

## Provocative Pedagogies (2017)

### Jake Watts 'MVSE: Workshops as Performative Environments for Artistic Learning' Slides & Talk Notes:

Slide 1 & Slide 2



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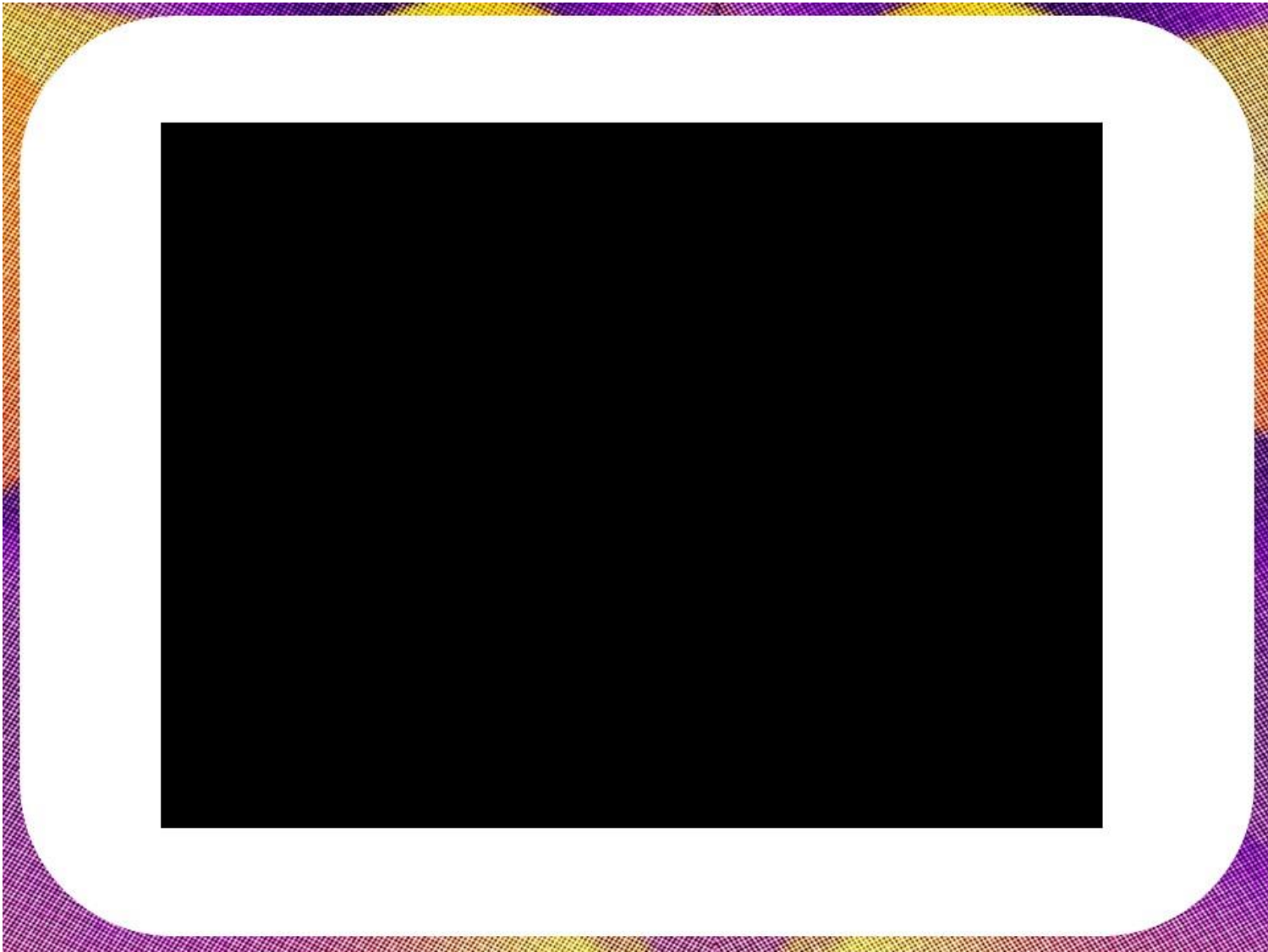
Workshops as  
Performative  
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for Artistic  
Learning

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Talk Outline:

- How the MVSE Workshop came about
- How it was composed
- What has happened in the MVSE workshops
- What forms of learning are involved in the MVSE workshop
- How this relates to workshops as artistic learning environments more generally

Slide 3



First, I will play a short excerpt of George Brecht's original Event Score for Motor Vehicle Sundown Event being performed in Basel in 2011.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zi0pxipGNr8>

I wanted to give you a quick sense of what a rendition of Motor Vehicle Sundown Event might look and feel like.

It is from Brecht's event score that I developed the MVSE workshop which I will be discussing today.

Slide 4



MVSE: Reykjavik (2016)

I was commissioned in 2016 by [MANY Studios](#) in Glasgow to produce a workshop for members of their graduate residency scheme. The workshop was restaged again during 2016 in Reykjavik at the [Iceland Academy of the Arts](#) for students, faculty, and local artists.

The issue that precipitated the invitation to develop a workshop for MANY Studios was that the three members of their graduate residency scheme had not been able to develop a working relationship or dialogue about their practices due to not being in the studios at the same time. The graduate residency was to culminate in an exhibition of the 3 artists involved and MANY Studios wanted use a workshop to develop an understanding between them of the ways they each approached making work.

While I could've developed a workshop that directly facilitated discussion between the graduate residents, I felt there were alternative ways to create an environment that might facilitate learning between them that would be more playful and productive, ways that would go beyond just having them explicitly articulate what they do and how they do it. That there could be ways to bring their tacit and embodied ways of thinking and doing to the surface, and in turn create a deeper and more holistic understanding of how one another works.

## MOTOR VEHICLE SUNDOWN (EVENT)

(TO JOHN CAGE)  
SPRING/SUMMER 1960  
G. BRECHT

Any number of motor vehicles are arranged outdoors.

There are at least as many sets of instruction cards as vehicles.

All instruction card sets are shuffled collectively, and 22 cards are distributed to the single performer per vehicle.

At sundown (relatively dark/open area incident light 2 foot-candles or less) the performers leave a central location, simultaneously counting out (at an agreed-upon rate) a pre-arranged duration  $1\frac{1}{2}$  times the maximum required for any performer to reach, and seat himself in, his vehicle. At the end of this count each performer starts the engine of his vehicle and subsequently acts according to the directions on his instruction cards, read consecutively as dealt. (An equivalent pause is to be substituted for an instruction referring to non-available equipment.) Having acted on all instructions, each performer turns off the engine of his vehicle and remains seated until all vehicles have ceased running.

### INSTRUCTION CARDS (44 per set):

1. Head lights (high beam, low beam) on (1-5), off.
2. Parking lights on (1-11), off.
3. Foot-brake lights on (1-3), off.
4. (Right, left) directional signals on (1-7), off.
5. Inside light on (1-5), off.
6. Glove-compartment light on. Open (or close) glove compartment (quickly, with moderate speed, slowly). Glove-compartment light off.

## Scores & Cards



Questioning how we could learn differently from one another, and developing methods to explore those questions, underpins my approach to composing and playing artistic workshops.

Within the MVSE workshop, the methods of composing and scoring, and of playing and performing are central to the activity of the participants.

The provocation given at the beginning of the workshop is simply that:

*Participants must score, perform, and document a version of Motor Vehicle Sundown Event at a communally agreed upon location at Sundown.*

To structure this activity I adapted Brecht's original event score into a set of instructional cards, including 'sound horn, turn on widescreen wipers, rev engine, etc', these were then distributed between participants who rolled dice to see how many of each instruction they were to include in their score.

This deck of cards and accompanying die, including both provocation and instructions, are now distributable as an open educational resource for running the workshop, which can be used with or without me being present.

Each group that have participated in the workshop has found different ways to collectively negotiate using the provocation and performance instructions as notation for scoring and performing a version of MVSE. This approach is in the lineage of Fluxus, Cornelius Cardew and Scratch Orchestra's approaches to notation, utilising the eloquence of simple instruction to facilitate a potentially wide range of interpretations and improvisations.

Participants have actively drawn on their own research approaches, practices, and experiences to shape the composing and playing aspects of the workshop: One rendition in Glasgow drew on the choreography practices of Yvonne Rainer to score the actions of the group's performance in chalk onto the road of a Govan industrial estate, another in Iceland attempted to use CCTV from a fast food restaurant to capture the performance, one group went to a hot spot where boy racers convene on the outskirts of Glasgow and performed their score as the local car enthusiasts were gathering. Each participant can inflect the process of collectively producing the performance with an element of invention from their own artistic practice.

## Forms of Learning in Workshops

### Paragogy

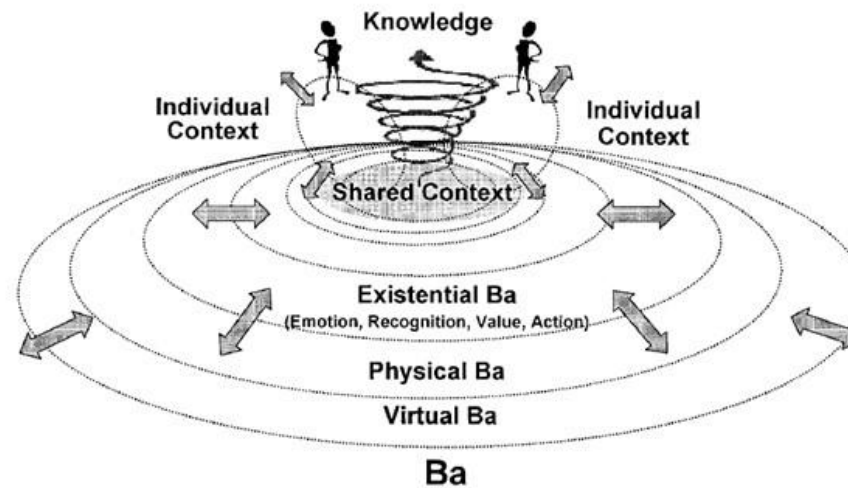


Figure 2 Conceptual representation of ba.

“a shared context in motion, in which knowledge is shared, created, and utilized” (Nonaka & Toyama, 2003: 6)



Having described the how's of the workshop coming about, being composed and being played, I will now discuss what types of learning I think are occurring in that process and how this related to workshop as artistic learning environments more broadly.

Facilitating opportunities for dynamic and self-directed peer-to-peer learning are key to the vitality of workshops as artistic learning environments. MVSE attempts to do this by putting participants into a shared context together and metaphorically setting that context into motion through the provocation, timed constraint, and instructions that constitute the workshop (and quite literally put them into motion in a car).

The term workshop designates both a site and an activity of production. It is a shared space/time for learning that can facilitate the collective production of knowledge. In this sense, the workshop can be an ideal paragogical environment. Paragogy meaning peer-to-peer learning through collective production. Workshops allow participants of differing competencies, levels of experience, and disciplinary backgrounds, to collectively negotiate the meaning and application of ways of knowing; reifying them, challenging them, experimenting and playing with them, with participants learning from one another in this process.

Due to the dynamic nature of learning in an environment contingent on the specific people, materials, space and the time it occurs within – we need ways to conceptualize how knowledge arrives, operates, and leaves this environment. One such way is through Nonaka & Toyama's concept of 'Ba'. This is a concept invoked by Corneli & Danoff (2011:4) when discussing their principles for paragogy. In its simplest sense Ba is a way of describing "a shared context in motion, in which knowledge is shared, created, and utilized" (2003: 6). Ba is a phenomenological space/time in which meanings emerge and new knowledge is created from changes to existing knowledge in response to the learning context – in our case a workshop. Nonaka & Toyama suggest this occurs through a process of socializing, externalizing, combining, and internalizing both tacit and explicit forms of knowledge.

## Embodied Cognition

“Bodily features play a significant role in how or what an organism thinks and in how it makes sense of the world.”

(Malfouris, 2013: 59)

“Like language, skilled actions can be ‘parsed’, and thus be ‘acquired’ as motor-based mental representations (i.e. the constituents of ‘embodied cognition’) (Marchand, 2007d). Such representations may be re-combined either to mimic or to generate improvised expressions of practice-based knowledge.”

(Marchand, 2010: 263).

This brings me to the concept of embodied cognition within workshops. Within the MVSE workshop - how participants think through their bodies shapes the learning environment. Engaging in activities such as creating and performing a score and using a car as an instrument requires learners to activate and express their tacit knowledge to articulate ideas and negotiate their meaning with others through doing these tasks together.

Following on from Nonaka & Toyama concept of Ba, we can think about the tacit knowledge exchanged as being externalized and socialized at the lived level of the body. This is not just a case of expressing things already thought through the body. The workshop is a space/time of learning where hidden knowledges comes to the fore and is expressed, transferred and shaped through the doing of the body, as well as through language. In MVSE this occurs through the gestures used in scoring, of playing the vehicle, of leading and following one another's movements and actions.

Embodied cognition acknowledges that "bodily features play a significant role in how or what an organism thinks and in how it makes sense of the world." (Malfouris, 2013: 59). Within a workshop these forms of kinaesthetic meaning-making range from small gestures to direct performative or skilled actions. These bodily expressions are required to make permeable the boundaries between tacit and explicit knowledge, they are essential for full exploration of a subject to be enacted and to take flight They are also constitutive of why the workshop is an active and dynamic learning environment and differentiates it from more dialogic learning environments – such as lectures, seminars, or crits.

Importantly for peer-to-peer learning, forms of embodied cognition are not boundaried by the individual. As Trevor Marchand has noted, "like language, skilled actions can be 'parsed', and thus be 'acquired' as motor-based mental representations (i.e. the constituents of 'embodied cognition') (Marchand, 2007d). Such representations may be re-combined either to mimic or to generate improvised expressions of practice-based knowledge." (Marchand, 2008: 263).

## Extended Cognition



With this range of knowledge and learning moving fluidly it is useful to consider the ways it is reified by participants in relation to the materials of the workshop. Which is why I will now talk briefly about extended cognition.

In the MVSE workshop extended cognition is enacted through the production of the collective score and through an engagement with a vehicle (as an instrument) and the environment (a communally agreed upon location at sunset). These things constitute elements of a collectively extended mind that is inhabited for the duration of the workshop. This collective extended mind allows for a range of intersubjective engagements beyond the individual.

Extended cognition is about acknowledging and utilizing the permeable boundaries of how we think beyond our own body. In the case of workshop learning, this means considering specifically how a collective extended mind can be reified through engagement with things-in-the-world, and the potential of these things to be shaped by relationships with existing materials and through interactions with others.

As I have outlined already in the MVSE workshop a collective extended mind can take several forms, more generally in workshops it means being attentive to how material shapes thinking and how that material is reciprocally shaped through thinking. When composing a workshop, considering the potential for participants to become entangled with things is essential to structuring and opening up the potential for learning.

When I am using the term *thing*, I do so in the sense of a Latourian *thick thing* – a *thing* as a matter of concern, not a matter of fact – for a given community (2008: 3), one that has complicated entanglements between people and material. This *thing*, and the matter (both human and non-human) entangled within it, is always in a collective state of unfurling and becoming, of thinging other-*things*. It is a process by which our knowledge risks becoming unstable, but also generative.

Considering workshop learning in relation to how our minds are extended beyond ourselves allows for a generous consideration of the relationships between learners and materials, and what those engagements could produce.

## Play-as-Paragogy



This brings me back to pedagogy, and more specifically to stressing the importance of play in provoking peer-to-peer forms of learning.

The performativity of play affords participants the conditions to explore the *what ifs* of doing an activity together. This means structured play can stimulate thinking about thinking, provoking them to question how to further or adapt these processes in the act of performing their play in a workshop setting.

Within MVSE, play is most explicit when participants collectively negotiate how to score a performance and then work together to stage it. They decide how to structure their play and are consistently required to step outside of the process they are within, to consider its components, to consider what one another are doing, to discuss, shape, and adapt their collective approach in response to each other as they go. As such, this form of critical play stimulates a metacognitive relationship between the participants and what they are learning.

It is the potential to harness the power of play within a workshop that makes it ideal for pedagogical forms of learning. It establishes opportunities for learners to actively engage with materials, their environment, and most importantly one another, to produce new ways of knowing or not-knowing a subject and to bring this learning back into their own practices once they have departed the workshop.

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