

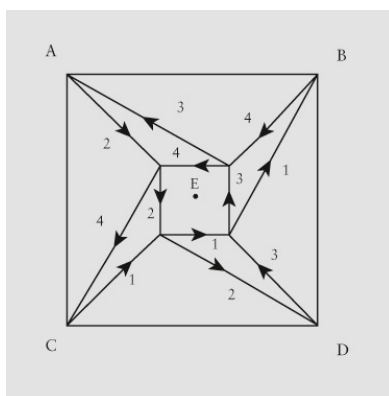
“Where am I?”

—QUADS, *terrestrial cartography and the learning theatre*

The question—*where am I?*—is from a book-title by Bruno Latour. The subtitle is: *lessons from the confinement for terrestrials*. It is from 2021 and is about the pandemic. Latour thinks that there is an extra-terrestrial streak to Western civilisation, and in particular the generations who have grown up with the Internet (to whom Internet access is as immediate as turning on an electrical switch).

So, we work in groups of 4 (QUADS) with rotating *tasks*: **1**) present an idea; **2**) support that idea with research; **3**) criticise this research; **4**) come up with hands-on knowledge of what can be done [which constrains/enables the idea]. The point being that these tasks are done by different people in a group of 4: each with one task. The you *rotate* the tasks so the whole group gets to do them all.

The idea of calling this a **QUAD** comes from Samuel Beckett’s choreographic work with that name. Beckett invented a design for how *four* people can move along the vertices and diagonals of a *square*, without ever crossing each other’s paths/colliding. In the original version he makes each of the 4 movers correspond with cloaks of different colour, with each their sound-track in the music.



This non-colliding design can be interesting to perform because it allows to extend your practical understanding of what the above tasks of group-work does: because you do not attack the person with the *idea* (1); rather, you assist that person with *knowledge resources* (2), critiquing *these* rather than a person (3). And use that as a *springboard* to set the idea in motion: how it can be done (4).

So, here—in the present usage—the QUAD is model/method of *communicative interaction* that generates an outcome that will fuel your work with developing materials for a logbook (which you go and do, *right away*, after you have done the QUAD-work). The QUAD is quite simple, but can work at any level of sophistication. For pedagogical reasons I choose a very simple one here:

- (1) I want to do an entry about *fish*!
- (2) Then you are in the right country, so much *research* about fish: like the reports x, y, z.
- (3) Yes, but those are reports and this is an art-school project, the knowledge base is *different*.
- (4) You know there is salmon in the river by the school? You need a *permit*, a special *rod* and *line*.

That should take you about 15 minutes, and then you go on to the next person. Of course, as your baggage grows heavier the discussions will be more pointed/sophisticated. The point being that you get to root knowledge (2) and its critique (3), in a framework of ideas (1) and performance (4). And this is exactly what Bruno Latour says we have to do to become terrestrial (from being E.T.s).

As the output from QUAD meetings is generated, and *feeds* a logbook—with drawings, pictures and patches of writing—the people meeting in the QUAD will have things to show in the group as they present their idea. Since each entry is *dated*, it will become clearer where each one is in their process. And for this reason is important that the QUAD-members bring and show this work.

An example is shown in a separate entry on developing BlackBooks. By this means, the participant will have appropriated the surfaces—the surface of selected elements and layout—for their own uses. The QUAD is a model of a process mainly, generating outcomes at this level. However, when it receives input from the logbook production, it becomes a performative arena: presentations.

Any presentation in the practical subjects at art school is likely to incorporate the 4 task elements of the QUAD: demo and story of idea, suggestions for research, critiques of this research and hands-on reflections that the presenter can bring on as constraints/enablers. Since a surfaces that the MA students invent in this train will acquire an importance, we may ask: *where do they come from?*

Just as students who are trained to work with exhibitions in mind often have *drawing*—with a stronger *foothold* than writing—the *wall* of the white cube is a surface they have more/less *acquired*. With performing arts students the place they spend time working is often the *floor* of a BlackBox. To reflect on the appropriation of these two surfaces, I have made a board: black & white on two side.

Turning the black (*slate*) side up I would put it on the floor in a Black Box determine what is to be screened on it from that place. It is a limited surface. Then *raise* it to a level where it possible to continue working on it: for instance, sitting on a chair with the board on the *lap*. Similarly, the *white board* side can be held against the wall of a White Cube, to initiate contents. An then take it down.

The point of this demonstration: it is possible to *take a surface that you have already acquired* and *take it into possession for other purposes* (lending strength from the ones you already know and master). As a sample of space that you know, the black and white sides of the board are apt to help you *screen* stuff that is taking place in *time*: since it is a surface only, and not the entire space.

The surface, then, is the surface on which you invent symbolic elements and language that will help you orient yourselves in your *timescapes*: the process, performance and production aspects of your work with an MA. The simple demonstration, which thereby is outlined, has a communicative physical impact. It thereby certainly qualifies to a certain (communicative) definition of *ritual*.

Such acts that clarify the terms in which a topic is set, are likely to have a specific content for each one of you. One that will become ever more precise as you make compositions of images, drawings, and written patches as a logbook is made up of. Make sure that you *date* the entries, since you may not want to bind them to a certain sequence immediately, but determine one with the work of time.

By using this method you end up with a collection—or, *portfolio*—of small patches that you can use to develop your personal (terrestrial) *cartography*: small surfaces that spread out and determine *where you are*. This is useful when you do presentations (where am I in my project?), whether you use the surfaces to make a score for the presentation, or a scenography exhibiting some of these.

Presently, I am writing a few lines on surfaces used for reflective purposes—as indicated—to *dock* the writing you are doing, as part of your studies, in the *environment* defined by your artistic

practice. So that you don't only end up with some text for someone else to read, but one that can also be spoken, shown and performed. This is what is meant here by the notion of 'learning theatre'.

So, the outcome of the present notion of *cartography* is *not* to extend the subject of geography from the primary and secondary school levels, and into higher education and research at art school. But rather to *divert*—even *highjack*—mapping: for generative artistic purposes. This will help you become a better reflective practitioner: however, the impact on your artistic practice is what counts.

The epithet *terrestrial* is used by Bruno Latour as a counter-point to *extraterrestrial*. In his book, there is a part of Western civilisation which is *extraterrestrial*, in a sense that is presently globalising with digital culture, social media and online habits. We relate to the world, in which there is life, as though we are not really part of it; but instead are looking at it from above. That is, the **god-trick**.

The board offers a way of being *with* the subject matter: one's own, trans-personal—collaborative, or spontaneous—or the work of others, and establish this as an experimental limbo-zone; where new creatures can hatch and live: whether they are day, night or twilight creatures. As time goes by, or with the work of time, *references* will expand from books, articles, catalogues, videos and objects...

"... *L'espace du milieu*¹ explores reflexive emanations from the middle zone. ... the middle (or centre or interval) operates multiple changes with what surrounds it. ... The work is experiential, inflecting the vibrational activity of middle spaces, which include and exceed humans." (Ikoniadou, 2014, p.55)

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Before organising QUAD groups in a large class—in courses that run across several sessions—it can be wise to set up lists so that all the students get to work in different groups throughout the course, and getting to know each other through this intermedium. The QUADs, in the sense outlined here, set off in the wake of the pandemic: we had set up small cohorts to limit contagion impact.

When the students have gone through the first drill, and they could benefit from working with more stable QUADs, it is material to involve the students in the selection and composition in such groups. The basic setup developed here is according to a morning meeting in a design-/architecture studio. This particular group work is *not* for therapy, but for a quick run-through that triggers activity.

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Ikoniadou, Eleni. (2014). *The rhythmic event. Art, media and the sonic*. The MIT press.

¹ Fr. The Middle Space (project title)