

## **Architecture-Writing**

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### **Abstract**

This paper discusses how my research into site-writing, influenced by debates around art-writing, can inform architectural criticism. The paper first situates the term art-writing in relation to contemporary debates in art criticism. It then outlines a theoretical framing for the spatialization of art-writing as site-writing, identifying the potential of particular concepts in feminist, art and literary criticism for developing understandings of positionality and subjectivity in critical writing in terms of stand-point, relation, encounter and voice. The paper then demonstrates how these spatial possibilities can be played out in art criticism with reference to four essays. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of this work for architectural criticism, exploring how the hybrid term architecture-writing demands us to rethink the objects, subjects, sites, methods and materials of architectural criticism.

### **Architecture-Writing**

art-writing

The idea for the 'Critical Architecture' conference came from my own dissatisfaction with the current state of architectural criticism. Whether in academic journals or publications connected with professional practice, very

few critics seem willing to reflect upon the purposes and possibilities of architectural criticism, or to consider their choice of subject matter and modes of interpretation and operation. In this respect architectural criticism lags behind architectural history and theory, and certain practices of architectural design, and if one compares the level of debate in architectural criticism to discussions in other disciplines, namely art criticism, this sense of stagnation is reinforced.

Art criticism has been a hot topic in the UK's art journal, *Art Monthly*, over the past few years. Essays and letters have debated the purpose and appropriate modes of art criticism in terms of ethics, aesthetics and politics. One particular strand of the discussion has focused on art-writing, providing my inspiration for the architecture-writing session of the conference.<sup>1</sup> When in April 2002, I was invited by Alex Coles to chair a session at a conference at Tate Britain called 'The All New Art Writing', I was keen to raise concerns that focused on space and subjectivity in contemporary art writing, asking critics to consider the positions they occupied not only in connection to art works but in also in relation to writing itself. Post conference, and in the pages of *Art Monthly*, the debate was constructed by a series of male critics

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<sup>1</sup> See Alex Coles, 'The Bathroom Critic', *Art Monthly*, 263 (February 2003), pp. 7-10; Michael Archer, 'Crisis What Crisis?', *Art Monthly*, 264 (March 2003), pp. 1-4; Rasheed Araeen, letter in response to 'Crisis what Crisis', *Art Monthly*, 265 (April 2003), pp. 12-3; Matthew Arnat, 'The Middle Distance', response to Michael Archer, *Art Monthly*, 265 (April 2003), p. 43; Peter Suchin, 'The Critic never Sleeps', *Art Monthly*, 266 (May 2003), p. 41; Michael Archer, 'Critical Task', letter in response to 'The Critic never Sleeps', *Art Monthly*, 267 (June 2003), p. 9; Rasheed Araeen, 'Opportunism', letter in response to 'Critical Task', *Art Monthly*, 268 (Jul-Aug 2003), p. 14; J. J. Charlesworth, 'The Dysfunction of Criticism', *Art Monthly*, 269 (September 2003), pp. 1-4. The debate then turned to the role of the artist/curator, but has recently reverted to discussions of criticism in the form of artist Dave Beech's attack on critic Julian Stalleybrass. See Dave Beech, 'Art's Debunkers', *Art Monthly*, 283 (February 2005), pp. 2-4.

along adversarial lines, sticking to binary rather than discursive models: art writing rather than the non-expressive theoretical models of academic criticism, political critique rather than the formalism of art writing. My contribution was to say:

It is worth pointing out that the term art writing is not new, it has been around in so-called academic circles for some time now. Art writing is not about restating a case for formalism, but it does explore differing writing modes [...] the very form of the writing itself, is taken to be integral to the way in which a critic positions him/herself. Feminist critics, such as Griselda Pollock, Mieke Bal, Rosalyn Krauss and others, have been examining critical distance, questions of intimacy and the relationships critics construct with artists, art works and places for producing and viewing art. The personal and the autobiographical enter the debate, not in order to assert an ego criticism, but as part of an on-going political exploration of subjectivity. The points I introduced at 'The All New Art Writing' conference are I think still pertinent to the current debate. They require that we look outside art journalism to other modes of writing in order to develop an art criticism that is self-reflective and creative as well as politically aware.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Jane Rendell, letter, 'Art Writing', *Art Monthly*, 272 (December-January 2003-4), p. 15.

My research produces sites of interdisciplinary exchange, following what I now recognise as a spatial pattern. From architectural history to feminist theory, from architectural design to conceptual art practice, and now from art criticism to writing, I move outside the discipline in which I am located, in order to find a place from which to reflect upon its mechanisms of operation, before returning in order to suggest new modes of enquiry. My aim appears constant, I seek to make manifest the position of the writing subject and her choice of objects of study and subject matters, processes of intellectual enquiry and creative production; but there have been shifts in my methods, from the more dogmatic and literal attempt to produce a feminist Marxist architectural history to more lateral and metaphoric texts.<sup>3</sup> My current work explores the position of the author, not only in relation to theoretical ideas, art objects and architectural spaces but also to the site of writing itself. This interest has evolved into a number of writings (at first site-specific writings, now site-writings) that investigate the limits of criticism, that ask what it is possible for a critic to say about an artist or architect, a work, the site of a work and the critic herself and for the writing to still 'count' as criticism. This paper outlines some conceptual concerns that frame my argument for the spatialization of art-writing, before discussing several site-writings, and then returning to ask what potential this work has for architectural criticism in the form of architecture-writing.

#### site-writing

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<sup>3</sup> Compare for example Jane Rendell, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Gender, Space and Architecture in Regency London*, (London, Athlone Press, 2002) to more recent work. See notes below 19-23.

In postmodern feminism new ways of knowing and being have been discussed in spatial terms, developing conceptual and critical tools such as 'situated knowledges' and 'standpoint theory' to examine the inter-relations between location and knowledge.<sup>4</sup> *Where* I am makes a difference to *who* I can be and *what* I can know. For example in bell hook's explicitly spatialised exploration of race, class and gender identities, she argues passionately for the occupation of the margin to be understood as a place of radical difference.<sup>5</sup> And for Rosi Braidotti, the figure of the 'nomadic subject' does not only describe a spatial state of movement, but also an epistemological condition, a kind of knowingness (or unknowingness) that refuses fixity.<sup>6</sup> Feminists in visual and spatial culture have drawn extensively on psychoanalytic theory to further understandings of subjectivity in relation to positionality, making connections between the spatial politics of internal psychical figures and external cultural geographies. I am interested in how criticism can engage with these concerns and investigate the positions we

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<sup>4</sup> For example Donna Haraway's 'situated knowledges', Jane Flax's 'standpoint theory' and Elsbeth Probyn's notion of 'locality', all use 'position' to negotiate such on-going theoretical disputes as the essentialism/constructionism debate. See Jane Flax, *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West*, Berkeley, (Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1991), p. 232; Donna Haraway. 'Situated Knowledges: the Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Knowledge', *Feminist Studies*, 14: 3, (Fall 1988), pp. 575-603, especially, pp. 583-8 and Elspeth Probyn. 'Travels in the Postmodern: Making Sense of the Local' in Linda Nicholson (ed.). *Feminism/Postmodernism* (London, Routledge, 1990), pp. 176-89, p. 178.

<sup>5</sup> See bell hooks, *Yearnings: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (London, Turnaround Press, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> See Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1994).

occupy in relation to works, the sites they are located in and the issues they raise, not only conceptually and ideologically, but materially and emotionally.<sup>7</sup>

When Hal Foster discusses the need to rethink critical distance, he points to the different distances produced by the optical and the tactile, but warns of the dangers of both dis-identification and over-identification with the object of study.<sup>8</sup> Foster rejects those who lament the end of 'true criticality' as well as those who see critical distance as 'instrumental mastery in disguise'. But despite advocating the need to think through questions of critical distance, Foster ends his reflection still proposing that the critic's role is to judge and make decisions without discussing the particularities of these modes of operation.<sup>9</sup>

Howard Caygill presents us with a different point of view, one that discerns between discriminations and judgements. For Caygill, in immanent critique the criteria for making judgements are discovered or invented through the course of criticism.<sup>10</sup> Caygill argues that there is no position outside the work

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<sup>7</sup> See for example, Susan Stanford Friedman, *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies Of Encounter* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1998); Diane Fuss, *Identification Papers* (London, Routledge, 1995); Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994); Irit Rogoff, *Terra Infirma* (London, Routledge, 2000) and Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (London, Routledge, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 2001), pp. 223-4.

<sup>9</sup> Foster, *The Return of the Real*, pp. 225-6.

<sup>10</sup> Howard Caygill, *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience* London: Routledge, 1998, p. 34 and p. 79.

from which the critic may make a judgement, rather a critic may make a discriminate judgement by adopting a position at a moment of externality where the work 'exceeds itself' and 'abuts on experience'. Strategic critique may use such moments in order to locate the work, and although Caygill does not acknowledge them as such, such procedures are intrinsically spatial:

Strategic critique moves between the work and its own externality situating the work in the context of experience, and being in its turn situated by it. <sup>11</sup>

In art criticism few critics have taken a close interest in the experience of an encounter with a work. Mieke Bal is an exception. As Norman Bryson points out, Bal's work is rhetorical, she considers visual art through narrative and structures her own narratives through processes of focalization.<sup>12</sup> Yet despite Bal's ability to 'write' the encounter with a work of art, her writing does not necessarily engage with the spaces of such encounters. And when Nicholas Bourriaud calls for a 'relational aesthetics', he tends to locate the relational in the open-ended condition found in works by certain artists rather than in the spatial aspects of critical negotiation.<sup>13</sup> However, the significance Trinh T.

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<sup>11</sup> Howard Caygill, *Walter Benjamin* p. 64.

<sup>12</sup> Norman Bryson, 'Introduction: Art and Intersubjectivity', Mieke Bal, *Looking in: The Art of Viewing* (Amsterdam, G+B International, 2001), pp. 1-39, p. 12.

<sup>13</sup> Nicholas Bourriaud. *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods, (Paris, Les Presses du Réel, 2002).

Minh-ha assigns to the shift from, for example, speaking 'about' to speaking 'to' has been stressed by Irit Rogoff,<sup>14</sup> underscoring how instead of taking power relationships to produce spatial locations, it is possible for a change in position to advance a change in relation. The focus on the preposition here allows a direct connection to be made between the positional *and* the relational. From the close-up to the glance, from the caress to the accidental brush, my interest in the site of encounter with a work investigates the spatial and positional qualities of relationships and encounters.

To move beyond notions of judgement and discrimination in criticism to consider questions of relation and encounter, involves objective and subjective modes of enquiry as well as the taking of distant and intimate positions. Italo Calvino has explicitly explored the relationship the writer has to his/her writing in terms of different subject identities or 'I's'.<sup>15</sup> And Roland Barthes has described his choice of authorial voice in terms of four regimes: including an 'I', the pronoun of the self, a 'he', the pronoun of distance and a 'you', a pronoun which can be used in a self-accusatory fashion or to separate the position of the writer from the subject.<sup>16</sup> Feminists in cultural, literary and post-colonial criticism, such as Hélène Cixous and Gloria Anzaldúa, have

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<sup>14</sup> See Irit Rogoff's discussion of Trinh T. Minh-ha's assertion in Irit Rogoff, 'Studying Visual Culture', in Nicholas Mirzoeff, (ed.) *The Visual Culture Reader* (London, Routledge, 1998), pp. 14-26, p. 18.

<sup>15</sup> Italo Calvino, *Literature Machine* (London, Vintage, 1997), p. 15.

<sup>16</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice: Interviews 1962-80*, trans. Linda Coverdale, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1991), pp. 215-6.



woven the autobiographical into the critical in their texts, combining poetic writing with theoretical analysis to articulate hybrid voices.<sup>17</sup> Yet few writers have acknowledged the position of the writing subject, the place of the personal and the role of the autobiographical in art criticism.

From those who theorise to those who tell stories, from those who list items to those who describe personal memories, from dictionary definitions to records of informal conversations, from statements to observations, from the walk through the gallery to an alternative space from which to imagine a work, my interest is the multiplicity of voice and the variation of stand-point. Such an approach can draw upon the remembered, the dreamed and the imagined, as well as descriptions and observations of the 'real', challenging criticism as a form of knowledge with a singular and static point of view located in the here and now.

What happens then when discussions concerning site-specificity move from discussions about site-specific art and extend to involve criticism as a site-specific practice and when the spatial qualities of writing become as important in conveying meaning as the content of the criticism?<sup>18</sup> Once we acknowledge that criticism is also a mode of a situated practice then the

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<sup>17</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa. *Borderlands/La Frontera: the New Mestiza* (San Francisco, Lute Books, 1999) and Hélene Cixous. 'Sorties', trans. Betsy Wing, in Susan Sellers (ed.). *The Hélene Cixous Reader* (London, Routledge, 1994).

<sup>18</sup> On art and site-specificity see for example, Alex Coles (ed.), *Site Specificity: The Ethnographic Turn* (London, Black Dog Publishing, 2000); Nick Kaye, *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation* (London, Routledge, 2000); Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 2002).

terms of reference that relate the critic to the art work or architectural structure are themselves brought into question. As a practice criticism is active, it constructs as well as traces the sites between critic and writer, artist and art work, architect and building, viewer and reader, producing critical commentary through the spaces of writing itself.

In my own critical writing I have taken up these propositions outlined above in a number of different ways in catalogue essays I have written for both artists and architects. At times I have used the spatial form of a walk through a building, exhibition or a work to structure the writing, at other times I have used the dialogue to bring in other voices.<sup>19</sup> For some essays I have drawn on memory and imagination to construct alternative sites from which to consider art works, and in others I have adopted different voices and subject pronouns, as well as the integration of found words, in order to produce site-writings, texts that are spatially constructed in relation to the works I have been asked to 'critique' or 'write about'.

longing for the lightness of spring<sup>20</sup>

When Jules Wright asked me to write about 'Spring', a work by Elina Brotherus she had commissioned for the Wapping Project in London, I turned

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<sup>19</sup> See for example, Jane Rendell, 'Imagination is the Root of all Change', *Bridges*, (London: August Publications, 2001); Jane Rendell, 'Traces of the relationships people make with one another', for architects, *Hawkins/Brown*, (London, Black Dog Publishing, 2003) and 'A walk through BALTIC', with Dominic Williams (architect) and Sune Nordgren (director), *BALTIC*, (Gateshead, BALTIC, 2002).

<sup>20</sup> Jane Rendell, 'Longing for the lightness of Spring', *Elina Brotherus*, catalogue essay for artist Elina Brotherus's 'Spring', curated by Jules Wright, (London, The Wapping Project, 2001).

to three short texts I had written concerning three sites – two remembered and one dreamed. 'Moss Green' described a derelict house in the green belt where in early March we found photographs of a brave new world of modernist high-rise housing. Just after the autumn equinox, just after her death, I dreamt of the home of my welsh great aunt. 'White Linen' recalled this dream, while 'Bittersweet' remembered a spring visit to an abandoned cork factory in Catalunya where we found the names of colours scattered over the floor.

Brotherus's 'Spring' was composed of two installations: a video triptych, 'Rain, The Oak Forest and Flood', in the boiler house at the disused pump station, and a back-lit image 'Untitled', showing a pale grey Icelandic sky over lava covered in moss, reflected in the water tank on the roof. A work that anticipates spring, 'Spring' opened in Wapping just after the autumn equinox in the northern hemisphere. I made visual associations with Brotherus's work based on formal similarities, the textures of moss and lava, a colour palette of monochromes and pastels. However, it was my own fascination with the backwards gaze of nostalgia and Brotherus's interest in anticipation as a longing that looked forward rather than backward, which allowed me to consider her work in relation to three sites connected with colour, memory and yearning.

to miss the desert

The essay I wrote for Gavin Wade in relation to a work he curated for Art and Sacred Spaces – Nathan Coley's 'Black Tent' – also drew on memory but

developed particular personal memories of architectural spaces in relation to a more professional voice. Wade had read a piece of my mine, where I questioned whether it was possible to write architecture, rather than about architecture, and so he approached me and asked me to 'write a tabernacle'.<sup>21</sup> 'Black Tent' had developed out of Coley's interest in sanctuaries in general but particularly the evocative and precise description of the construction of the tabernacle given in the bible.

'Black Tent' consisted of a flexible structure – a number of steel-framed panels with black fabric stretched across them – which moved to a number of sites in Portsmouth, two in the Cathedral, reconfiguring itself for each location. The essay I wrote related in both form and content to the art work. Structured into five sections, each one with a spatial condition, such as 'in the middle', 'on the edge', 'around the outside', as a sub-title, my text explored the relationship between specific locations and generic conditions. This interest paralleled two aspects of the siting of Coley's work – the differing configuration of the piece depending on where it was located and the particular position of the work in relation to the architectural geometry of the cathedral as a form of sanctuary. My central spatial motifs were the secular sanctuaries of home and refuge. I decided to investigate the changing position of the subject in relation to particular details of material places and psychic spatial experiences of security and fear, safety and

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<sup>21</sup> Jane Rendell, 'Writing in place of speaking', Sharon Kivland (ed.), *Transmission: Speaking and Listening* (Sheffield, Site Gallery, 2003).

danger. The narrative I composed was spatial, like the squares, it had two sides, two voices.<sup>22</sup>

The first voice remembered a childhood spent settling into various nomadic cultures and countries in the middle-east. The second voice was drawn from the architectural design of contemporary sanctuaries, specifically a series of community buildings for different minority groups. These included ethnic communities, gay and lesbian organisations, single mothers with young children and people in long-term mental health care being moved from large scale institutions into 'care in the community' programmes. The texts were taken from design proposals and drawings, construction details and specifications. The two voices were pitched against one another to create a dynamic between personal and public sanctuary. One voice was highly subjective and used the imagination to conjure up spaces of safety from memory; the other, equally engaged in the creation of secure spaces, adopted an objective and distanced professional tone to describe various sanctuaries at different scales and stages of the design process.

everywhere else<sup>23</sup>

The catalogue essay I wrote for the group show 'Ausland' continued to develop my interest in memory, architecture and criticism, but this time not

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<sup>22</sup> Jane Rendell, 'To miss the desert', Gavin Wade (ed.), *Nathan Coley: Black Tent*, (Portsmouth, 2003).

<sup>23</sup> Jane Rendell, 'Everywhere Else', *Ausland*, comprising artists Jan Peters, Martina Schmid and Silke Schatz, (London, Domo Baal Gallery, 2003).

my own memories, but my imaginings of the memories of others. Each of the three artists included in the exhibition works with forms of architectural and spatial representation – Martina Schmid produces foreboding mountainous landscapes on folded paper from doodles scribbled while daydreaming, Silke Schatz draws large scale architectural perspectives of places she remembers in fine coloured pencil, while Jan Peters works in video presenting narratives of his experiences in labyrinthine buildings. I described the spaces materially present and those places I imagined the artist might have encountered in producing their work. The text was written as a detailed empirical account, moving between the art works and the sites they referred to, as well as the location of the gallery itself.

My critical intention was to question the constitution of a legitimate subject or object for art criticism, and to expand the possibilities of criticism by suggesting that the critic could move beyond the works themselves to discuss the sites imagined or remembered by the artists and the sites of their economic exchange. The building in which the Domo Baal Gallery is located, a Georgian terraced house in Bloomsbury, London, is also the curator's home. As a critic you have access to the administration spaces or rooms 'supporting' the gallery' and also to the private and domestic rooms of the house where art works often on 'show' in the gallery are to be found in a very different setting.

she is walking about in a town which she does not know<sup>24</sup>

The site as a place of imagination was something I had theorised but not fully engaged with until I wrote this piece. The time-frame offered by *Elles sont passées par ici*, a group show due to take place in Loguivy de la Mer, in Brittany, France, made it impossible for me to visit the site or to view the works - at the moment of writing the art works were not yet in existence. I was sent a map and photographs of the small fishing village in which the work was to be installed as well as statements written by the artists and visual images of their previous works. My encounter was with the sites of these representations. I used them to create a fictional piece, 'She is walking about in a town which she does not know', structured as a walk through the town visiting places in which the artists intended to position their projects. I combined my own words with those of the artists (in italics) and those from the map and photographs of the site (in bold).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Jane Rendell, 'She is walking about in a town which she does not know', *Elles sont passées par ici*, curated by Karine Pradier, (Loguivy de la Mer, Brittany, France, forthcoming 2005).

<sup>25</sup> The title of this piece references an essay and an art work by Sharon Kivland and an essay by Steve Pile. Kivland's works explore Sigmund Freud's discussion of Dora's second dream. See Sharon Kivland 'She is walking about in a town which she does not know', Sharon Kivland, *A Case of Hysteria* (London, Book Works 1999), pp. 177-186 and *She is walking about in a town which she does not know*, (1997). The art work consists of two c-type photographs, from an archive image of Anna Freud and Marie Bonaparte, glass panel engraved and silver-mirrored with a street map of Marienbad, reproduced in *Fascinum*, artists' book, (London, 1998), and in *La Valeur d'Echange*, exhibition catalogue, text by Jean-Marc Huitorel, (Rueil-Malmaison, Centre d'Art Contemporain, 1999). See also 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria', (1905 [1901]), trans. Alix and James Strachey, James Strachey (ed.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, v. 7, (London, 1953), pp. 1-122, referred to by Kivland. Pile's essay investigates Freud's notion of the uncanny. See Steve Pile, 'The Un(known) City . . . or, an Urban Geography of What Lies Buried below the Surface', in Iain Borden, Jane Rendell, Joe Kerr with Alicia Pivaro (eds.), *The Unknown City: Contesting Architecture and Social Space* (Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 2001), pp. 263-79. See also Sigmund Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', (1919), Albert Dickson (ed.), *The Penguin Freud Library*, v. 14, (translated under the editorship of James Strachey), (London, Penguin Books, 1985), pp. 335-76, referred to by Pile.

Drawing upon the uncanny, upon Freud's walk through Genoa and Dora's second dream, I invented a subject who explores an unknown town thinking that the places she passes feel strangely familiar. The coastal location provided an opportunity to consider threshold figures, and for a show of women artists, and decided to reverse the call of the siren – a mermaid is seduced by a male voice crying out from the beach. In writing the essay I asked myself:

What does it mean to write a site that one has not visited, that can only be imagined, to know a place not with your feet, but with your eyes tracing lines on a map, dots on a screen?

What does it mean to write of art that is not yet in existence, that at the time of writing is only imagined, and to know of its possibilities through the words of seven artists, eight women, maybe nine?

What does it mean to meet them in a place that they once passed through?

architecture-writing

The possibilities opened up for criticism by art- and site-writing engage closely with debates around the relationship between theory and critical practice in the visual and spatial arts. But what happens when such ideas are taken into architectural criticism? Are such concepts and creative modes of



production derived from elsewhere seen to be as relevant to architecture as those generated within the discipline itself? At many points during the 'Critical Architecture' conference we returned to questions concerning disciplinary specificity and this particular line of enquiry runs through many of the papers in this collection. For some, interdisciplinary debate is a distraction: critical enquiry and architectural production are relevant only when they emerge out of architecture itself.<sup>26</sup> For others, including myself, 'travelling concepts' are indispensable, they allow us to challenge assumptions internal to disciplines and to re-think, in this instance, what architecture is, what it might be and how we might think, write and make buildings critically. This is not to ignore the particularity of the context in which architectural criticism is located – the architectural profession – but to return to it, having been transformed through ideas experienced somewhere else.

I choose architecture-writing as a title for the theme of my conference strand in reference to my research into art-writing. Interestingly Katje Grillner, who also spoke at the conference, has linked these two words in the opposite way around: Writing Architecture.<sup>27</sup> What difference does it make it one word

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<sup>26</sup> A variation on this position is the one that argues that architecture is itself interdisciplinary and so has no need to engage with other disciplines. For an expanded discussion of many of these issues see Jane Rendell, 'Architectural Research and Disciplinarity', *ARQ*, (forthcoming 2005).

<sup>27</sup> See <http://www.akad.se/progwri.htm>. (AKAD: The Academy of for Practice-based Research in Architecture and Design). See also Katja Grillner *The 'halt at the door of the boot-shop'* in Katja Grillner, et al. (eds.), *01.AKAD*, (Stockholm, 2005, forthcoming) and Katja Grillner, *Writing and Landscape – Setting Scenes for Critical Reflection*, Jonathan Hill (ed.), Special Issue of the *Journal of Architecture*, 8:2, (2003).

comes before another, or if a preposition, for example, 'for', 'with', 'to', is inserted between the two terms?<sup>28</sup> And what of the hyphen? This small line that brings the architecture and writing into close proximity allows us to think of one in relation to the other, but also creates a hybrid form. I focus here on this insignificant point of conjunction, on such a tiny detail as the hyphen, to demonstrate the importance of the decisions we make in designing the position of words – writing constructs as well as reflects meaning.

Architecture-writing suggests that the objects and writers of architectural criticism may come from beyond architecture. Certainly the conference welcomed wonderful papers by artists, film-makers, writers, poets and philosophers as well as architectural historians, theorists and critics.<sup>29</sup>

Architecture-writing also demands that we consider the modes in which we write, as well as the medium in which we practice criticism, to be more than a description of content, but to define critical positions. In one conference session we explored different media for criticism including photography, film and writing and in another the materiality of writing through prose poetry and rhetoric. Here in the *Journal of Architecture* Robin Wilson examines the architectural photograph in relation to utopic discourse and Igea Troiani considers the potential of documentary film-making for developing an

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<sup>28</sup> The role of the preposition is a personal fascination. Prepositions indicate the importance of 'position' and 'relation' in the spatial encounter between the critic and the art or architectural work. Michel Serres writes of the angelic qualities of prepositions in terms of their role as messengers and their transformational qualities. See Michel Serres, *Angels: A Modern Myth*, (Paris, Flammarion Press, 1995), pp. 140-7.

<sup>29</sup> For a summary of the 'Critical Architecture' conference content. See <http://www.bartlett.ucl.ac.uk/architecture/events/conferences/conferences.htm>

architectural writing and criticism that focuses on friendship. Finally architecture-writing expects that in order to reflect upon the specificity of our own modes of operation as critics we need knowledge gleaned both from within the discipline of architecture but also from beyond it.

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