroundings and contribute whatever thoughts emerge.

Fig. 1. *Scapes* encourages deCordova visitors to play and express themselves as active agents in the construction of a soundscape, and by extension, the Park's constantly evolving audio history. For the duration of the project from mid-July to mid-November, *Scapes* folds individual voices into a collective archive. Past and present collapse to create a unique sonic record of actions within the landscape. **Fig. 2.**

Scapes creates chance-controlled output and group-generated compositions using custom-built, open-source software. It

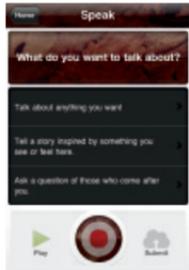


Fig 1: *Scapes* interface

expands on the pioneering work of Cage and other process-oriented, experimental musicians, such as Brian Eno (b. 1948) and Cornelius Cardew (1936–1981), with updated technological developments. The framework of the open-ended prompts functions similarly to Eno's *Oblique Strategies*. First published in 1975 in collaboration with British artist Peter Schmidt, the *Strategies* are a series of printed 2.75 x 3.75 inch cards with brief, open-ended instructions meant to inspire creativity in those who use them, and

for Eno specifically, musical ingenuity in the studio. The *Scapes* framework, like Eno's and Schmidt's *Strategies*, invites endless variation in responses and interpretations from individual users.

While participants primarily contribute voices to the *Scapes* composition, their recordings also capture other background environmental sounds, such as wind, bird chirps, and rustling leaves, adding another texture to the music score. Eno and other "sonic observers," such as Sam Auinger (b. 1956) and Bruce Odland (b. 1952), feature everyday noises in their compositions and installations to highlight the psychoacoustic potential of familiar environments.¹ Similarly, the *Scapes* composition intertwines voices with ambient sounds and invites users to focus on the often unnoticed sonic dimension that informs spatial experiences of the Park. For example, a voice recording accompanied by the sound of crunching leaves repositions the audio dimension of the foliage as something that is as important to the description of the site as the visual qualities of the leaves and physical sensations of walking over them.

Attention to the frequently under-observed soundscape is part of Burgund's attempt to foster what he calls "location-awareness," an observational capability compromised in today's culture of hurried speed and multi-tasking. As visitors



 Participant recording range  Virtual speaker range

Aerial map of deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum and surroundings with audio recordings

move their bodies through the Park, music output from the *Scapes* system continuously changes in response. A constantly updated audio stream produces a set of recordings specifically tailored to each individual user's current location. Instrumental music based on the nearby topography mixes with the voices to create an intimate connection between sound and site, asserting the importance of sound to perceptions of place. Unlike the finite, predetermined narrative tracks in *audio walks* by Janet

Cardiff (b. 1957) and George Bures Miller (b. 1960), which function like traditional audio guides with a previously recorded score that directs users on a precise path, *Scapes* allows participants to decide their own movements, and by extension, the specific musical composition they hear.

Scapes is a self-perpetuating system that uses real-time feedback mechanisms to generate a continuous, four-month long performance. Every recording alters the archive and immediately effects output. In earlier decades, experimental musicians made compositions by reacting to each other's actions and/or a set of instructions, but in *Scapes*, computer software is the hinge that links and synthesizes individual responses separated by both time and location. Thus, authorial agency extends beyond Burgund and his collaborators, Park visitors, and the environment to include a virtual composer.

Although user- and group-generated content is now ubiquitous thanks to Web 2.0 systems like Wikipedia, and GPS is common to our everyday spatial navigations, *Scapes* combines the two in a unique platform. An increasing number of artists have experimented with locative technologies since the mid-1990s when GPS, once an exclusively military resource, became accessible to the general public. *Scapes* is distinct from earlier projects in that navigational technology exceeds its everyday

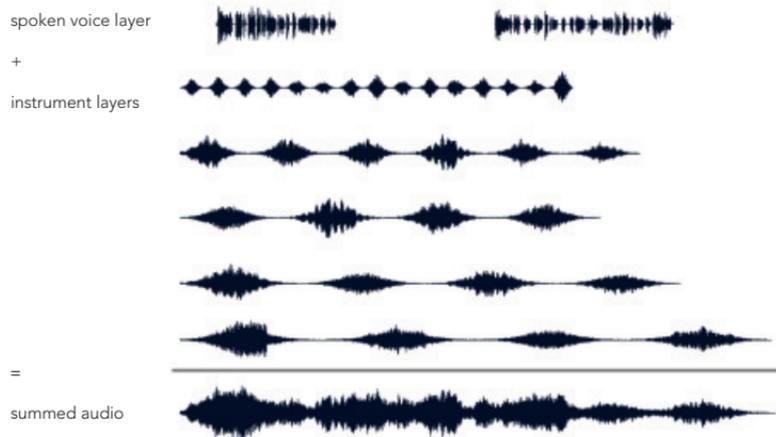


Fig 2: Simulated *Scapes* sonic record

function and operates as an artistic and musical tool for us to reconsider our individual agency in the sonic landscape. And while *Scapes* is an isolated gesture in the Park at deCordova, it serves as a proposition for greater locative awareness at large and asks us to consider both how we shape our environment and how our surroundings shape us. The seemingly innocuous hum of the streets and the common sound of a summer thunderstorm define our environments, but the participatory experience of *Scapes* reminds us that while these are important, our individual actions also affect the world's audio score that is in constant play.

¹ Bruce Odland and Sam Auinger, "Hearing Perspective (Thinking with your ears)," <http://www.o-a.info/background/hearperspec.htm>

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BIOGRAPHY

In 1995 Burgund received his BS in Geology and Geophysics from Yale University. Since the late 1990s and early 2000s, Halsey has been a member of music collaboratives Aesthetic Evidence and Enemies of Enormity, which explore the fusion of various musical styles, spoken word, and electronic re-sampling. Burgund's previous sound-based projects include ROUND (2008) at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT and One Hundred and Four Thousand (2006) at Forest Hills Cemetery, Jamaica Plain, MA. Halsey received an LEF Foundation Grant in 2006 and 2007. The artist lives and works in Bedford, MA.

PLATFORM

PLATFORM is a series of solo exhibitions by early- and mid-career artists from both the New England and national arts communities. These shows focus on work that engages with deCordova's unique architectural spaces and social, geographical, and physical location. The PLATFORM series is intended as a support for creativity and expression of new ideas, and as a catalyst for dialogue about contemporary art.

Topographical map illustration: deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum by over/under



Rethink Possible



deCordova | Sculpture Park and Museum

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PROGRAMMING

Free Friday Nights in July Performance

Performance by Halsey Burgund's band, Aesthetic Evidence
Friday, July 23 at 6:30 pm

PLATFORM Discussion Series

Halsey Burgund and Geeta Dayal will engage in a conversation about some of the larger aesthetic and technological issues at play in *Scapes*. Dayal is a music and arts critic as well as the author of the recent book on Brian Eno's 1975 album, *Another Green World*. She writes frequently on the intersections between technology and the arts; her articles and reviews have appeared in major publications including *The New York Times*, *The Village Voice*, *Wired*, and *Bookforum*.

Artist Talk

Saturday, October 16 at 3:00 pm

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