

# OUTLINE OF PLACE PRACTICES



This outline brings together practices from the Performing Places site ([www.performingplaces.org](http://www.performingplaces.org)) into a single document, offering more detail about how individual activities can be structured and facilitated. It is intended to be an accessible and usable document, from which practitioners, facilitators and teachers can draw when working with groups on issues of place. These are not 'lesson plans', but rather a set of related ideas and activities, which can be used in isolation or grouped together to form workshops or a series of sessions.

As with the website, this outline is grouped according to the categories, 'Openers', 'On Sites' and 'In the Studio', with activities from these sections of the site included, covering the work done by the three organisations (Half Moon, Cyrff Ystwyth and Oldham Theatre Workshop). There are no activities from 'Sharing and...'; as this section covers general ideas for presenting and sharing practices, rather than how such practices can be broken down and delivered within sessions.

Each activity follows the colour coding of the main site and therefore indicates suitability for particular groups. Oldham Theatre Workshop (mainly adult migrants) are in red, Half Moon (youth) in peach and Cyrff Ystwyth (disabled and non-disabled adults), green. Many activities are suitable across a range of participants, however. There are also links drawn between the different activities, suggesting how each could be developed or connected with other exercises.

The activities and ideas contained here were generated by a number of practitioners:

- Cyrff Ystwyth (CY) - Margaret Ames, Adrian Jones
- Half Moon (HM) - Vishni Velada-Billson, Samantha Adams, Patrick Furness, Stephanie McMann, Sally Mackey
- Oldham Theatre Workshop (OTW) - James Atherton, Craig Harris, Sally Mackey
- Other facilitators and artists who contributed to the work at HM, OTW and CY

Finally, there is no claim within this outline of practices or the site itself to the absolute 'originality' of the activities. Although many were generated or developed by those referenced above, some are certainly influenced by other practices, practitioners and theorists over many years of gathering material. They are collected here in what is hopefully a useful grouping of resources, which can be employed in developing place practices with community groups.

In each example below, a link is offered to the relevant page or pages of the website where related video examples can be accessed. In addition, when connections to other activities are suggested, links allow easy navigation between sections of the document, which are all bookmarked. To access the bookmarks, please click the bookmark icon on the left of the document (when saved and opened in Adobe).

Outcome from 'Challenging concepts of "liquid" place through performance practices in community contexts', an AHRC funded research project led by Sally Mackey.



**Related Video Clips:**  
[OTW: Openers](#)  
 2. Gels

### Gels – Oldham Theatre Workshop

An activity which can work well as an ice breaker for a range of different groups and as a way of individuals sharing memories, connections and special places

- Offer coloured gel squares (or equivalent) to participants, along with marker pens
- Ask participants to use their square to draw, write or indicate in some way something positive with which they have a personal connection
- Ask participants to share their gel with the rest of the group in a circle, so that the gels are physically collected and grouped together in the centre
- Find somewhere to display the gels, so they become a collective artwork and sit in the space as a reminder of the work

The idea of making art in response to place and connections with it can be developed through 'Tree Wishes'

### What is Place? – Half Moon

This opener is particularly helpful for young people or groups who may not have clear ideas about what place is.

- Put a blank word document up on a projector that everyone can see, or work on a single large piece of paper
- Ask participants to offer their own definitions of what place is
- Record all these responses, as well as dictionary definitions, if useful
- Use this to lead into a discussion about different ideas of what place is and to use this as a starting point for subsequent work

The record of the discussion can inform later work in sessions if the document or paper is brought into the space, to see what may have changed.



Outcome from 'Challenging concepts of "liquid" place through performance practices in community contexts', an AHRC funded research project led by Sally Mackey.



### Related Video Clips:

[OTW: Openers](#)

7. Where Have You Been?

### Where have you been? – Oldham Theatre Workshop

This activity is a great opener for any participants who share a common locality.

- Put up a large map of the locality in the space, along with markers and stickers
- Ask participants to place a mark on an area they live, have lived or visit regularly, offering them the possibility to 'mark' in different ways according to their connection with that place ie. an initial, symbol, colour, word
- Use the activity to prompt discussion around the place they all inhabit

This opener can also be returned to later in the process, where the marks can be revisited and new marks added.

### Daily Routine Through Sounds – Oldham Theatre Workshop

This opener is suitable for all groups, as a way of participants exploring and reflecting on their daily routines.

- Work as a full group in a circle to create rhythms together which reflect the daily routine of the participants, using vocal sounds, body and instruments
- Create a table with vertical and horizontal axes on a large piece of paper. Each participant's name is written down the left vertical axis, while the horizontal line is divided into time zones – this will need to be prepared in advance
- On the table, ask each participant to depict their daily routine through drawing a line from right to left next to their name – this can be straight to show a calm period or jagged to show chaos or disruption and so on. With large groups, this process could be carried out in small groupings with each group working from a different table, but it is important that each individual has a chance to trace their own line
- Ask small groups or individuals to work from the completed table to develop and perform their daily routines through sound and music, using any instruments available to experiment with tone, rhythm and pitch

This activity can develop into rhythmic routines to depict certain places, such as 'Market Performance' or could be developed integrated into a place-related activity, such as 'Mapping Oldham in the Studio'.



### Related Video Clips:

[OTW: Openers](#)

4. Daily Routine through Sounds

Outcome from 'Challenging concepts of "liquid" place through performance practices in community contexts', an AHRC funded research project led by Sally Mackey.



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### Related Video Clips:

[HM: Openers](#)

3. Focus on the Details

### Focus on the details – Half Moon

This activity works well with young people in order to draw their attention to the small details of the place they are in.

- Introduce the idea to the group that we often miss the details as we move around and within familiar places with familiar people
- Ask the group to move around the space and then to focus on a detail of that space that they have not noticed before
- Encourage them to become fascinated by that detail and then to vocalise that through describing and celebrating everything about it – this can be done individually or in pairs, so participants are describing their details to each other
- A development of the activity, as in the video, is to ask a whole group to respond to become obsessed with the details of an individual's appearance and to vocally share and celebrate that

This activity leads nicely into the 'Object Perspective' work below in the 'In the Studio' section.

### Relating to Images – Oldham Theatre Workshop

This is a great opener for groups, with less experience of drama work, to introduce ideas around place and memory.

- Place a collection of images on the floor in the space. These can be of people, places or objects, but there should be a good range to choose from
- Ask individuals to move around the space and choose one image which they connect with the most
- Ask the participants to share which image they have chosen and why – this could be a whole group exercise or in pairs depending on the size and nature of the group
- Divide the participants into groups of 3 or 4 and ask them to create freeze frames of their interpretation of the images each group member has chosen
- Ask groups to share their images and discuss responses

An exercise like this is a good lead in to work that might focus more on the specific locality e.g. 'Now consider how such an image might be situated in this area. Who might these people be? What might the objects be used for here?' Allow this to develop into further simple drama work that encourages a fusion of place.



### Related Video Clips:

[OTW: Openers](#)

6. Relating to Images

Outcome from 'Challenging concepts of "liquid" place through performance practices in community contexts', an AHRC funded research project led by Sally Mackey.



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### Related Video Clips:

[HM: On Sites](#)

1. Pipe Cleaner and Ribbon

### Pipe Cleaner and Ribbon – Half Moon

This is a great exercise for groups, who meet infrequently, to maintain focus on place practices and/or to draw the practices out into the everyday lives of the participants. The results of the activity at Half Moon were shared on a closed Facebook page, but this could also be done in the studio

- Gather pieces of ribbon and pipe cleaner and at the end of a session ask each participant to take one
- Encourage each individual to take their ribbon or pipe cleaner to a place they visit everyday
- Ask them to position or tie the ribbon/pipe cleaner within or in relation to the place, so that their perspective of that place is changed or disrupted
- Ask participants to photograph the place, with this added element and bring the image to the next session (or post on a shared social media page if possible/appropriate)
- Use the images to prompt discussion and activity in the next session around re-viewing or disrupting familiar and everyday places

This exercise links nicely to other activities exploring the disruption or re-viewing of everyday place – see 'Filming at Home' and 'Disrupting Everyday Place' below.

### Developing Group Improvisation/Bells – Cyrff Ystwyth

This is a good exercise for groups who are comfortable working together, to develop sound in relation to place. Whilst this exercise was relevant because church bells had become part of the memory of place to be performed by CY, the exercise can be generally adapted.

- Bring in simple percussive instruments, like bells, drums or triangles
- Ask participants to come up one by one and improvise with one of the instruments, so that a group improvisation is created
- Work with the participants to refine the improvisation, so it has a simple structure
- Re-site the improvisation in another place and ask the participants to look at how their positioning and/or movement in that place can affect the sound and the place itself

Developed by Cyrff Ystwyth with bells, this exercise links to many of their other activities, where improvisation is used as a starting point for creation (e.g. 'Working with Gesture').



### Related Video Clips:

[CY: On Sites](#)

1. Developing Group Improvisation
2. Bells

Outcome from 'Challenging concepts of "liquid" place through performance practices in community contexts', an AHRC funded research project led by Sally Mackey.



**Related Video Clips:**

[OTW: On Sites](#)

5. Outside Tea Party

### Outside Tea Party – Oldham Theatre Workshop

This activity works well once a particular routine in the studio has been established, to change and disrupt this through working on site

- Take a routine part of your regular studio sessions – this could be a particular warm up or, in the case of Oldham Theatre Workshop, the drinking of tea and coffee together before the session starts
- Carry out the activity as normal in the studio
- Ask participants to perform the same activity, but in a public site of your or their choosing, outside the studio
- Discuss how the familiar and routine actions are changed through being placed in an unfamiliar and public site

This use of site to re-perform routine activities links effectively to the Half Moon 'Filming at home: playing with place' activity below and could be developed and documented in this way.

### Scattering Cornflakes – Half Moon

This activity works particularly well with participants who meet regularly in the same venue, to enliven and draw their attention to the familiar route they take to reach that place.

- Before the session begins and participants start arriving, trace the route most participants take to the venue
- Find some way of physically changing their experience of the route – this could be scattering cornflakes, as shown in the Half Moon clip, but could equally be a series of signs, paper chains, chalked instructions or any other mode of shifting the space
- If possible, film the process of changing the space, so this footage can be shown later to participants
- When participants arrive, use their experiences of the disrupted route to prompt discussion around how we can re-view everyday places and routine activities.

This activity can link effectively to movement work, exploring disrupting everyday place – see 'Disrupting Everyday Actions'.



**Related Video Clips:**

[HM: On Sites](#)

2. Scattering Cornflakes

Outcome from 'Challenging concepts of "liquid" place through performance practices in community contexts', an AHRC funded research project led by Sally Mackey.



### Related Video Clips:

[OTW: On Sites](#)

3. Tree Wishes

### Tree Wishes – Oldham Theatre Workshop

This activity is effective with any group who have been working together for a few sessions, to share wishes and dreams, as well as interacting with the local space.

- In a circle, ask the participants to share their individual hopes, dreams and wishes with the rest of the group (Where participants are new to the area, it might be suggested these relate to the area.)
- Give each participant an individual piece of paper and ask them to write a dream or wish on one side of the paper – this does not have to be shared with others
- Ask them to decorate the other side of the paper in any way they wish and then to mould the paper round pre-prepared wire frames, to make a fruit shape
- Find a local place – ideally a tree, that they are likely to pass, to hang their wishes. They can remain there as a 'placed' reminder (a 'fruit') of their hopes and dreams

This activity works well as part of a series of exercises to develop interaction with local sites – see 'Outside Tea Party' and 'Film-making to explore place' for further ideas.

### Film-making to explore place – Half Moon

This activity works particularly effectively with small groups of young people, who enjoy the idea of film-making and acting for camera.

- Take the participants to a part of the space, which they don't usually inhabit. In the case of Half Moon, this was the basement, but it could be any area of the place they meet in which is unfamiliar
- Ask the group to explore this unfamiliar place and to think about a scene or story which might take place there. It is important that this story uses different parts of the place
- Ask participants to work quickly to devise the short scene and then film the different sections

This work, using filming to explore place, is usefully developed through editing the footage into a continuous piece and sharing it with other participants. In the Half Moon project, the film made was shown in the foyer area before the live performance.



### Related Video Clips:

[HM: On Sites](#)

3. The Lost Boy: Film making to explore place

Outcome from 'Challenging concepts of "liquid" place through performance practices in community contexts', an AHRC funded research project led by Sally Mackey.



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### Related Video Clips:

[OTW: On Sites](#)

7. Dovestone Story Trail

### Dovestone Story Trail – Oldham Theatre Workshop

This activity involves taking the group out of the studio and to an outdoor site for the duration of the session. It's a good way to develop familiarity with and attachment to a local place.

- Once at the site, give each participant a small amount of clay and ask them to mould a figure or character out of this
- Ask each of the participants to move around the site and find somewhere for their clay figure to sit
- Encourage, through modelling if appropriate, each participant to improvise a story about how their figure got to the spot in the site which they are inhabiting
- Leave the clay figures in their spots, as marks or traces of the participants on the site

Within the Oldham Theatre Workshop sessions, this activity was developed through a later studio based exercise, 'Bringing Mario to Life' which used one of the stories created as a stimulus.

### Filming at home: playing with place – Half Moon

This is an excellent activity to extend and develop place practices, with participants who are happy to work outside of session times and in their home environments.

- Ask participants who are willing to do some filming in their own homes – get permissions/consent as appropriate
- When visiting participants' homes with a video camera, ask them to identify everyday actions that they might carry out in different rooms of the house, or places nearby
- Film participants carrying out these actions as normal then ask them to think about how they could be disrupted or made strange, through either placing the action in an unfamiliar environment or changing the action in some way (see video clip)
- Film the results of this 'playing with place' and edit together to share with others

This type of activity produces footage which can be used in performance work. These actions can also be explored through live movement work. See 'Disrupting everyday actions' below.



### Related Video Clips:

[HM: On Sites](#)

4. Filming at home: playing with place

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**Related Video Clips:**

[HM: In the Studio](#)

1. Object Perspective

**Object Perspective – Half Moon**

This activity works well with young people, to draw their attention to a different perspective of familiar or everyday places.

- Ask the participants to spread out in the space and think of an everyday object that may be sitting around their house and the detail of how it looks and feels
- With that object in mind, ask the participants to take on a physical shape which might echo or evoke that object and then start to move around the room as the object
- Encourage them to develop and play with the quality, pace and size of their movement as the object
- Ask participants to share which object they are in groups and then to decide on a room or place where those objects might be grouped
- Ask them to develop a short scene, where the objects reflect on their position in and perspective of this everyday place, through dialogue, while maintaining the physicality and movement they had developed previously

The 'Focus on the details' opener is a good lead in to this activity.

**A Place Where... - Oldham Theatre Workshop**

This is a good activity to use early on in studio sessions with groups to start to get them thinking about their relationships with and emotional responses to particular places.

- Place three signs in different areas of the studio, which read 'A place where I felt comfortable', 'A place where I felt uncomfortable' and 'A place where I felt...'. These titles can be adapted and shifted to create a different focus for the activity
- Ask participants to visit each of the three areas and to contribute a response to each sentence, on the paper provided there. Their response should include their emotive response to the place, what they could see or hear and who else was present in their memory of that place
- This can be followed with group discussion and sharing of memories if appropriate

The text generated in this exercise can be combined and used to develop moments of performance, which respond to those memories, if participants are comfortable with this.



**Related Video Clips:**

[OTW: In the Studio](#)

1. A Place Where...

Outcome from 'Challenging concepts of "liquid" place through performance practices in community contexts', an AHRC funded research project led by Sally Mackey.



### Related Video Clips:

[CY: In the Studio](#)

1. Working with Gesture

### Working with Gesture – Cyrff Ystwyth

This activity works well for groups with varied physical and cognitive abilities, allowing each participant to develop their individual interpretation of the stimulus.

- Either start with a gesture or set of gestures you have devised based on discussions about a specific place or ask a participant to develop these prior to the session. In Cyrff Ystwyth, however, such work is often found in the session through improvisation
- Share the gestures with the rest of the group and ask them firstly to copy the gesture as exactly as possible
- Ask participants to develop each gesture, playing with how it can be changed through its positioning in space, size and its pacing
- Place the participants' individual gestures together in the studio and then transpose the sequence to a different site, ideally the site upon which the ideas were based originally
- Experiment with the group as to how the sequence of gestures can be positioned on the site and how the site affects their performance of this sequence

This exercise works well to develop material in the studio which can then be developed and shifted when placed in a site. See another example of this type of work below in 'Creating and Developing Choreographic Material'.

### Performing Fearful Place – Half Moon

This is a strong exercise to allow participants to develop a physical response to a fearful place. It works particularly well with young people, but could be adapted to the needs of different groups.

- Ask all participants to position themselves individually in the space and to think of a place they find fearful. They do not have to share this with anyone else, but it should be clear to them what this place is
- Ask each participant to take masking tape and find a way of creating that fearful place in the studio, which evokes something of how it makes them feel. They need to be positioned within the place they make through the masking tape
- Working from the position they have adopted in the fearful place, ask each participant to develop a sequence of 3 or 4 movements, which express something of their position, actions or response to that place – this can be realistic or abstract
- With their movements fixed, ask participants to re-position their sequence in relation to the studio – this could involve working from a wall or another fixed surface in the space. At this point, participants could continue to work individually or work with a partner to develop a combined sequence
- Ask participants to present their sequences with music and then discuss what they evoke

This exercise could be developed into a group movement sequence or a series of individual movement pieces. Participants could also explore taking the movements into a different site and transposing the movements to fit this place.



### Related Video Clips:

[HM: In the Studio](#)

3. Performing Fearful Place: Masking tape and movement sequences

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**Related Video Clips:**  
[OTW: In the Studio](#)  
2. Mapping Oldham in the Studio

### Mapping Oldham in the Studio – Oldham Theatre Workshop

This is a good studio-based activity for a group of people who share a locality, with which they may not be familiar, like the migrant participants in the Oldham Theatre Workshop project. It explores their positioning and routine within the locality and as such, could also be useful with more embedded groups.

- Ask participants to imagine that the studio space represents the locality they share – this could be a town, borough or even a building or set of buildings
- Tell the participants where the studio space they are in sits in this physical map. Ask them to move to this place in the studio
- Name a well-known site or building nearby and ask them to move to it, thinking of the studio space as a map. Develop this by mapping other familiar places in the studio, such as libraries, hospitals, markets and green spaces.
- Ask individual participants to attach a particular sound to each mapped space – this could be vocal or instruments can also be used.
- Using the sounds as triggers, ask participants to move to each different place accordingly
- Ask participants to think about their daily routine, visiting each of these spaces. Ask them to move around the studio according to this routine, using non-verbal sound to characterise their journey and their feelings about going to each of these places

This activity links effectively from 'Daily Routine Through Sounds' and 'Where have you been?' as a series of exercises which develop ideas around participants' positioning in and daily engagement with the place in which they live.

### Creating and Developing Choreographic Material – Cyrff Ystwyth

This is an effective way of developing group choreographic material with participants of varied physical and cognitive abilities, allowing each individual to develop movement according to their abilities.

- Develop a series of movements, or ask an individual participant to do this, based on the place that is remembered and that will be the focus for the finished performance
- Ask the participants to watch and follow the sequence, so that they can place these movements comfortably in their bodies
- Develop the sequence through moving it in and around a space or site
- Ask participants to develop and refine their individual interpretations of the movements and place these together
- This stage of the activity often needs an outside 'directorial' eye to aid the development of the group choreography in space

This type of choreographic development is typical of Cyrff Ystwyth's work, often resulting in a series of beautiful and sensitive sequences in performance – see in 'Hymns' and 'Closing the Gates in the 'CY: Sharing and...' section of the website.



**Related Video Clips:**

[CY: In the Studio](#)

3. Creating Choreographic Material
  4. Developing the Choreography
- [CY: Sharing and...](#)
2. Hymns
  4. Closing the Gates

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#### Related Video Clips:

[HM: In the Studio](#)

#### 4. The Uncomfortable Choir

### The Uncomfortable Choir – Half Moon

This is a lovely activity to develop a vocal response to fearful place and is appropriate for a range of groups. It can be carried out live, but also benefits from having some recording equipment to capture the responses.

- Ask participants to gather in a circle and to think about what kinds of sounds they make when scared. Encourage them to consider the variations of pitch, volume and quality of sound
- Making the circle a little tighter, work initially from breath to start to develop the sounds, asking participants to work and build from each other as part of the improvisation
- Try a few different starting points for this improvised vocal response for fear, like a particular note sounded to 'ahh'
- Change the configuration of the space and ask participants to stand in a line at one end and voice a stronger vocal response to fear, such as screams and shouts

Using simple sound editing software and a microphone, the varied sounds created can be captured and mixed together to create an 'uncomfortable choir', which can soundtrack movement work such as that generated in 'Performing Fearful Place'. Otherwise, the sounds can be activated or conducted live with the group.

### Bringing Mario to Life – Oldham Theatre Workshop

This studio-based activity is an effective follow up to the on-site development of characters and stories in 'Dovestone Story Trail'. It works well with groups who have recently done this type of on site work, but could work equally well with groups, who can relate to a shared familiar place.

- With a map of the site visited placed in the studio, ask participants to position their characters/figures as they were on the site. If the site has not been visited recently, the participants have a choice of where to position their figures, which could be actual clay figures, toys or simple markers
- Focusing on one of the figures in the map, ask the participant who created or positioned that figure to re-tell or tell their story. This could be aided by you and other participants, so that the story is improvised by the group
- Ask members of the group to use percussion instruments to dramatise particular moments of the story and encourage participants to physicalize the character's actions as they are told
- This improvised storytelling with music can also be carried out with other characters/figures on the map

This activity clearly links back to the site-based storytelling around clay figures made by participants in 'Dovestone Story Trail'. It could also be developed through asking small groups to use individual stories to create short scenes or movement sequences.



#### Related Video Clips:

[OTW: In the Studio](#)

#### 4. Bringing Mario to Life

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### Related Video Clips:

[HM: In the Studio](#)

5. Disrupting Everyday  
Actions: Cornflakes

### Disrupting Everyday Actions – Half Moon

This is an effective activity to explore how everyday actions can be disrupted – it works particularly well with young people.

- Ask participants in small groups to think of an everyday action they all do, like eating breakfast, getting dressed in the morning etc.
- Ask each group to break down the activity into individual movements and to experiment with how those individual movements can be shared across the group, using canon, repetition and unison movements, so that a group sequence is created
- Ask the groups to experiment with different qualities of movement and pacing to disrupt the 'everyday' nature of the movement and make it strange or unfamiliar
- Ask groups to present sequences and discuss if and how the everyday activity is disrupted by its performance in this way

This activity can be developed through bringing in the materials, such as bowls, cereal, clothes etc. and asking groups to explore how the materials can be used to further disrupt the actions, similarly to 'Playing with Place'

### Market Performance – Oldham Theatre Workshop

This studio-based activity is a great way for groups to respond to a site they have visited. In the case of Oldham Theatre Workshop, this was a market, but any busy, vibrant site could be identified by the group.

- Visit the chosen site with the group, asking them to pay attention to the different movements people are engaged in at this place, as well as sounds they hear and other visual aspects of this place
- Once back in the studio, ask participants firstly to share any particular movements they noticed. Work from each movement offered, to develop a series of rhythmic sequences with the group. Practise these so that they are familiar to the participants
- Now ask participants to share the sounds they heard and ask them to re-create these in the studio, recording these if possible
- Next, ask participants to use whatever materials and props you have available in the studio to recreate the visual feel and space of the site – this can include using costumes
- Finally, place the movements and sounds in the created place and start to fit them together into a sequence. This can be fixed if you wish, but could also be semi-improvised, where participants can activate different movement sequences at different points and positions within the place they have created

Similarly to 'Bringing Mario To Life', this activity is a way of working from and responding to a particular site in the studio, with the performance of place drawing attention to the sounds, sights and feel of this place.



### Related Video Clips:

[OTW: In the Studio](#)

5. Market  
Performance

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