

Site-Writing

I first started to develop site-writing as a way of doing criticism in a 1998 essay,¹ called 'Doing it, (Un)Doing it, (Over)Doing it Yourself: Rhetorics of Architectural Abuse', but I first conceptualised it and named it as a practice in 2005.² In 2010, a collection of essays and text-works on and off the page was published as Site-Writing: The Architecture of Art.³

In my development of site-writing as a critical spatial practice I have been keen to spatialize art-writing and architectural history and theory, to find out what happens when discussions concerning situatedness and site-specificity enter the writing of criticism, history and theory, and to draw out the spatial qualities of the critic/historian/theorist's engagement with their object of study, including the sites – material, emotional, political and conceptual – of the work's construction, exhibition and documentation, as well as those remembered, dreamed and imagined.

Alongside my own writing, 'site-writing' has developed as part of my pedagogic practice from 2001, when I set up a history and theory module, called 'Site-Specific Writing', for architectural design students at the Bartlett School of Architecture. The module invited architectural design students to consider their dissertations as site-specific forms of practice, and to allow their spatial design expertise to create new kinds of writing skills. The ambition was to invite students to explore how writing could be inserted into a site, to see how the production of writing could make a site for meeting the reader, and to examine how the structure and processes of writing might relate to the structure and processes of a site. Most importantly the challenge was to experiment in how the material qualities of a site – as well as its history, culture, and the relations of power embedded in a site – could get transposed into writing – in short how one might write site, rather than write about site.

This site-writing work continued in various modes, from 'Travel Stories' through to 'The Reading Room', until 2004, when it became formalized as an option module, 'Theorising Practices/Practicing Theory: Art, Architecture and Urbanism' on MA Architectural History at the Bartlett School of Architecture. In this module we specifically addressed new forms of writing for architectural historians which acknowledged the relations and positions between the writing subject and their objects, subjects and spaces of enquiry. The transdisciplinary potential of the process was triggered by the fact that the module could also be taken by students on the MSc Urban Studies and MRes Urban Design, as well as by students on the Architectural History and Theory and Design PhD programmes at the Bartlett.

From 2017 onwards the work was repositioned as a core module on the MA Situated Practice, and was retitled 'Critical Spatial Practice: Site-Writing'. Artists books and performative text works produced as part of the module have been displayed several times at public venues, first at the Cities Methodologies conference hosted by the Urban Laboratory in 2013, then at the MA Architecture Conference, at the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL in October 2017, the Situated Practices conference at UCL's Here East in October 2017, and as part of the fringe to the Folkestone Triennale in November 2017. In 2018 work has been performed and site-writing workshops led by alumni of the module at the Creative Critic conference at the University of Newcastle in June 2018, and as part of the Urban Storytelling event, curated by Emily Stone, at the Bartlett School of Architecture, as part of the Bloomsbury Festival.

I have also conducted the following writing workshops:

Site-Writing, KTH, Stockholm, Sweden, (2006)

Writing in an Expanded Field, University of Southern Australia, (2009)

Site-Writing, UTAS, Tasmania, Australia, (2009)

Feminist Spatial Practices, FATALE workshop, KTH, Stockholm, Sweden (2009)

Writing around the Kitchen Table, RMIT, Melbourne, Australia (2010)

Spatial Dialectics, Prague Quadrennial, 11th International Competitive Exhibition of Scenography and Theatre Architecture (June 16 - 26, 2011).

Critical Spatial Practice, University of Calgary (2012)

Interactive Cities, Strelka, Moscow in collaboration with the University of the Humanities, Moscow, (July 2012)

Site-Writing and Memory, Mission Gallery, Swansea, (May 2013)

Site-Writing, University of Aalborg, Denmark, (7-8 May 2014)

Site-Writing, University of Aarhus, Denmark, (12-3 March 2016)

Site-Writing, Tasmanian College of the Arts, University of Tasmania, (2016).

Site-Writing, University of Regensburg, (2017).

Site-Writing, Central St Martins, (2018).

Endorsements

I believe what attributed most to my enjoyment of the module was the teaching style and interdisciplinary nature. ... the student-led seminars were engaging and thought provoking. It was great to be able to ... create our own creative pedagogical space(s). The workshops were helpful for expanding my writing and design skills, and they provided fresh insight into alternative ways to approach, conceptualize, and theorize my work ... Overall, I was highly pleased and impressed with this module. It was a delight to be a part of it!

(Heather Moore, MA Architectural History)

This was a thrilling and compelling experience that was supported not just by the tutor but also by the dynamic of the group that was welcoming and inclusionary ... I also loved the direct confrontation with our site without hesitation or delay

(Marisa Daouti, MA Architectural History)

What makes this module and Jane's way of teaching truly unique and something ... is the way she binds and integrates theory and practice. Through student-led seminars, anchored in theoretical readings, the class used different events as points of departure for understanding and discussing theory. In her teaching these two – theory and practice – are not separated, which gives strength and meaning to both. ... The module contains amazing writing workshops, which provide important insights and skills on how to play with words, work more creatively with writing, and use writing as apparatus for analysing.

(Anne Corlin, Affiliate PhD Student, Kolding School of Design).

Jane Rendell's Theorising Practices/Practicing Theory module has had a profound effect on my academic and personal development as a postgraduate student ... By establishing and encouraging an extremely supportive, warm, and intellectually rigorous atmosphere with regular feedback on individual projects as they developed, Jane enabled us to be playful with our spatial writing, move against conventional boundaries of academic work, and inspire each other to experiment, pushing ourselves in new and unexpected directions.

(Leyla Williams, MSc Urban Studies)

I thoroughly recommend this course to anyone frustrated with the common separation of architectural practice and theory. Jane has the powerful ability to create a nurturing space where the tools of writerly and artistic practices come together, through group discussions, readings, and performances, to form a wonderfully productive dialogue. I have thoroughly valued the chance to find new ways of working and build my confidence in pushing the boundaries of history writing. My experience of the course has helped me understand how this method of working can be used to develop an expanded architectural practice which, I know will significantly influence my future work.

(Joanne Preston, MA Architectural History).

This module is a complex web of interdisciplinarity. It accepts the brilliant fear of crossing the lines of disciplinary expertise, and the vulnerability of personal, relational writing. These become productive rather than restrictive. ... Jane's teaching displays such an extent of pedagogical understanding and sensitivity to learning practices and experiences that really evolves in relation to the dynamics of her cohort. The result is an environment of learning that is as warm, collective, and shared as it is intense.

(Lili Zarzycki, MA Architectural History)

¹ Jane Rendell, 'Doing it, (Un)Doing it, (Over)Doing it Yourself: Rhetorics of Architectural Abuse', Jonathan Hill (ed.) *Occupying Architecture* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 229–46.

² Jane Rendell, 'Site-Writing', Sharon Kivland, Jaspar Joseph-Lester and Emma Cocker (eds), *Transmission: Speaking and Listening*, vol. 4, (Sheffield Hallam University and Site Gallery, 2005), pp. 169–76.

³ Jane Rendell, *Site-Writing: The Architecture of Art Criticism* (London: IB Tauris, 2010).