

## Critical Spatial Practice

By stretching and playing out definitions like 'art' and 'architecture', theoretical reflection provides standpoints from which to explore what we might call critical spatial practice.<sup>1</sup>

I suggest a new term, 'critical spatial practice', which allows us to describe work that transgresses the limits of art and architecture and engages with both the social and the aesthetic, the public and the private. This term draws attention not only to the importance of the critical, but also to the spatial, indicating the interest in exploring the specifically spatial aspects of interdisciplinary processes or practices that operate between art and architecture.<sup>2</sup>

The term critical spatial practice highlights a three-way intersection between theory and practice, public and private, and art and architecture. Critical spatial practices, as I understand them, are those, which seek to question and transform the social conditions of the sites into which they intervene, as well as test the boundaries and procedures of their own disciplines.<sup>3</sup>

I first introduced the term 'critical spatial practice' in my 2003 essay, 'A Place Between Art, Architecture and Critical Theory',<sup>4</sup> and later consolidated and developed the concept in my 2006 book *Art and Architecture*.<sup>5</sup> Critical spatial practice is informed by Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980, translated into English in 1984),<sup>6</sup> and Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1974, translated into English in 1991),<sup>7</sup> as well as the critical theory of the Frankfurt School,<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jane Rendell, 'A Place Between Art, Architecture and Critical Theory', *Proceedings to Place and Location* (Tallinn, Estonia, 2003), pp. 221-33.

<sup>2</sup> Jane Rendell, *Art and Architecture: A Place Between*, (London: IB Tauris, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Rendell, *Art and Architecture*, pp. 1-2, 4, 6, 9, 12, 66 and 191. See [http://www.janarendell.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Critical\\_Spatial\\_Practice.pdf](http://www.janarendell.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Critical_Spatial_Practice.pdf) and <http://www.mahkuscript.com/article/10.5334/mjfar.13/>

<sup>4</sup> Rendell, 'A Place Between Art, Architecture and Critical Theory'.

<sup>5</sup> Rendell, *Art and Architecture*.

<sup>6</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Practice\\_of\\_Everyday\\_Life](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Practice_of_Everyday_Life) and <http://www.ucpress.edu/book.php?isbn=9780520271456>

<sup>7</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri\\_Lefebvre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri_Lefebvre) and <http://eu.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-0631181776.html>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.iep.utm.edu/frankfur/>

but I transpose the key qualities of critical theory – self-reflection and social transformation – into practice.

Other theorists and practitioners have since worked with the term, evolving it in different directions. For example, there was the reading group and blogspot initiated by Nicholas Brown in the early 2000s, which came out of discussions around Brown's own artistic walking practice.<sup>9</sup> In 2011, Nikolaus Hirsch and Marcus Miessen started a book series with Sternberg Press called Critical Spatial Practice which focused on architectural discourse and practice, and in the first publication they asked the question: 'What is Critical Spatial Practice?'.<sup>10</sup> In 2016, Hirsch and Miessen set up a website site called [criticalspatialpractice.org](http://criticalspatialpractice.org) to archive their work in this area since 2011.<sup>11</sup> The MaHKUscript, Journal of Fine Art Research published a special issue on critical spatial practice in 2016, where many of the contributors enact critical spatial practices concerned with political and ecological issues.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.walkinginplace.org/iprh/> See also [http://criticalspatialpractice.blogspot.co.uk/2006\\_01\\_01\\_archive.html](http://criticalspatialpractice.blogspot.co.uk/2006_01_01_archive.html).

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.sternberg-press.com/index.php?pageId=1399&bookId=294&l=en>.

<sup>11</sup> <http://criticalspatialpractice.org/>.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.mahkuscript.com/2/volume/1/issue/2/>