



# Site-Specific Pedagogy Map

Dr Richard Allen | Wimbledon College of Arts

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## 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 reexamines, 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

book and the map, 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.

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 reexamination I want to return to some of those questions in

How are landscapes lived on, in and through?  
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## Performance Pedagogy Toolkit

### An Approach for the Art School

Richard Allen







# Cloudbusting

## AIM

This task is designed to encourage deep listening to an environment and how this can be used to make a piece of work.

## DURATION

20 Minutes (minimum)  
10 minutes of listening and 10 minutes of reflection.

## INSTRUCTIONS

Find an outside space that has a sonic environment you find engaging. This could be a park, a beach, an urban landscape or so on. Close your eyes and spend at least 10 minutes listening closely to the space.

When you have finished, describe what you have heard. Share this with the group.

1. What materials could you hear in the space, what was it made out of?
2. What were the material relationships of sound you could hear? (textures, lines, dimensions, scale)?
3. What was the relationship between the sounds?
4. Who was using the space (humans/animals)?
5. How would you describe the atmospheres or climates of the space through sound?
6. How did the sound capture or contain movement?

## ADAPTATIONS

This task can be extended in sound/ audio projects through the use of listening with different microphones that extend the reach of the human ear. Contact microphones can amplify the sounds of surfaces or objects, hydrophones can listen underwater, binaural microphones can amplify and mimic the range of the human ear.

## QUESTIONS

- Can the observations of the sonic environment instigate a making process of a character, costume, or environment design?
- How might an awareness of a changing soundscape or context inform the way performance or art making might happen in relation to the space or context?



# LIGHTS!

## AIM

To light a scene, scenario, or action only using the sun.

## DURATION

Variable. Suggested as an overnight/ week long task or could be structured within a session.

## INSTRUCTIONS

Select a scene, scenario or action from your current practice. This might be an image from a play text, a set of movements or choreographies, a scene in which a costume is based or a character/ figure you are performing.

There must be a sequence involved in what you select.

Plan out how to light your sequence using the sun. This can be durational, at a certain time of day, inside or outside.

Consider the qualities of light: refractions, heat, framing, reflections.

Respond to these elements in your choreography of the work.

Film or photograph the lighting or sequence (use time lapse on your phone if necessary) for presentation to your peers.

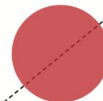
## ADAPTATIONS

For the Actor: Do you proclaim a speech staring directly into the sun? Eyes closed or open? Are sunglasses required? Is the speech performed in the dark?

For the Designer: How are the materials or objects of your set design/costume impacted by the qualities of the light?

## QUESTIONS

- What do you learn about your scene or action by doing this?
- How does it affect the materials you are using in your making (body, set, costume, technology)?





# Scene



# Bank

## The Scene Bank and Non-hierarchical Practice

The Scene Bank tool is a guide for tutors and students to collectively assemble sources and materials for the making of performance projects. The sources and materials are individual scenes or scenarios in the form of texts, scores, images, songs or any material that might be considered as a 'unit' of action or storytelling rather than a full play text or source. The potential use of the scenes can therefore be used for small group tasks, workshops or the basis of full productions and projects. The scene bank is built by grouping the materials thematically by scene type (ghost scenes, fight scenes, street scenes, love scenes etc.), rather than organising it by author, place of origin, or cultural context.

The thematic grouping dissolves the traditional hierarchy of text that solidifies the canon of specific writers and artists at the forefront of work that is made and the stories that are told. This non-hierarchical approach to builds upon B. Ananthakrishnan and Jane Collin's work *Against a hierarchy of expressive means; arguments for new pedagogies in performer education in India and the UK* (2019) that expands "Heiner Goebbels' challenge to the conventional hierarchies in performance and his call for "a division of presence amongst all the elements' " (2019:115). The division of elements in the making of theatre and performance seeks to flatten the hierarchical structures that prioritises the performer and text to embrace the potential of performance technologies and scenographic

elements to operate within a distributed network of stage presences. The Scene Bank can therefore be integrated into a non-hierarchical practice based pedagogy to enable the genesis of work to also adopt this ethos.

The creation of a scene bank can be framed and adapted by the specific pedagogical context in which it emerges. It should be shaped by the staff and students of the institution and operate vertically as well as horizontally in that it can be accessed across year groups and built year on year. It does not need to be attached to a particular year level or group (although parameters can be added if required for specific learning outcomes or contexts). A key aspect of the bank is that sources or materials are discovered through moments of connection or revelation between thematic ideas.

## Structure and Methodology

The scene bank structure is presented as a simple grid describing the scene types. Students are invited to select the type of scene they would like to work on (rather than the author or 'text'). Once selected, the scenes matching the type (or genre) can be accessed and the scenes are encountered alongside each other.

The scenes have two forms. The first are dramatic or post dramatic texts in the form of scenes from plays or performances that are part of a larger stage work (or complete works in some cases). The second is scenarios, these are paintings, poems, drawings, postcards, objects or contexts that meet the genre type of the scene. The scenario opens up the potential for the 'scene' to be non-linguistic, or to offer alternative perspectives or frames to the understanding of materials that can be used.

The bank can be constructed in whatever way is most accessible to staff and students, so it can exist within a VLE or as part of a shared online drive. There is also the potential to expand it physically, in analogue form, so it can be explored in person. This should enable students to search through the bank is important to its conception so that texts and materials might be chanced upon and compared against each other so that the connecting strands of the thematic offer new connections and relationships between cultural forms, historical contexts and perspectives of artists and writers.

Love Scenes	Ghost Scenes	Domestic Scenes
Fight Scenes	Teaching Scenes	Crime Scenes
Street Scenes	Dream Scenes	Revenge Scenes
Recognition Scenes	Rivarly Scenes	End Scenes

## The 'Chance Operations' Tutorial

Photocopy/print/make three copies of the choice wheels and make a simple wheel spinner with a piece of card and a pin. Place them on the floor of the studio and agree with the group what should be contained on the spokes of the wheels.

When you have completed the wheels get different tutorial participants to spin each wheel to create a focus for a discussion on the group's work. These can last any length but the intention is to be quick fired (approx 5/10 minutes for each configuration depending on group size).

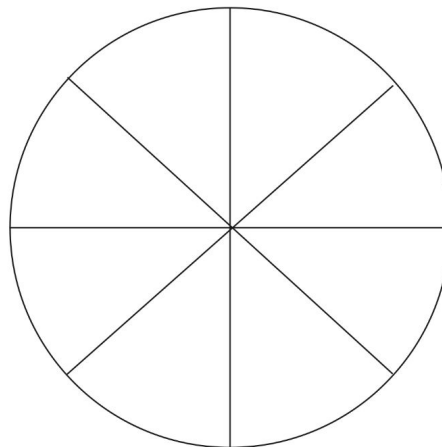
Select a viewpoint.  
Select a critical question.  
Include a random factor.

Wheel 1: Viewpoints

- Audience
- Lighting
- Sound
- Acting
- Community
- Space
- Participation

Wheel 3: Random Factor

- You can only answer in single sentences.
- You must be eating ice cream.
- You must discuss it blindfolded
- You must discuss it while walking.



Wheel 2: Critical Questions

- What is unresolved about this viewpoint?
- What is working well about this viewpoint?
- How does this viewpoint contribute to the atmosphere of the work?
- What could be transformed about this viewpoint?



1

The separation of practice and theory is artificial.

2

Practice is a way of 'doing' theoretical work.

3

Practice enables other forms of thinking materially than reading and writing, it articulates discoveries differently and can be reflected upon like anything else.

4

Reading and writing is as much a form of practice as painting and performing. The materiality of these practices is the only difference, hence why a researcher finds out different things by doing them.

5

Not all practice is research in the same way that not all reading is research.

6

The quality and success of practice-based research is, like any other research, based on rigour (artistic, scholarly and conceptually). The more rigour, the more there is to unpack and thus the more pleasurable it is to engage with.

7

The terms 'practice-based research', 'practice-led research', 'practice research' etc. is for the forms of the academy. They are meaningless for the researcher who can just think of what they are doing as 'research'. Nevertheless, they are needed in the same way that the terms 'investigation' 'enquiry' and 'fieldwork' are useful because they borrow from scientific language (social and otherwise) which have familiarity and comfort.

8

The unease felt at accepting practice-based research in the academy comes from the perceived attempt to quantify poetics. Poetic discoveries make speculation possible (if it is found in a painting, sculpture, written philosophy etc). A continued process of speculation upon speculation is what 'knowledge' looks like in the arts and humanities.

9

Not all speculation is good speculation. There are qualities of speculation (see point 6) so it cannot be claimed that practice-based research is hermetically sealed.

10

Practice is a system of codes, an apparatus through which thinking (affect) is made possible. The apparatuses of painting, sculpture, drawing, performance etc just look different to the apparatus of writing (philosophy, history, ecology etc.).

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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 studies 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 national theatre set up in conformance 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 records, theatre and performance international politics academics and many more. For the purpose of my examination 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 reimaged.

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 persistence of a site and its materiality and action, enables performance making to bypass an emphasis on abundance and addition, instead generating

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Mike Pearson

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

Elizabeth Ellsworth

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

Fragment of London City Wall, 2013. © Richard Allen.

## 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 sites 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 of 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'

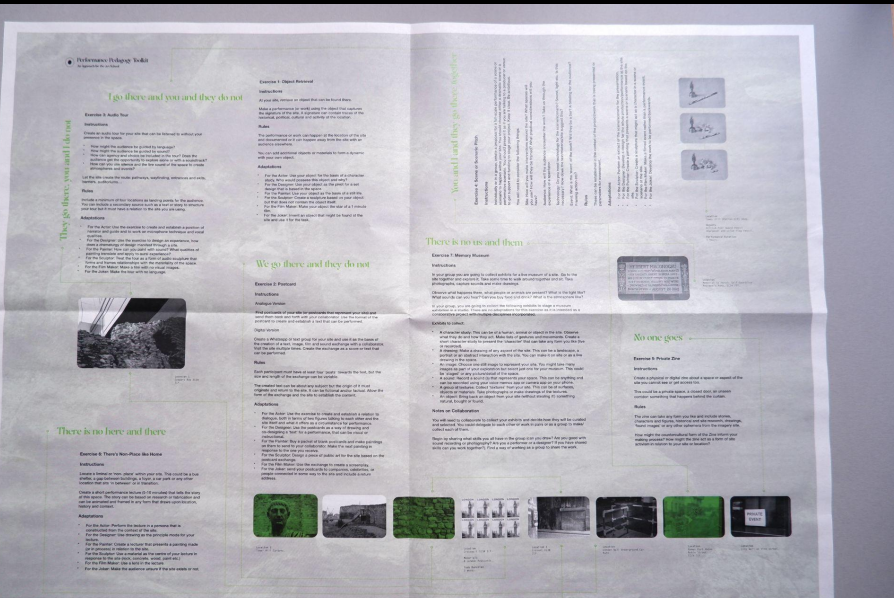
such as in Eva Meyer Keller's *Pulling Strings* (2013). Not all art is site-specific, even if it is presented in a non-conventional 'site' (think of occurrences of summer Shakespeare in Park, the trees and grass are often used as backdrops and perform the same functions as scenery would do in a conventional 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 orientational 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 I elegantly combines the form and content of working within a site-specific context. They also do not prescribe scale but allow



London City Wall, Brecon Beacons.







# Seven Pedagogical Exercises

3. They go there, you and I do not

6. There is no here and there

7. There is no us and them

2. We go there and they do not

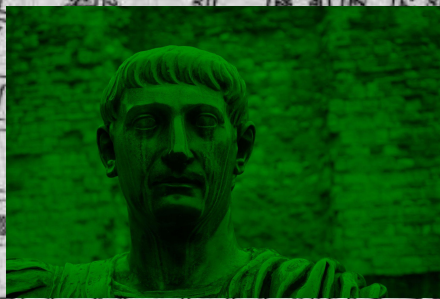
4. You and I and they go there together

1. I go there and you and they do not

5. No one goes











# I go there and you and they do not

## Object Retrieval

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

Make a 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.



# They go there, you and I do not

## Audio Tour

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**

### **Private Zine**

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

### There's non-place like home

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 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

### 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, capture sounds and make drawings.



