

# Build-A-Basho

## Build-A-Basho

Build-A-Basho develops the first class lecture into an introductory learning resource.

It is a preable to the **Class Assignment #1 – Create your Basho's Covenant**, which is based on the research covered in this learning resource.

If you miss the lecture, or you're following this independently, you should first work your way through this page before moving onto **Class Assignment #1** .

As paragogues, you will go through an interactive process in which you learn how to establish a Basho of your choice, one tailored to your own group preferences.

Build-A-Basho will show you how to create a 'calibrator', a simple method of establishing how you will work in a group (your Basho).

You will create both a personal and group calibrator using either an analogue Whiteboard or an Miro e-Whiteboard ([link](#)).

### References:

Nishida, K. (2012). *Basho. Place and Dialectic: Two Essays*. A. A. o. Religion. New York, Oxford

University Press. Salmon, G. (2013). *E-tivities the key to active online learning*. New York, New York : Routledge.

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# What is 'Basho'?

Let's start by examining a key term – *Basho* – how it is used in organisational settings?

You should be able to formulate your own responses to this question to some extent by the end of this first workshop since you will gain direct experience of what being part of a Basho involves.

## Basho 場所

*Japanese: basho no ronri "logic of place".*

While the phrase Basho 場所 is used widely in Japanese culture, the particular concept – “logic of place” – was developed by Nishida Kitaro – founder of the Kyoto School of Philosophy in 1926. We will be drawing loosely on the theory of Basho as refracted through the lens of SECI organisational learning theory rather than Nishida and the Kyoto School specifically.

Source: <https://youtu.be/0e0Tbbyy7uYE> (link)

Further research: *If you wish*, you can read about Nishida's influence on related philosophy and organisational learning theory (Japanese Phenomenology of the Kyoto School and SECI organisational learning theory). Please note that it's not essential to do so as you do not need to understand Nishida's philosophy to form your own Basho! If you do want to know more about this, then follow this link where you can watch Felipe Ferrari's useful lecture on Nishida Kitaro (link).

You can also read Nishida for yourself: See: Nishida, K. (2012). *Basho. Place and Dialectic: Two Essays*. A. A. o. Religion. New York, Oxford. The Kyoto School of Philosophy website is another useful Open Educational Resource on Nishida <https://thekyotoschoolofphilosophy.wordpress.com/the-logic-of-basho/>

Nonaka's and Takeuchi's practical adaptation of 'Nishida philosophy' – their SECI model of organisational knowledge creation (link) – proposes everything is implaced within a "ba" (field). Such Ba can be physical or conceptual. We can think of the basho as a shifting context (such as being a student in a University) or set of moving constraints (like the rules of a game). Either way, what we do / what we are is something implaced within a larger field.

When it comes to *learning*, a key thing here is to think less not only about how and where we *implace ourselves*, but equally about what sort of field we are generating. Ba/sho is akin to a habitat; habits develop in relation to specific habitats. If we want to change our habits, we need to also change our habitat. In 'Nishida philosophy' subject and object are one, people and environment correlate:

*'...the environment makes the subject and the subject makes the environment.'*

Nishida interview in *Philosopher of nothingness: From ZEN Buddhism made Japanese philosophy* Kyoto University OpenCourseWare (Philosopher of nothingness: From ZEN Buddhism made Japanese philosophy) (link)

The basho (from a social and organisational perspective) is something we generate and that generates us; it changes through what we do in it and it changes us in the process. It enables some things and disables others; we help to shape its

parameters. The basho cannot be removed; it is always present albeit always changing.

Nishida's Kyoto school of philosophy has directly inspired two highly influential learning theories that we will return to in this course:

1. Nonaka's and Takeuchi's SECI (Socialisation, Externalisation, Combination, Internalisation) model of organisational knowledge creation (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995).

*'On the one hand, the environment influences agents, and on the other hand, the agents are continuously recreating their environment through social interaction. Hence, social structure does not exist independently outside of human agency. Rather, structure and humans are two ways of considering social action and they interplay in defining and reproducing each other.'* (Nonaka and Takeuchi 2003: 4).

2. Corneli and Danoff's theory of paralogy (peer-to-peer learning). (Corneli and Danoff 2011).

*'Nishida's idea of basho (shared context in motion) can help us think about how a context constrains and supports different types of (inter-)actions, and also about how we (re-)shape the contexts we find ourselves in'* (Corneli and Danoff 2011: 4).

# What is a Basho in our learning context?

*“You’ll never see the hacienda. It doesn’t exist. The hacienda must be built.” Ivan Chitchevlov “Formulaire pour un urbanisme nouveau” 1953, Internationale Situationniste #1 (Paris, June 1958). No copyright.*

The places in which we learn are most often constructed for us. Classrooms and studios are “laid out” by our teachers while architects and institutional ‘estates committees’ and learning technologists design the buildings and interiors we learn in.



The design of learning spaces in many Universities is increasingly outsourced to educational designers that produce off-the shelf learnspace solutions. e.g.: <https://www.spaceoasis.com> (link)

As postgraduate, you might already be familiar with kind of University study spaces designed by companies such as [www.spaceoasis.com](https://www.spaceoasis.com) (link) See: UoE’s Study Pods for example (link) Such environments are increasingly ubiquitous in libraries and would-be ‘Third Spaces’ such as University-run cafes. It’s not, perhaps, unexpected to find that such

learning places are designed in a top-down fashion given that they have to be adaptable to such a wide range of student needs and serve a myriad of academic subjects.

See: Do Coyle's use of the neologism 'Learnsapes' in *Shared Learning Spaces – Why We Need to Stop Ignoring the Fundamental Role the Physical Environment Plays in Deeper Learning for Students* (link)

Watch: James Ritson and Kate Lindsay *The Art of Placemaking for Online Learning* [30mins] (link); follows:

What about more *bespoke* learning places – what about *art schools*? Surely art schools are learning places that practise more user generated design? In art schools, studio spaces are also designed by committee; they are allocated by academic faculty and are built/divided by technicians.



*Playtime* (Jacques Tati, 1967) Tati's parody of modernist office space mirrors the modernist division of the art

school studio into private studio spaces. Note how different Tati's office is to the open-plan offices that have since become commonplace (at least pre-Covid).

Art students rarely are given the chance to build their own studio spaces, or, at very least, to determine how their studio space is divided (or not) between them as a peer group.

Of course, it *is* possible for students in Universities and Art Schools to design their own learning places. For example, in ECA, I established an experimental MFA orientation week called *This Must be the Place*:

### **This Must be the Place (link to download PDF)**

Neil Mulholland – *This Must be the Place* This project is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License Neil Mulholland 2020

*This Must Be The Place* became an orientation week that was programmed and managed by Relay: Society for Contemporary Art a EUSA society run by postgraduate students in the School of Art. This meant, in effect, that the MFA2 students designed and ran the incoming MA and MFA1 induction (with the help of the Berlin artist Tobias Sternberg). The ethos of *This Must Be The Place* underwrites this course and the BarCamp that it culminates in. (see the slides above for details).

On the whole, however, the places in which we learn are very seldom constructed by learners. This means that the logic of

learning places is not determined or shaped by students themselves. This is significant. It raises the following questions:

*How can anyone know in advance what would be the optimum learning place for each (unique) learner?*

*If learners have no say in how they construct their own learning places, then do they have less control over how, or indeed, what they learn?*

*Are learners less likely to engage in learning when they do not help to construct their learning place?*

One of way of answering these questions is to break with conventional forms of curriculum design and see what happens.

Instead of occupying ready-made learning places (learning architecture, designed learning tools and a structured curriculum) we might start by making the learning place design and construction process the initial focus of learning. If we follow 'Nishida philosophy', wherein subject and environment correlate, then learners must task ourselves with the job of constructing their own learning places as part of our programme of learning. This is something that learners have been doing for a very long time...

Paragoues construct their own learning places collectively. In so doing, they construct their own 'logic of place', their own set of rules that govern that learning place.





Alex Schweder and Ward Shelley: *Your Turn*, An architectural environment for two that shapes the occupants' behavior. The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum Oct 1st, 2017 – Apr 22nd, 2018

It is important not to read this literally. Constructing learning places is not 'architectural'; our learning places are both physical **and conceptual** – learning places are **constructive parameters** that help us to compose our thoughts and actions. In this course, we will call this self-imposed restriction – **enabling constraints** ([link](#)).

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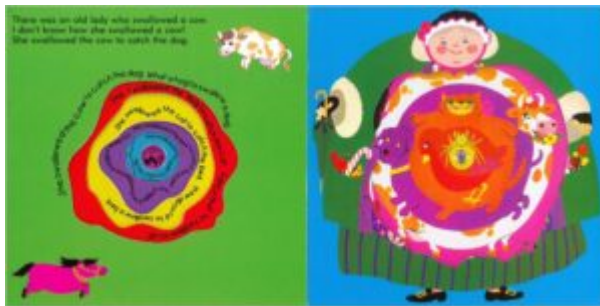
*What ways might we organise or "implace" ourselves – and how might we ensure we engage with each other on the same agreed terms?*

*What do we each think is important when it comes to composing*

*the groundrules that will establish the kind of learning places that we want to learn in?*

*The first thing we will do in this course is answer this question by attempting to consciously implace ourselves...*

## ...We will build our own Basho



Consider this:

*You nest within your Basho which nests within a course which nests with a Degree Programme (MA CAT) which nests within a Department (School of Art) which nests within a School (ECA) which nests in a College (College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences) which nests within The University of Edinburgh. The University is the Basho of the College, the College is the Basho for the School, the School is the Basho of the Department, the Department is the Basho of Degree Programme, the Degree Programme is the Basho of the Course, the Course is the Basho of your group, and that Basho is the Basho for you.*

This describes how we can see our own University here in

Edinburgh as a Basho. So, everything can be considered to a) be part of a larger basho b) to be a basho that hosts other, smaller basho.

Imagine these Matryoshka nesting dolls stretching infinitely in either direction, becoming ever larger and ever smaller. Each babushka doll would all be a basho for another and each would have its own larger basho.



"DGJ\_4705 – Russian Matryoshka" by archer10 (Dennis) is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0

Can we see everyone and everything as implaced?

For example, the artworld is not a singular homogenous hermetically sealed social group, from Nishida's perspective, the artworld is, rather, a large somewhat amorphous Basho constituted from a series of smaller Basho (artworld\*s\*, plural) in which we are implaced. New smaller, atomised, artworlds are constantly being birthed while others are wither and die. The artworld, thus, is akin to a fermenting *culture*, it resembles an ongoing cycle of life.

*'To be is always to be in place, and for the person, whether*

[illegible]

Note that Powhida's emotional map of artists payments can function as a map of the artworld (from Powhida's perspective). The nodes 'NEVER', 'UBER', etc. constitute components of this artworld, many of which straddle non-artworld spheres. This map is one of several drawn by Powhida.

We will find that we belong to more than one such artworld 'Basho'. Some of these artworld Bashos are worlds that we seem



to just “find” ourselves in (e.g. your masters cohort is such a Basho, you chose ECA as your art school, but you did *not* choose your peer group). To this extent, there’s an element of chance and circumstance in group formation. In other cases, we actively construct the Basho (e.g. in choosing to set up a studio, a gallery, a website, etc. with a group that we have personally nurtured).

Basho have to keep busy identifying and pursuing common purposes that lie beyond what they already know (knowledges) and what they already have (tools). Basho stay together, (play together), only if they have a reason to learn together. Such groups will only flourish for so long as they have a common purpose (what we will call our Collaborative Inquiry and can only do so if they have a means of organising themselves. If they cannot figure out how to organise, they simply disintegrate (and new Basho form in their wake).

## Thinking... about what makes a group work

Stop and think about what groups you are part of.

Which of these groups have you ‘fallen into’ and which have you actively constructed?

*We will ask this question anonymously in class using Wooclap*

Now think about what groups have you ‘fallen out of’.

Why did you fall out of these groups? Is it because they no longer exist? Or are there other reasons?

*We will ask this question anonymously in class using Wooclap*

What is the ‘glue’ that kept you in a group?

*We will ask this question anonymously in class using Wooclap*

What made you (want to) leave a group?

*We will ask this question anonymously in class using Wooclap*

Trying to answer these questions personally will help you to contribute to constructing your Basho's Covenant.



Jeff Koons, Peter Halley, Ashley Bickerton, Joan Wallace and Barbara Bloom outside Katz's Deli in New York City. Lehmann Maupin interviews this group (Basho) and asks them to reflect upon the construction of the East Village scene (late 1970s/early 1980s) in NYC.

<https://www.lehmannmaupin.com/news/the-artists-who-defined-the-east-village-s-avant-garde-scene2> (link)

Making a professional contribution to **the artworld** is more a case of *building a new basho* within it than finding and joining an existing basho. Art scenes have their own logic; Basho generate the logic of art scenes. So, we all need to learn how to Build-A-Basho.

## Establish your peer group as your Basho:

You are automatically assigned to a group; but you have to work hard to make a group in to a Basho.

The Basho> relations described above (University of Edinburgh) are all carefully structured and governed; they are all answerable to each other and have clear responsibilities, oversight and missions. Basho do not have to be so carefully structured, but we must be aware of what they aim to support.

When accountability breaks down, trust erodes and Basho dissolve (this is scalar: think of revolutions, or friend circles). In practice, a Basho requires establishing good working relationships; good working relationships are more likely to emerge if you set clear parameters from the start. This is what you will be doing this week!

If you've managed to read this far, you can now go onto the next page and start this week's assignment by following the link:

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# **Class Assignment #1 – Create your Basho's Covenant (link)**