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VIDEO ARTICLE

Workshopping: Exploring the Entanglement of Sites, Tools, and Bodily Possibilities in an Academic Gathering

Paul Craddock and Anna Harris

Maastricht University, NL

Corresponding author: Paul Craddock (p.craddock@ucl.ac.uk)

The craftsperson's workshop, the academic workshop – how comparable are they? Historically, craft workshops have been sites of sustained cooperation, imbued with elaborate social rituals and hierarchies, and are considered places of experimentation. Through close engagement with materials, tools, places, and other bodies, the body itself is acknowledged as a 'learning' and 'knowing' entity (Sennett 2008). Academic workshops, similarly, have rituals and hierarchies, and aspire to be experimental venues. Framed as cerebral affairs, however, their embodied dimension is far subtler and easier to overlook. This video essay focuses on an academic workshop that took place in Maastricht, in the Netherlands, in July 2018. The workshop focused on teaching and learning, particularly attending to how learning is related to the environment in which we learn, how materials and sensoriality influences the development of embodied skills, and how technologies and global contexts shape learning. Over four days, 40 participants – all academics or practitioners – ran or participated in panel discussions, movement and object exercises, practical workshops, and a public event which delved into this topic, exploring how it related to their academic work. The main venue choice was very specific – a hotel school completely staffed by hospitality students. We learned alongside them. It was, in some sense, a skillshare workshop. We took seriously the assertion that making and performing are also acts of thinking, and that meaning is created and expressed in multiple modes (Kress 2010, Brown and Banks 2014, Kullman 2014); the workshop was inherently interactive, often using experiments and exercises to structure dialogue in creative ways, and involved contributions from makers and other practitioners. This video essay uses closely-observed insights which emerged from the video of the event, to consider what this workshop on learning and embodiment offers to thinking about the nature of the academic workshop more broadly, and its potential relationship to the kinds of craft workshops Sennett describes. It speaks in conversation with literature which recognises a relationship between bodies, environments, and materials in knowing about the world (eg. Pink 2017, Lave 2019, Ingold 2013) also drawing on literature which explores the nature of how we gather (Parker 2019). It adds new insights through exploring three themes from the small group workshops

that aren't always prominent in the literature – that are perhaps difficult to explicate in words – framing the workshop as a place of learning and apprenticeship: fumbling, traces of places, and the tactile-digital. Through reference to these themes, the videos link academic experimentation and embodied learning. And while these themes all emerge in the literature above, the video component reveals the extent to which we found them to be entangled – bodies with places, with materials, with digital landscapes. This palimpsest of interactions, and how they are inter-related, is difficult to recognise in a written treatment.

Keywords: embodiment; workshopping; skills; place; multimodality

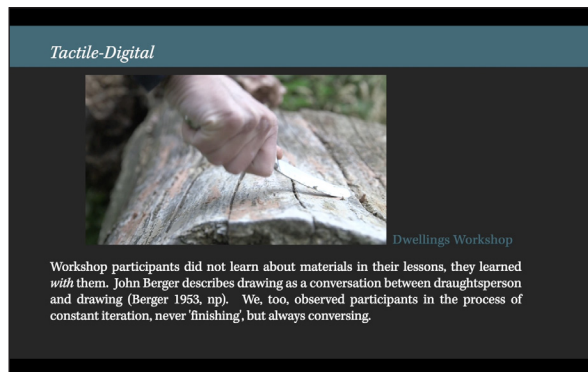
VIDEO ARTICLE

Available to view here: <https://doi.org/10.16995/jer.30>.

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STILLS FROM THE VIDEO ARTICLE





VIDEO ARTICLE TRANSCRIPT

[00:10]

Workshopping: Exploring the entanglement of sites, tools, and bodily possibilities in an academic gathering

Paul Craddock and Anna Harris

[pause symbol]

Please pause the video to read the following text.

How to View

We have consciously designed this article as an experiment in the video article form. It was created as a scholarly output, an application of film distinct from that of a documentary film maker. We follow the lead of social semiotician Gunther Kress

by attempting to recognise and respect non-spoken, non-written contributions to knowledge, using film to do this. Our approach has led us to resist the convention of translating every important expression into a textual medium. In many cases, it has meant we chose to retain seemingly incidental audio not because it spells out our argument, but rather because it reflects a more central point: that learning is an embodied process – often untidy, dirty, and occasionally undignified.

This is not to say we resist text. On the contrary, this article experiments with the combination of text and audio-visual information. Our intention is to invite a non-linear approach to engaging with a traditionally linear medium and encourage you to use the 'play' and 'pause' functions to move back and forth as necessary. When it will be essential to pause to read text, we will indicate this with a 'pause' symbol. In these circumstances, the text will remain on screen for five seconds.

[00:30]

Our biographies and narratives are an important part of how we frame and approach workshopping as well as how we crafted a video essay together about the topic.

Paul Craddock

Paul is a cultural historian and alongside this was a professional film maker. Over the last five years or so, through working with the V&A and collaborating with Anna, these once-distinct careers collapsed into one another as he engaged with concepts like embodiment and intellectual tools like multimodality. He found film a far more appropriate medium to work with these ideas because it helps to respect the integrity of knowledge manifested in non-textual modes.

Anna Harris

Anna Harris first worked as a doctor before learning anthropology and turning her ethnographic gaze back to the medical profession. Missing the hands-on element of clinical practice in academia, her work endeavors to find creative and practically engaging methods for studying questions of embodiment, learning, materiality and infrastructures of medical practice.

Our collaboration began with a workshop which brought together advisors and collaborators at an early stage of Anna's research project, Making Clinical Sense, which focuses on the materiality of medical education. As both professional film maker and cultural historian, Paul was invited to document the event, and it is his footage that features in this article. The workshop was also part of a larger agenda of Making Clinical Sense to experiment with the notion of gathering, attending to materiality, learning, and place. More details about the workshop, the activities it comprised, the participants, geographical location, purpose of the building, rooms, dates, and invitations can be found at www.makingclinicalsense.com

[00:55]

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We have arranged the article in five sections. As well as the section title displayed in the top-left corner of the screen, the background for each theme is a different shade to help orient the viewer:

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Introduction	01.16
Theme 1: fumbling	01.55
Theme 2: traces of places	06.25
Theme 3: tactile-digital	11.18
Conclusion	14.00
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We invite you to scrub through the video using these markers to aid navigation, as you might sub-headings in a conventional written article.

[01:00]

Abstract (1 of 5)

The craftsperson's workshop, the academic workshop – how comparable are they?

Historically, craft workshops have been sites of sustained cooperation, imbued with elaborate social rituals and hierarchies, and are considered places of experimentation. Through close engagement with materials, tools, places, and other bodies, the body itself is acknowledged as a 'learning' and 'knowing' entity (Sennett 2008). Academic workshops, similarly, have rituals and hierarchies, and aspire to be experimental venues. Framed as cerebral affairs, however, their embodied dimension is far subtler and easier to overlook.

Abstract (2 of 5)

This video essay focuses on an academic workshop that took place in Maastricht, in the Netherlands, in July 2018. The workshop focused on teaching and learning, particularly attending to how learning is related to the environment in which we learn, how material and sensorality influences the development of embodied skills, and how technologies and global contexts shape learning. Over four days, 40 participants – all academics or practitioners – ran or participated in panel discussions, movement and object exercises, practical workshops, and a public event which delved into this topic, exploring how it related to their academic work.

Abstract (3 of 5)

The main venue choice was very specific – a hotel school completely staffed by hospitality students. We learned alongside them. It was, in some sense, a skill share workshop. We took seriously the assertion that making and performing are also acts of thinking, and that meaning is created and expressed in multiple modes (Kress 2010, Brown and Banks 2014, Kullman 2014); the workshop was inherently interactive, often using experiments and exercises to structure dialogue in creative ways, and involved contributions from makers and other practitioners.

Abstract (4 of 5)

This video essay uses closely-observed insights which emerged from the video of the event, to consider what this workshop on learning and embodiment offers to thinking about the nature of the academic workshop more broadly, and its

potential relationship to the kinds of craft workshops Sennett describes. It speaks in conversation with literature which recognises a relationship between bodies, environments, and materials in knowing about the world (eg. Pink 2017, Lave 2019, Ingold 2013) also drawing on literature which explores the nature of how we gather (Parker 2019).

Abstract (5 of 5)

It adds new insights through exploring three themes from the small group workshops that are not always prominent in the literature – that are perhaps difficult to explicate in words – framing the workshop as a place of learning and apprenticeship: fumbling, traces of places, and the tactile-digital. Through reference to these themes, the videos link academic experimentation and embodied learning. And while these themes emerge in the literature above, the video component reveals the extent to which we found them to be entangled – bodies with places, with materials, with digital landscapes. This palimpsest of interactions, and how they are inter-related, is difficult to recognise in a written treatment.

[01:26]

The Small Group Workshops

Napkin Workshop

Science Lesson

Dwellings Workshop

Light Workshop

Imaginative Ethnography

Overhead Visualisations

Napkin Workshop: A Material Investigation of Folding

Participants who signed up for this workshop led by historian of science Kristen Haring were offered a lesson in hands-on history research and teaching techniques in the midst of a hands-on exercise of hospitality napkin folding.

Science lesson: An Exercise in Hands-On Science

Selase Dorledzi, Master Trainer from the Practical Education Network re-enacted a science lesson that she would give to highschool students, using materials readily available in the Ghanaian context.

Dwellings Workshop: Exploring Scale, Site and Leaving Traces Through Clay

Anthropologist Rachel Harkness invited her workshop participants to explore places and bodies materially and theoretically, through building miniature clay dwellings in the grounds of the Hotel School.

Light Workshop: Making and Moving Electronic Candlelight

New York Arts Professor Tom Igoe brought Arduino single-board microcontrollers to the Hotel School so that his workshop participants could learn to make and control LED candles.

Imaginative Ethnography: Unpacking the Silent Histories of Making

In this workshop, Sven Dupré, Thijs Hagendijk and Jenny Boulboulé, all historians, took participants offsite to the art institution Marres, to imagine the silent dimensions of workshop spaces embedded in recipes.

Overhead Visualisations: A Philosophical Investigation of Workshopping

Erik Reitveld and Ludger van Dijk, both philosophers, invited their participants to reflect on the activities leading up to our workshop and tell stories about these material engagements via overhead projections.

[02:06]

1. Fumbling Bodies

Science Lesson

Napkin Workshop

Workshop participants, particularly the academics, struggled, banged, fumbled and smoothed their way through the small group workshops. They took their time to

learn new things, because they had time. They made mistakes, because they could afford to.

In the literature on enskillment and learning (Sennett 2008, Ingold 2013), there is often little room allowed for uncertainty and error, with a focus instead on fluency and expertise. The same could be said for the missing element of bumbling in academic discourses today (Taylor 2014).

[Instructor:] One in each group. And then the cellotape...

[Person 1:] I am not very good in cutting. Would you like to cut?

[Person 2:] I am very good in cutting.

[Person 1 laughs]

[Person 2:] Why aren't you good in cutting. What is the, what's the problem?

[Person 1:] I don't know. I don't have a very steady hand.

[Person 2:] That is because you do not practice.

[Person 1:] Well, yes, because I let other people do the cutting for me.

[Person 2:] But this is quite difficult with small, with small scissors

[Person 1:] And then there needs to be another ...

[Person 2:] Ok, so let's... I have four. What we can do, we fold this one, and then we have two parts, and then we make one smaller, so...

If I do a nice crisp fold ...

[Person 1 laughing]

[Person 2:] Cutting skills.

How are we doing with the sticker, where is the sticker?

[Person 1:] And you think this one a little bit smaller?

[Person 2:] Yeah.

[Person 3:] The face, I wasn't sure where the face was. I thought the face would be the place where the sticker wasn't but I have now changed this, so the sticker is facing downwards.

[Person 1:] Oh, tie it. Yeah.

[Person 2:] Yeah, tie it, yeah.

As our workshop was running, next door the hospitality students were swiftly, expertly folding napkins for the lunch service.

Academics can fumble in workshops. The craftsperson and practitioner does not always experience the same luxury.

[Person 4:] If you line these two up, it's easier.

[Person 5:] Ah, line these two up. OK, yeah. I was trying to figure out where the sticker shouldn't be.

[Person 4:] The sticker shouldn't show.

[Person 5:] Shouldn't show? So that means where it needs to be in the beginning ...

[Person 4:] Normally if you have selvedge like this ...

Dwellings Workshop

Learning new skills in an academic workshop involves uncertainty, mistakes, error, and slowness – aspects of enskillment often missing from the literature in learning and workshopping, yet witnessed here in the videos. The academic workshop differs from the craft workshop in the luxury afforded to such fumbling.

[06:37]

2. Traces of places

Each session engaged closely with its respective site. Participants related to place geographically, philosophically and historically, through landscape and labour. In one session, place was even addressed in relation to performing historical recipes – a tacit recognition of the historical relationship between physical workshops and bodies.

Dwellings Workshop

[Person 6:] It's a bit windy up here. So that's why we need shelter.

[Person 7:] I'm thinking of trying to work with the shapes a bit, so the knobs on the trees and the roundness, but I'm, I don't know if I have the skill or the ability to fill it out, but something with more of the roughness, as well. ... I wasn't thinking of the sun, well, I guess there is not so much here, but...

[Person 8:] Pour it in rain water
or in common pure water
or for valuable work in distilled water
Allow to rest for a few days
Pour off the clarified liquid by tipping
or else separating from the amber by filters
That is long pieces are felt
And let the powder
That is left behind
Dry on white absorbent paper
Or on chalk,
And then save it in a dry place.

[Person 8:] It was about how to make a varnish. And one group started to imagine the place where that varnish making would take place. So in the recipe it talks about grinding a resinous substance, and then heating it up in a sand bath, adding essences and oils, being careful that they do not... that the varnish doesn't catch fire, but on the other hand also putting the fire really high until the sand starts to glow.

Overhead Visualisations

Place is often in the background of studies of embodied learning (Pink 2011, Fors 2013). Video engagement reveals it to be ever-present and influential, entangled with bodies and the process of learning. Place emerges not only in the physical site of the

workshop, but also in the journeys before and after, in the historical imagination, in the assumptions made and reactions witnessed when a science lesson from Ghana is replicated in the Netherlands, and at different scales, from the miniature to the looming large.

[Person 9:] OK, so what we have here is the process of kind of getting here. This is everybody's different journey and this is where we are [pointing], that's the inset above which I will come to in a moment [pointing], and the different journeys... This is not a scale! [Laughter] I mean, a little bit, to suggest a kind of scale, so the longer the line the further you have travelled, and, but the thickness of the lines are also there to kind of indicate, the people with thicker lines are more skilled and better prepared. [Laughter] That's me. [Laughter] And – is he still here? – this is Paul, whose journey started kind of easily and then got difficult because he had to carry everything here in the last little bit. [...] The blue one is me, this is me walking to my room, to go here, to the lunch, to the toilet, to the outside... And what these other points are other people, and their kind of little journeys in here as well, going from place to place, and they sometimes intersect and sometimes don't. And if I was more artistic it would be much more beautiful.

Sites of learning are always part of the process of learning, and there are a multitude of ways in which places can be traced in an event. Not only is place potentially backgrounded or too contained in studies of embodiment and learning, but also in academic workshops, the venue is often merely an incidental container, when it could be much more.

[Person 9:] Because I think one of the interesting things about conferences is how do you create a place where many people have come from many different places, and then you're trying to kind of very quickly create some kind of whole. What I would have liked to visualise, if I was capable, was not only the different kinds of skill and engagement – so these thicker lines are all kinds of local people who were working hard to make this happen – but how distracted you might be by other things going on in your life at the moment, but I didn't know how to visualise that. [Laughter]

[11:29]

3. Tactile-Digital

Dwellings Workshop

Workshop participants did not learn about materials in their lessons, they learned with them. John Berger describes drawing as a conversation between draughtsperson and drawing (Berger 1953, np). We, too, observed participants in the process of constant iteration, never ‘finishing’, but always conversing.

[Person 10:] It looks like painting, doesn't it? ... You get nice texture like this, no?

[Person 11:] Yes.

[Person 10:] Now let me get my knife.

Light Workshop

These materials were tactile and textural, digital and dirty, highlighting an important interface – a proxy maybe, a means of dialogue. The small group workshops treated materials like clay, but many of the workshops showed that materials can also be code, and that code can be tactile, can in this instance create candlelight.

[Person 12:] I just did some code that Tom has...

[Tom:] ...and it tells the computer to do one thing. So, set-up is a built-in function that you get to define. You get to define what happens in the set-up. It happens once when the chip starts. I'm going to use the word chip and computer interchangeably, chip, computer, microcontroller, same thing. And then the loop, after the set-up has run, the loop starts running, and when the loop finishes, it starts running again, and it continues forever and ever. That is where Apple got the name of their address for their headquarters, infinite loop.

[Person 13:] Absolutely, and mine's not doing anything at all anymore.

[Person 12:] Is it on?

[Person 13:] It's all in the uploading. It says it's done, but I suspect I am not wired properly. But it's doing something that it wasn't doing three hours ago.

[Tom:] ...for lunch today is going to have the napkins from the napkin folding, and they'd like our candles too... [Laughter] What they are going to do is they're going to set up up power in the centre like we did here and then we can just plug in. So I've got enough power for four ... all we really need is basically people's phone chargers, and they can run off those.

[14:10]

Overhead Visualisations

Scholars of multimodality have argued that knowledge is made manifest and communicated in multiple modes and cannot be reduced to talk and text (Gunn 2005, Kress 2010, Jewitt, Bezemer and O'Halloran 2016). Video, we argue, enables us to privilege non-written, non-spoken modes of communication. By using the medium to highlight usually-suppressed audio-visual information, we observed a considerable seepage between bodies, materials, and places even in an academic workshop.

The processes of learning and workshopping, we found, resonate with Ingold's sentiment about participant observation being 'enshrined in an ontological commitment that renders the very idea of data collection unthinkable' (Ingold 2013, 5). Fumbling, traces of places, and the tactile-digital are all rich concepts. They are difficult to observe and write about; they appear woven into the fabric of the workshop. We suggest that academic workshops could benefit from attending more closely to these embodied aspects of gathering no matter what the theme.

[Person 14:] And then I thought of yesterday evening's session, where we had three different people talking, but they had overlapping interests, concerns. And then we had dinner and all of us together, sitting together, and then in the morning we had three workshops. And I had the sense that they are quite separate, we didn't talk to each other about it. So, a little bit of anxiety about three different things happening. And then again we have lunch together, and then we have three more workshops. But now it's even more

diverse, they are not even the same shape, they're... You know, someone's gone off somewhere. [Laughter]. So, I have the workshop structure and these are all disparate bits of the puzzle, but I'm not sure in the end what kind of rainbow, beautiful rainbow we can make.

[15:44]

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[15:56]

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This video article is dedicated to the memory of Professor Gunther Kress (1940–2019).

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Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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