

## SLIDE 1

### Site-Specific Pedagogy Map

## SLIDE 2

The Site-Specific Pedagogy map is part of a performance pedagogy toolkit I made during a UAL Educational Enhancement Sabbatical 2023/24. The toolkit takes the form of a mini-zine and broadsheet fold out map.

Performance in this context is engaged as a way of encountering, interacting and thinking and making with the world, and not as a discipline to be taught.

The intention is to work towards a non-hierarchical pedagogy, building on Jane's Collin's brilliant work in this area. In this configuration, the tools, exercises and frameworks can be used by any discipline including performers, designers, theatre makers, painters, sculptors, sound artists and so on. Many of the tasks and exercises have suggestions for adaptations from these perspectives.

The Tools are:

## SLIDE 3/SLIDE 4

**Climate Justice Cards** ...that offer tasks and mini projects based on the University's core climate principles that can be embedded into any practice based curriculum and avoids 'climate' and 'environment' becoming the theme or topic of student work and instead works towards it being an embedded ethos in their practice.

## SLIDE 4

**A Scene Bank** ....a tool to break away from solely canonical texts in theatre and performance making built by grouping scene taxonomies of thematic materials together for students to work with (ghost scenes, fight scenes, street scenes, love scenes etc.), rather

than organising them by place of origin, author or cultural context to create a flat hierarchy of materials.

#### SLIDE 5

**Collaborative Tutorial Templates** .... As a way of facilitating tutorials in collaborative groups, encouraging cross-group dialogue, peer feedback and reflection as a means to nurture an understanding of positionality and diversity when working together.

#### SLIDE 6

**Creative Research Manifesto**... presented as a playful set of provocations that challenges the common separation of theory and practice in student work. Polemics and positions are taken to argue towards an embedded approach of thinking and making that scaffolds rigorous research through a creative process.

#### SLIDE 7

##### **Site-Specific Pedagogy Map**

.....a fold out map that offers seven pedagogical exercises which can be used as a basis for short tasks expanding on Mike Pearson's approaches to the 'visitation' of a site and how that site might be excavated for cultural, political and historical artefacts to be brought back to the studio.

In this paper I want to focus on the pedagogical and practical applications of the map thinking towards how site-specifics can contribute to an 'ecological turn' in art and design pedagogy.

##### **After Effects: Site-Specific Pedagogy Today**

#### SLIDE 8

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 makes 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. 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, a nomadic national theatre set 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 active 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, and wildlife sound recordists. The conference engaged with the following questions:

- How are landscapes (city, field, ocean, desert) 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?

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 artists to bypass an emphasis on abundance and addition and generate practices that utilise pre-existing architectures/grounds/frames/sonics/objects and people to create new work, moving towards a more ecological 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, site-specifics are driven by an ethos of sustainability, landscape impact and engagement towards what Timothy Morton advocates for as a form of 'ecological thought' that focuses on the interanimation of the human and more than human *actors*. As Alexandrowicz and Fancy state, "fundamental to the notion of animating "the ecological thought" in performance 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 art and performance making.

## **Using the Map**

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

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*. 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.

## SLIDE 9

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 propositions/visitations can be remixed and shuffled, blended or reworked. They are orientations, 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 do not prescribe scale but allow for conceptual adaptation, 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 and or the creation of short performances or provocations.

#### SLIDE 10

As an exercise with students, I run a 'grounding' 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 structure of the work that is made together.

#### The London Wall: One site or many

#### SLIDE 11

To illustrate and stage the exercises in the map, 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 wall itself 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 meet new buildings, road layouts and private space negotiation. 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, there is a location of the wall and an example of how Peason's visitations can be used to frame a pedagogical 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.

- I go there and you and they do not

**Exercise: Object Retrieval**

**Location: Tower of London Gift Shop**

**Instructions:**

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

Make a performance (or work) using the objects that capture the signature of the site.

A signature must contain a trace of the historial, political, cultural and activity of the location.

- We go there and they do not

**Exercise: Postcard**

**Location:**

**Instructions:**

Analogue Version: Find postcards or establish a whats app group 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.

- They go there, you and I do not

**Exercise: 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,

- No one goes

### **Exercise: 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.

- There is no here and there

### **Exercise: 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.

- There is no us and them

### **Exercise: Memory Museum**

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

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In conclusion I want to consider the use of site-specifics as a 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 the material encounter with space and the pedagogical programme of work done there, be that thorough activities, framings, walks and encounters with architectural structures. A central idea of Ellsworth's book is that once knowledge becomes a ‘thing made’ it is dead and that the focus of pedagogy should therefore 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 lecture hall or studio, they are activated through their lived experience in a different way, phenomenologically acting upon the senses to situate different perceptions and routes to knowledge creation.

The notion of site and place as a pedagogical hinge, and what Pearson offers through the entanglement of humans and landscapes - is helpful as it provides a foundation for the use of site-specifics in teaching practices to become *an active participant* within 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 the presentation or framing of art works in sites themselves, “reaches beyond the limiting scope of language” (10) unlocking new interactions with the non-human world, in the hope of transforming our relationship with it.