



Site-Specific Pedagogy Map

How are landscapes lived on, in and through?
How can performance inform, extend and enhance
engagement with, and the interpretation and
appreciation of, landscape and environment?
What is the life of landscape and how is it performed?

Mike Pearson

After Effects : Site-Specific Pedagogy Today

Fourteen years after the publication of Mike Pearson's seminal theoretical and practical text *Site-Specific Performance* (2010), this pedagogy map reflects upon, and reanimates, aspects of Pearson's writing and practice to think through what site-specifics make possible in the context of developing pedagogy for climate justice, sustainability and regeneration.

The final chapter of Pearson's book is called 'After Effects' and considers the "pedagogical potential of site-specific work" (188) in the context of learning and teaching at Aberystwyth University. In both the BA and MA Performance Studies courses in the Department of Theatre, Film and Television Studies at Aberystwyth, students were set tasks, investigations and etudes in site based contexts: on beaches, in fields, shops, farms and chapels, contexts of landscapes, politics, culture and nation. The chapter looks towards the then newly formed National Theatre of Wales, which would stage an inaugural programme of site-specific works as a nomadic national theatre set up in contrast to the monolithic building of the NT in England. Pearson himself would

become part of that programme with his epic staging of *The Persians* in an army training camp on the top of a hill in the Brecon Beacons.

In his reflection of pedagogical after effects, Pearson cites the central questions of an interdisciplinary conference held at Aberystwyth in 2009: Living Landscapes. The conference drew together artists, academics and students, including cultural geographers, archaeologists, wildlife sound recordists, theatre and performance international politics academics and many more. For the purpose of my reanimation I want to return to some of those questions in light of how - in the elapsed fifteen years marked by the rapid escalation of the climate crisis - they might be rethought and reimagined.

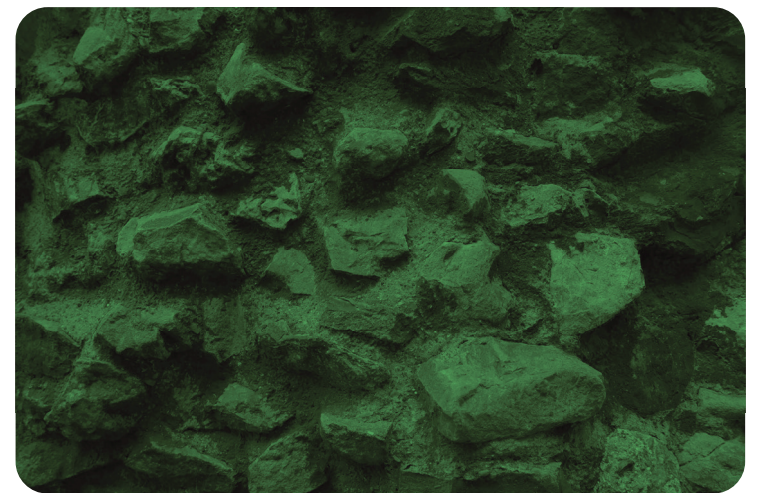
Site specifics have a role to play in the ecological turn of theatre, performance and art making. Site-specific practices, when carefully and ethically situated, can provide sustainable and regenerative forms of art making. The preexistence of a site and its materiality and action, enables performance making to bypass an emphasis on abundance and addition, instead generating

practices that utilise pre-existing architectures, grounds, frames, sonics, objects and people to create the work, moving towards a more ecologically conscious mode of making. This mode of making can utilise forms of ephemeral design that frames, subtracts, reanimates and encounters the nonhuman world and makes it present in the work, for both awareness and preservation.

In a pedagogical context, the development of student work can be reframed by an ethos of sustainability, landscape impact and engagement and a refocusing from the interiority of anthropocentric theatre and performance practices to what Timothy Morton advocates for as a form of ecological thought (2018). As Alexandrowicz and Fancy state, "fundamental to the notion of animating "the ecological thought" in theatre pedagogy is the need for the performer to cast her/his gaze outward to the nonhuman" (2021:10). Site-specific practice offers a pedagogical apparatus that can enable this shifting of the gaze that can become fundamental to the politics and ethics of the future of theatre and performance making.

Our lived experience of pedagogy is what makes its features as pedagogy visible and remarkable.

Elizabeth Ellsworth



Fragment of London City Wall. Tower Hill Gardens.

Using The Map

There are six pedagogical exercises as part of this map which can be used as a basis for short tasks or whole project briefs for larger performances, productions or artworks. The exercises are based on six of Pearson's approaches to the 'visitation' of sites and how those sites might be excavated for cultural, political and historical artefacts to be brought back to the studio or imagined with.

The six visitations I have chosen offer a range of pedagogical possibilities from working in groups to individual tasks and practices. Pearson includes more in his book and these can also be conceptually expanded upon as required (2010:18-29). In this context, each visitation has three sets of participants; 'I' meaning the artist (or student); 'You' meaning a potential collaborator or other maker in the process; and 'They' meaning an audience or spectator. 'There' is meant to signify anywhere, and therefore enables this approach to be adapted and transformed for any context of making that includes a form of performative interaction, so it could

be used as a project for painters, sculptors, actors, designers, film makers, and any form or creative practice that might want to engage with notions of site and place.

The visitations are:

- I go there and you and they do not
- We go there and they do not
- They go there, you and I do not
- You and I and they go there together
- No one goes
- There is no here and there
- There is no us and them

The 'sites' (or here and there) in this context can be any site, the propositions remain the same: a tunnel, a shed, a night bus, a field, a village, an aircraft hanger and so on. A theatre, studio, or gallery space (sites dedicated to the framing and presentation of art) can also be considered as 'specific' locations but they must be treated as 'sites'

such as in Eva Myer Keller's *Pulling Strings* (2013). Not all art is site-specific, even if it is presented in a non conventional 'site': think of occurrences of summer Shakespeare in Park, the trees and grass are often used as backdrops and perform the same functions as scenery would do in a conventional dramatic stage setting. To illustrate and stage the exercises, I have orientated them around the site(s) of the London Wall, a series of locations and traces that traverse a large but walkable area of central London.

The propositions/visitations can be remixed and shuffled, blended or reworked. They are orientations but as should become clear, they are conceptual markers and grounding points and can be adapted, ignored or challenged, often by the sites themselves, which are never clearly defined or simple.

In my own teaching and making practice I use the framework of 'visitations' because it elegantly combines the form and content of working within a site-specific context. They also do not prescribe scale but allow

for conceptual adaptation within practical and institutional frameworks and time. Each proposition could become the basis of a full scale multi-modal production, an intimate piece of mail art, a design centred imagining exercise or the creation of short performances or provocations.

As an exercise with students, when working on a site-specific performance project, I run a live dramaturgy workshop where we decide together how we want anchor our visitation (this is following initial site visits and readings) so we can understand and establish the I, you, they and there configuration that will establish the principle dramaturgy of the work that is made together.



London City Wall, Barbican Estate.



I go there and you and they do not

Exercise 3: Audio Tour

Instructions

Create an audio tour for your site that can be listened to without your presence in the space.

- * How might the audience be guided by language?
- * How might the audience be guided by sound?
- * How can agency and choice be included in the tour? Does the audience get the opportunity to explore alone or with a soundtrack?
- * How can you use silence and the live sound of the space to create atmospheres and events?

Let the site create the route: pathways, wayfinding, entrances and exits, barriers, auditoriums....

Rules

Include a minimum of four locations as landing points for the audience. You can include a secondary source such as a text or story to structure your tour but it must have a relation to the site you are using.

Adaptations

- * For the Actor: Use the exercise to create and establish a position of narrator and guide and to work on microphone technique and vocal qualities.
- * For the Designer: Use the exercise to design an experience, how does a dramaturgy of design manifest through a site.
- * For the Painter: How can you paint with sound? What qualities of painting translate and apply to aural experience?
- * For the Sculptor: Treat the tour as a form of audio sculpture that forms and frames relationships with the materiality of the space.
- * For the Film Maker: Make a film with no visual images.
- * For the Joker: Make the tour with no language.



Location 1
Coopers Row EC3N
2LY.

There is no here and there

Exercise 6: There's Non-Place like Home

Instructions

Locate a liminal or 'non- place' within your site. This could be a bus shelter, a gap between buildings, a foyer, a car park or any other location that sits 'in between' or in transition.

Create a short performance lecture (5-10 minutes) that tells the story of this space. The story can be based on research or fabrication and can be animated and framed in any form that draws upon location, history and context.

Adaptations

- * For the Actor: Perform the lecture in a persona that is constructed from the context of the site.
- * For the Designer: Use drawing as the principle mode for your lecture.
- * For the Painter: Create a lecturer that presents a painting made (or in process) in relation to the site.
- * For the Sculptor: Use a material as the centre of your lecture in response to the site (rock, concrete, wood, paint etc.)
- * For the Film Maker: Use a lens in the lecture.
- * For the Joker: Make the audience unsure if the site exists or not.

Exercise 1: Object Retrieval

Instructions

At your site, retrieve an object that can be found there.

Make a performance (or work) using the object that captures the signature of the site. A signature can contain traces of the historical, political, cultural and activity of the location.

Rules

The performance or work can happen at the location of the site and documented or it can happen away from the site with an audience elsewhere.

You can add additional objects or materials to form a dynamic with your own object.

Adaptations

- * For the Actor: Use your object for the basis of a character study. Who would possess this object and why?
- * For the Designer: Use your object as the pivot for a set design that is based in the space.
- * For the Painter: Use your object as the basis of a still life.
- * For the Sculptor: Create a sculpture based on your object but that does not contain the object itself.
- * For the Film Maker: Make your object the star of a 1 minute film.
- * For the Joker: Invent an object that might be found at the site and use it for the task.

We go there and they do not

Exercise 2: Postcard

Instructions

Analogue Version

Find postcards of your site (or postcards that represent your site) and send them back and forth with your collaborator. Use the format of the postcard to create and establish a text that can be performed.

Digital Version

Create a Whatsapp or text group for your site and use it as the basis of the creation of a text, image, film and sound exchange with a collaborator. Visit the site multiple times. Create the exchange as a score or text that can be performed.

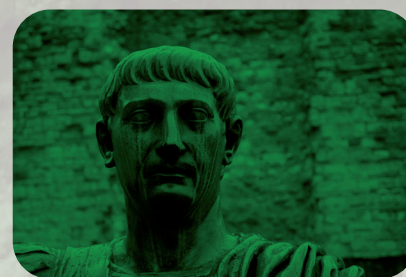
Rules

Each participant must have at least four 'posts' towards the text, but the size and length of the exchange can be variable.

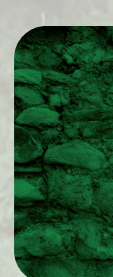
The created text can be about any subject but the origin of it must originate and return to the site. It can be fictional and/or factual. Allow the form of the exchange and the site to establish the content.

Adaptations

- * For the Actor: Use the exercise to create and establish a relation to dialogue, both in terms of two figures talking to each other and the site itself and what it offers as a circumstance for performance.
- * For the Designer: Use the postcards as a way of drawing and co-designing a 'text' for a performance, that can be visual or instructional.
- * For the Painter: Buy a packet of blank postcards and make paintings on them to send to your collaborator. Make the next painting in response to the one you receive.
- * For the Sculptor: Design a piece of public art for the site based on the postcard exchange.
- * For the Film Maker: Use the exchange to create a screenplay.
- * For the Joker: send your postcards to companies, celebrities, or people connected in some way to the site and include a return address.



Location 2
Tower Hill Gardens.



You and I and they go there together

Exercise 4: Scene or Scenario Pitch

Instructions

Individually or in a group, create a proposal for a full-scale performance of a scene or scenario to happen within your site. You should choose either a dramatic scene or a performative scenario. You should present it as if you are talking to a producer or venue to get support and funding to stage your project. Keep it clear. Be ambitious.

You will need to consider the following things:

Site: How will you make interventions around the site? What spaces will you use? How will they be framed? What practical considerations will you have?

Audience: How will the audience encounter the work? Take us through the experience of a spectator.

Technology: Do you need technology for the scene/scenario? Sound, light etc. Is this necessary? How does the text/material/site suggest this?

Event: What is the 'event' of the work? Will they be a bar? A briefing for the audience? Framing action etc?

Rules

These can be established in the context of the project/work that is being presented or parameters for assessment.

Adaptations

- * For the Actor: Perform an extract of the scene/scenario for the presentation.
- * For the Designer: Develop a design for the whole production/performance at the site.
- * For the Painter: Create a painting that presents a scene or scenario based on the site.
- * For the Sculptor: Create a sculpture that might act as a character in a scene or scenario at the site.
- * For the Film Maker: Make a filmed event rather than a performance event.
- * For the Joker: Develop the work to be performed backwards.



Location
Tower Hill Station Gift Shop.

Objects
British Foot Guard Pencil
Sharpener and Union Flag Pencil.

Performance Duration
3 Hours.

There is no us and them

Exercise 7: Memory Museum

Instructions

In your group you are going to collect exhibits for a live museum of a site. Go to the site together and explore it. Take some time to walk around together and sit. Take photographs, capture sounds and make drawings.

Observe what happens there, what people or animals are present? What is the light like? What sounds can you hear? Can you buy food and drink? What is the atmosphere like?

In your group, you are going to collect the following exhibits to stage a museum exhibition in a studio. There are no adaptations for this exercise as it is intended as a collaborative project with multiple disciplines incorporated.

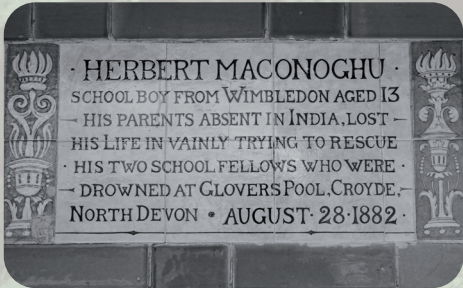
Exhibits to collect:

- * A character study: This can be of a human, animal or object in the site. Observe what they do and how they act. Make lists of gestures and movements. Create a short character study to present the 'character' that can take any form you like (live or recorded).
- * A drawing: Make a drawing of any aspect of the site. This can be a landscape, a portrait or an abstract interaction with the site. You can make it on site or as a live drawing in the space.
- * An image: Choose one still image to represent your site. You might take many images as part of your exploration but select just one for your museum. This could be 'staged' or any picture/detail of the space.
- * A sound: Record a sound (s) that represents your space. This can be anything and can be recorded using your voice memos app or camera app on your phone.
- * A group of textures: Collect 'textures' from your site. This can be of surfaces, objects or materials. Take photographs or make drawings of the textures.
- * An object: Bring back an object from your site (without stealing it!) something natural, bought or found.

Notes on Collaboration

You will need to collaborate to collect your exhibits and decide how they will be curated and selected. You could delegate to each other or work in pairs or as a group to make/collect each of them.

Begin by sharing what skills you all have in the group (can you draw? Are you good with sound recording or photography? Are you a performer or a designer? If you have shared skills can you work together?). Find a way of working as a group to share the work.



Location
Memorial to Heroic Self-Sacrifice
Postman's Park, EC1A 7BT.

No one goes

Exercise 5: Private Zine

Instructions

Create a physical or digital zine about a space or aspect of the site you cannot see or get access too.

This could be a private space, a closed door, an unseen corridor: something that happens behind the curtain.

Rules

The zine can take any form you like and include stories, characters and figures, historical and site research, drawings, 'found images' or any other ephemera from the imagery site.

How might the countercultural form of the Zine inform your making process? How might the zine act as a form of site activism in relation to your site or location?



Location
Crosswall EC3N 2LY.

Materials
8 London Postcards.

Task Duration
2 Weeks.



Location 3
Crescent EC3N 2LY.



Location
London Wall Underground Car Park.



Location
Roman Fort Ruins
Noble Street
EC2V 7EE.



Location
City Wall at Vine Street.

The London Wall: One Site or Many?

The London Wall is of Roman origin and demarcates the Roman foundation of the Modern City. Large chunks and fragments of the wall protrude throughout the modern building, roads, shops, restaurants and car parks. Some blocks of the wall are carefully preserved, labelled and privatised, whilst others are negated and marginalised on the edge of abandoned parks or forgotten heritage landmarks from a different historical and political time.

There are many ‘walking maps’ of the wall that can be followed by tourists, some of which are decades old and, if followed, they clash with new buildings, road layouts and private spaces. Many of the walking route signs remain (some next to each other from different generations) and these maps make for a fascinating symbolism of the

wall as a drawing of the palimpsestic nature of the city. Layers of rock, concrete, roads, dwellings, architecture, death, bomb damage, animals, commerce and the centuries of stories - both fictional and true - layered and compacted along the route.

For each exercise in the map, there is a location of the wall and an image/location of how Pearson’s visitations can be used to frame the pedagogical exercise or etude. The wall, as a route, a line and a demarcation, can be understood as one site or many, and illustrates how site-specific practice has the capacity to expand or contract based on the participants, the materials and the context of the teaching or art making that is happening.



Location 4
London Wall Underground Car Park

Site-Specifics as Pedagogical Hinge

In her book *Place of Learning: Media, Architecture, Pedagogy* (2005), Elizabeth Ellsworth introduces the notion of the very sites and locations of learning as a form of “pedagogical hinge” (38) that activate and embody learning through a material encounter with space and the pedagogical programme of work done there. This might be thorough activities, framings, walks or encounters with architectural structures. A central idea of Ellsworth’s book is that once knowledge becomes a ‘thing made’ it is dead and therefore the focus of pedagogy should approach knowledge as a thing in the making in constant flux and coming into being. She states, “what has already happened was once very much alive: the thinking-feeling, the embodied sensation of making sense, the lived experience of our learning selves that make the thing we call knowledge” (1). When a student encounters and works with a site outside of the classroom or studio, they are activated through thier lived experience in a different way, phenomenologically acting upon the senses to situate different perceptions and routes to knowledge creation.

The places and sites that Ellsworth explores in the book are predominantly of memorialisation: structures and settings that have a story, an emotional evocation and

a desire to teach about a certain event. The learning potential of such sites are ones in which the visitor experiences “...our sensations of time and of space as we are put into motion along the ‘experiential path’ - be it a building, landscape, or sculpture as memorial - are crucial to what we make of the history, people, or events that are memorialized.” (18). Sites that are designed to ‘teach’ about specific historical events or stories are structured pedagogically through the lived experience of the participant (student) to the site.

The notion of site and place as a pedagogical hinge is helpful as it provides a foundation for the use of site-specifics in teaching practices to become an actor in a pedagogical assemblage that can stimulate learning. Ellsworth poses the question: “what environments and experiences are capable of acting as the pedagogical pivot point between movement/ sensation and thought?” (8). The structuring of site-specific tasks and then the presentation or framing of performance works in sites themselves, “reaches beyond the limiting scope of language” (10). The potential reach of experiencing sites offers the potential to unlock the possible interaction and shifting of the gaze towards and through the non-human.

Landscape Questions

Here are some questions that can be given to students to frame their work based on Pearson’s questions of landscape:

How are landscapes lived on, in and through?

- What are the landscapes of your practice? - physical, ecological, interior, exterior, textual etc.
- How does your practice encompass and consider landscape and ecology? Is it engaged directly with specific landscapes, locations and places? How and why does this engagement inform what you make?
- If your practice does not engage with landscape, why is this and what does it tell you about your making and thinking?

How can performance inform, extend and enhance engagement with, and the interpretation and appreciation of, landscape and environment?

Consider how ‘performance’ happens in your practice.

Does it happen:

- Directly:** Are you a performer or performance maker?
- Indirectly:** Do you design, direct or write environments and contexts in which performance happens or is made possible?
- Adjacent:** Do you perform to make the work possible, does the audience of your work participate in the making of it?.

- How might the relationship between your practice and performance inform the relationship with the landscapes, sites and places in which you engage?

What is the life of landscape and how is it performed?

- How might you refresh and revitalise your practice through a direct engagement, observation or encounter with a landscape or site?
- What performance is already happening there?
- How are the spaces and sites alive?

Why Site-Specific Performance?

To bring attention to specific habitats, environments, landscapes or contexts for the purpose of activism.

Low (ecological) impact performance making.

Potential for sustainable design practices, including reusable, low energy materials such as headphones, sound recorders, found architectures and light.

To enable students and audiences to engage in ecological thinking around the awareness of plants, flora, fauna and animal life.

To rethink and engage with cities in terms of urban spaces and green contexts (parks, trees, verges, gardens, conservation etc.) and how it is traversed, occupied and nurtured in terms of biodiversity, awareness and impact.

For the application of live briefs for student problem solving and use of a public space (parks, derelict shopping centres, roadways and cycle lanes etc) in the context of city planning, renewal, rewilding and activism.

References

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Ellsworth, E. (2005). *Places of Learning: Media, Architecture, Pedagogy*. Abingdon: Taylor & Francis Group.

Pearson, M. (2010) *Site-Specific Performance*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Morton, T. (2018) *Being Ecological*. London: Penguin.

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Performance Pedagogy Toolkit
An Approach for the Art School

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