

# Sites, Situations, And Other Kinds Of Situatedness

If a site is a location that can be defined in physical and material terms, a situation can be both spatial and temporal, the location of something in space and a set of circumstances bounded in time – the conditions of a particular instant, a moment, an event. The associated verb *to situate* describes the action of positioning something in a particular place, while the adjective *situated* defines something's site or situation. *Situatedness*, then, is a way of engaging with the qualities of these processes of situating or being situated.

In architectural design, *site* is generally used to define the limit of a project's location, usually in physical and environmental terms,<sup>1</sup> alongside words such as *location*, *place*, and *situation*, which are equivalent but not precisely the same, while *context* often refers to the cultural and historical aspects of a site. In the 1990s, the term *site* became charged with a critical valency in art theory, as artists, working outside the gallery and often in urban conditions, embraced the term *site-specific* to describe their particular form of practice. In 2002, in *One Place after Another*, Miwon Kwon outlined a history of the development of a number of approaches to site in contemporary art practice, from phenomenological and experiential to critical and discursive.<sup>2</sup> In distinguishing between different approaches to site-specific practice and in arguing that some site-specific works did not adequately engage with their relations to site, Kwon positioned site specificity as a particular strand, if not genre, of art practice. Her critical intervention in the discourse around public art, community practice, and context-based work raised the stakes of the debate and encouraged critics to define key spatial terms and address the specific qualities, conditions, and impacts of site-specific artistic practice.<sup>3</sup> Interestingly though, Nick Kaye, a critic from theater and performance, had slightly earlier drawn attention to the temporal aspects of site-specific practice through his focus on performance, while many art critics based in art history overlooked the complexities of time and

1. Carol J. Burns and Andrea Kahn, eds., *Site Matters: Design Concepts, Histories, and Strategies* (London: Routledge, 2004), x–xi.

2. See Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002).

3. See Nick Kaye, *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation* (London: Routledge, 2000); and Jane Rendell, *Art and Architecture: A Place Between* (London: IB Tauris, 2006).

its relation to space, and thus the importance of situation, situating, and situatedness in site-specific practice.

As these conversations were occurring in the art world, scholars in feminist geography and philosophy were expanding postmodern and poststructural discussions of subjectivity, often relying on spatial metaphors to emphasize the importance of physical location and social position to the construction of gender, sexuality, and subjectivity.<sup>4</sup> In her 1988 essay “Situated Knowledges,” Donna Haraway argued, most memorably, that “feminist objectivity means quite simply *situated knowledges*.”<sup>5</sup> Although her essay became (possibly) the most cited text from this period of feminist scholarship, Haraway was by no means the only one to argue that knowledge is constructed and that subjectivity is contingent on position.<sup>6</sup>

During the 1990s, my own approach shifted away from site specificity as an aspect of public art and toward an interdisciplinary consideration of site-related practices that explicitly acknowledged their situated and situating tendencies. My understanding of concepts of site specificity came from reading spatial theory, feminist philosophy, and art criticism together; by engaging with the work of practitioners from art, architecture, performance, and urbanism; and, most important, through my experiences with pedagogy.

In 1996, when I was asked to contribute to a master of arts program called The Theory and Practice of Public Art and Design at Chelsea College of Art and Design in London, the problems associated with the term *public art* were new to me. Rather than considering public art as a set of objects located outside the gallery, my reaction to the genre was to relate it to discussions around site specificity and to conceive of it as an interdisciplinary form of practice, one that refuses to settle as simply design or art. I was interested in how public art combined a design-based approach that sought to provide a solution to a given problem with a more art-based attitude that aimed to rethink the problem itself. This latter approach could be described as problematizing, a process generated through forms of conceptual art practice usually associated with institutional critique. I found this method of moving backward and forward between solving problems and problematizing solutions to connect to the tension between resolution, or creative synthesis, on the one hand and critical analysis, or antithesis, on the other. So I introduced a new term, *critical spatial practice* (a term that could also be thought of as situating site specificity), which placed attention on how processes of engaging with sites varied across different modes of artistic and design practices in architecture and in urbanism.<sup>7</sup> I defined these

4. See the groundbreaking work produced in the mid-1990s by Liz Bondi, Linda McDowell, Doreen Massey, Steve Pile, and Gillian Rose.

5. Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (Fall 1988): 581. Emphasis original.

6. Jane Flax’s “standpoint theory” as well as Elspeth Probyn’s notion of “locality” both use “position” to negotiate ongoing theoretical disputes such as the essentialism/constructionism debate. See Jane Flax, *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 232; and Elspeth Probyn, “Travels in the Postmodern: Making Sense of the Local,” in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda J. Nicholson (London: Routledge, 1990), 176–89. See also Seyla Benhabib’s critical articulation of “feminism as situated criticism” in *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992); bell hooks discussion of the margin in *Yearnings: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (London: Turnaround Press, 1989); and Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodied and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

7. See Jane Rendell, “A Place Between Art, Architecture and Critical Theory,” proceedings to *Place and Location* (Tallinn, Estonia, 2003), 221–33. For more recent developments of my work around critical spatial practice, see <https://criticalspatialpractice.co.uk/> and Jane Rendell, “Critical Spatial Practice as *Parrhesia*,” *MaHKUscript, Journal of Fine Art Research* 1, no. 2 (December 2016).

critical spatial practices as approaches for questioning and transforming the social conditions of the sites in which they intervened, as well as testing the boundaries and procedures of their own disciplines. I stressed three particular qualities of these site-specific projects: the spatial, the critical, and the interdisciplinary, and drew out of the last critical discussions concerning how distinct practices differently articulate relations between the spatial and the social, the ethical and the aesthetic, depending on their disciplinary location.

Engaging closely with these interdisciplinary forms of site-specific practice, I realized that encounters with art and architectural works happen in situ, that critical responses take place somewhere – that site specificities are situated conditions – and that criticism itself must be recognized as a form of situated practice. In his 1962 essay, “The Poetics of the Open Work,” Umberto Eco drew attention to the performative manifestations of interpretative attitudes, which led me to suggest the importance of site in informing the performance of the critic’s interpretation.<sup>8</sup> In her book *Installation Art*, art historian Claire Bishop writes that the “degree of proximity between model subject and literal viewer” may “provide a criterion of aesthetic judgement for installation art.”<sup>9</sup> For my part, I wanted to draw attention to the critic as a precise category of viewing subject who, with the responsibility to “interpret” and “perform” the work for another audience, occupies a discrete position as mediator between the artwork and viewers.

### Site-Writing

In 2005, I first coined the term *site-writing* (meaning situated criticism) as shorthand for exploring the role sites play in critics’ positions as interpreters and performers of works for others, drawing attention to the situatedness of critical knowledge.<sup>10</sup> As a writer based in the discipline of architecture, my interest was in how criticism, in performing acts of interpretation, situates itself as a practice and in how the changing material, conceptual, emotional, and ideological positions and sites of criticism produce, and are in turn produced by, interpretative and performative acts. The desire to work with variations in voice to reflect and create spatial distances and proximities between works and texts – between artists, writers, and readers – became the motivation for pursuing a particular mode of pedagogical and written critical spatial practice, one form of which culminated in 2011 in a collection of essays and text works called *Site-Writing: The Architecture of Art Criticism*.<sup>11</sup> In the book, I explore the

8. Umberto Eco, “The Poetics of the Open Work,” in *Participation: Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. Claire Bishop (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 39–40.

9. Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 133.

10. Jane Rendell, “Site-Writing,” in *Transmission: Speaking and Listening*, vol. 4, ed. Sharon Kivland, Jasper Joseph-Lester and Emma Cocker (Sheffield: Site Gallery, 2005), 169–76.

11. See Jane Rendell, *Site-Writing: The Architecture of Art Criticism* (London: IB Tauris, 2010). This project continues to develop through the postgraduate teaching module I lead, involving exhibitions of student work, and has most recently taken a new form of life through a website, <https://site-writing.co.uk>.

possibilities of a situated form of criticism, one that invites critics to consider the sites and situations through which they encounter their objects of critique – materially, politically, and subjectively. These sites and situations are embodied through the ways in which one first engages with an artwork – in a book, in a gallery, on the internet, and so on – and then made manifest through the sites and situations we adopt in language to describe this engagement, from the positions associated with writers’ choices of pronouns – I, she, they, you – to the pages on which their words are printed. Considering the situatedness of criticism can take us from the sites through which a critic investigates a work – emotionally, intellectually, physically – to the ways in which a critical essay is published and meets its audience. This particular take on criticism as a situated practice encourages processes of interpretation to be understood as produced by, and productive of, the sites and situations to which they relate, as well as the ways in which they are performed through the very processes of criticizing.

In 2001, I set up a history and theory module called Site-Specific Writing for architectural design graduate students in their fourth year of study at the Bartlett School of Architecture. Module participants were invited to consider their dissertations as site-specific forms of writing practice; to use their spatial design expertise to create new ways of writing to break down the boundary between studio “practice” and seminar “thinking”; to explore how practice was itself a mode of thinking; and to develop more theoretical and critical approaches to conceptual design. This occurred by exploring how writing could respond to physical, social, and political qualities of sites, could be inserted back into sites, and, in so doing, could make spaces out of encounters with readers. The module offered the chance to experiment with the ways material qualities and processes at work in a site – as well as the site’s history – could be transposed into writing: in short, to consider afresh how one might write site, rather than write about site.

I drew on techniques from my own site-writing work to create different pedagogical settings, including seminars, workshops, and briefs, from Travel Stories to The Reading Room and eventually to Critical Spatial Practice: Site-Writing, a master of arts module in which students are encouraged to explicitly acknowledge the ways they situate themselves as writing subjects in relation to their objects of inquiry.<sup>12</sup> Through these pedagogical experiments, I

12. Site-writing has also been a key aspect of my supervision of PhD students over the past 20 years. The role of writing – both critical and creative – is something I would like to explore further, especially with respect to the ways in which decisions made about voice, style, and argument relate to those involved in the thesis structure and the relation of texts to works, words to images. Detailed literature is emerging on approaches to writing in practice-led theses. See, for example, Claire Aitchison, “Writing the Practice/Practise the Writing: Writing challenges and pedagogies for creative practice supervisors and researchers,” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 42, no. 12 (April 2015): 1291–1303; Estelle Barrett, “Experiential learning in practice as research: context, method, knowledge,” *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 6, no. 2 (October 2007): 115–24; and Brian Paltridge et al., “Doctoral Writing in the Visual and Performing Arts: Two Ends of a Continuum,” *Studies in Higher Education* 37, no. 8 (December 2012); and Katy MacLeod, “The functions of the written text in practice-based PhD submissions,” *Working Papers in Art and Design* 1 (January 2000).

Joanne Preston, Gutter, from "Gutter/ Index/Margin," The Bartlett School of Architecture Here East, October 2017. Photo: Joanne Preston. All photos courtesy the author.



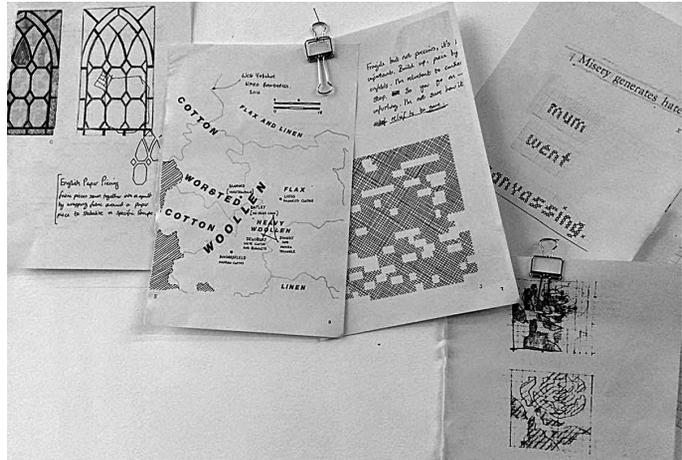
13. See David Roberts, *Slab* (2010), <https://site-writing.co.uk/slab-2010/>.

14. "Site-Writing/Site-Reading" was exhibited at the 2013 Cities Methodologies conference, hosted by the Urban Laboratory, and curated by Anna Ulrikke Andersen and Polly Gould, with assistance from Adriana Keramida, Povilas Marozas, Azzurra Muzzonigro, Mrinal Rammohan and Ishita Shah. See the text based on the exhibition: Jane Rendell with Adriana Keramida, Povilas Marozas, and Mrinal Rammohan, "Site-Writing/Site-Reading," in *Engaged Urbanism: Cities and Methodologies*, ed. Ben Campkin and Ger Duijzings (London: IB Tauris, 2016), 35–44. A 2017 exhibition, "Gutter/Index/Margin," curated by Joanne Preston, Rachel Siobhan Tyler and Lili Zarzycki, traveled to the MA Architectural History conference at the Bartlett School of Architecture in UCL's Bloomsbury site in central London; the Situated Practices conference at Here East, the Bartlett's East London site in Stratford; and the Urban Room, as part of the fringe festival of the Folkestone Triennale. In 2018, site-writing workshops led by alumni of the module were held, and work exhibited, at the Creative Critic conference at the University of Newcastle, and later as "Reconstructions," curated by Emma Filippides, with Maria McLintock, as part of the Urban Storytelling event, hosted by Emily Stone, at the Bartlett School of Architecture, as part of the Bloomsbury Festival on October 20, 2018. Exhibitors from the Bartlett's MA Situated Practices and Architectural History courses included Anastasia Balykina, Kai-Wen Chen, Emma Filippides, Eliza Grosvenor, Rafael Guendelman Hales, Maria McLintock, Valeria Muteri, Anna Livia Vørsel, and Max Wisotsky.

developed modes of working, adopted from the design studio and fine art practice, through which I can teach critical writing as a situated practice and in which students can produce creative propositions in textual form that critique, respond to, and intervene in specific sites. For example, David Roberts's *Slab*, a collection of concrete poems and photographs, was created in response to epitaphs engraved on gravestones in the Sephardi Velho Cemetery in East London and delivered as postcards to students living in the Albert Stern House, a former Jewish old people's home overlooking the site, to remind the current residents of the history of the Sephardic Jews buried beneath their windows.<sup>13</sup> Projects such as *Slab* draw attention to how individual relations to sites can form the very subject of investigation and how writing can intervene in specific sites to produce both emotional affects and discursive effects. Artists books and performative text works produced by students as part of this module have been displayed in several public venues.<sup>14</sup>

Developing a practice of site-writing allows writing's relation to architectural and urban design as well as art practices to be propositional and analytic, experimental and open-ended while retaining precision and rigor. There are multiple ways this relation can happen: first, through an exploration of the materiality of visual-spatial processes that combines written texts and images; second, in the development of the particular spatial and architectural qualities of storytelling and narration; third, by blending personal and academic writing styles to develop multiple voices and different subject positions; fourth, by investigating how physical journeys through architectural spaces work in dialogue with changes in psychic and emotional states; fifth, by articulating the interactive relationship between writing and designing; and sixth, by examining

Rachel Siobhan Tyler, Index (detail), from "Gutter/Index/Margin," The Bartlett School of Architecture, October 2017. Photo: Rachel Siobhan Tyler.



how responses to specific sites can structure the form and shape the content of texts, generating new genres for architectural writing based on (auto)biographies, diaries, guidebooks, letters, poems, stories, and travelogues. Taken together, these situated writing practices have the potential to reconfigure relations between research and practice. They can critique existing methodologies by prioritizing the emotional and political qualities of interactions between subjects and sites, as well as the role both these methods and qualities play in creating subtle but meaningful propositions that respond to existing situations, while at the same time creating new ones.<sup>15</sup>

Over the years, I have increasingly realized that one drawback in always pointing to site specificities and matters of situatedness is that space comes to the fore rather than time. I was aware of the work of curator Claire Doherty and her Bristol-based project Situations before my firsthand experience of her time-based, site-specific curatorial premise through my engagement with "One Day Sculpture." In 2010, Doherty and Australian artist David Cross, in collaboration with curators, galleries, and museums across New Zealand, led a program of artworks using time as material, a project that prompted me to focus on the temporality of site specificity and to consider time not only as history but also in all its other modalities: anticipating, duration, ephemerality, event, flow, flux, instant, moment, waiting... even.<sup>16</sup>

So how does a shift from the spatiality to the temporality of site-specific practice, as well as concerns with the situatedness of practice and criticism, take us to situations themselves? While the notion of situatedness allows us to address the particularities of a site and our relations to it, and may lead us to address material, political, and emotional qualities

15. See Jane Rendell, "The siting of writing, and the writing of sites," in *Explorations in Urban Design: An Urban Design Research Primer*, ed. Matthew Carmona (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014). See also Jane Rendell, "A Way with Words: Feminists Writing Architectural Design Research," in *Architecture Design Research: An Overview*, ed. Murray Fraser (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

16. I reconfigured the subtitle of Edward W. Soja's *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Social Theory* (1989) as "the reassertion of time into critical spatial practice." See Jane Rendell, "Constellations (or the reassertion of time into critical spatial practice)," in *One Day Sculpture*, ed. Claire Doherty and David Cross (Bielefeld, Germany: Kerber Verlag, 2009).

Emma Filippides, "Reconstructions,"  
The Bartlett School of Architecture,  
Bloomsbury Festival, October 2018.  
Photo: Ondre Roach.



of our own subjectivities from both spatial and temporal perspectives, there is still a need to consider in more detail what actually constitutes a change or transformation in a condition that can bring us into a state of critical awareness. This is where feminist concerns with situated knowledge meet the history of politically conscious art. Engaging with what might be meant by a “situation” returns us to the important work of the Situationist International (SI). In their rallying manifesto from 1957, Guy Debord writes, “Our central idea is *the construction of situations*, that is to say, the concrete construction of momentary ambiances of life and their transformation into a superior passional quality. We must develop a systematic intervention based on the complex factors of two components in perpetual interaction: the material environment of life and the behaviors which that environment gives rise to and which radically transform it.”<sup>17</sup>

In her brilliant 2014 investigation of “constructed situations” as a methodology, art historian Frances Stracey describes how SI’s theory and practice involved unitary urbanism, psychogeography, and the *dérive*, but that “common to all these tactics was the transient, momentary temporality of constructed situations that the SI defined as ephemeral, without a future, mere ‘passageways.’”<sup>18</sup> As critic Ira Ferris has discussed, the SI aimed to allow “moments of life to be experienced in almost laboratory settings where they are highlighted and made obvious and where one can start to critically examine them.”<sup>19</sup>

Looking back at the history of modern artists who made practices out of the production of events, happenings, and situations, Claire Bishop, in her study of the politics of spectatorship, includes an extremely rich and critical discussion of

17. Guy Debord, “Report on the Construction of Situations and on the International Situationist Tendency’s Conditions of Organization and Action, Revolution and Counterrevolution in Modern Culture” (1957). My emphasis. See <https://391.org/manifestos/1957-report-on-the-construction-of-situations-guy-debord/>.

18. Frances Stracey, *Constructed Situations: A New History of the Situationist International* (London: Pluto Press, 2014), 9.

19. See Ira Ferris, “Relational Art: An Arty Way to Twitter, with Nothing to Say?,” December 21, 2014, <https://artiris.wordpress.com/2014/12/21/relational-art-an-arty-way-to-twitter-with-nothing-to-say/>.

20. See Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012), 86–116.
21. *Ibid.*, 2.
22. Jan Verwoert, “Exhaustion and Exuberance: Ways to Defy the Pressure to Perform,” in *What’s Love (or Care, Intimacy, Warmth, Affection) Got to Do with It?* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017), 205–46, 210.
23. *Ibid.*, 213.
24. See Lauren Fournier, “Sick Women, Sad Girls, and Selfie Theory: Autotheory as Contemporary Feminist Practice,” *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 33, no. 3 (2018): 643–62.
25. Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 12–13.
26. Lauren Berlant, “Thinking about Feeling Historical,” *Emotion, Space and Society* 1 (October 2008): 4.
27. Young also quotes Moi: “To claim that the body is a situation is to acknowledge that the meaning of a woman’s body is bound up with the way she uses her freedom.” Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience: “Throwing like a Girl” and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 16. See Toril Moi, “What is a Woman?” in *What is a Woman?: And Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

the history of constructed situations in the work of the SI.<sup>20</sup> Bishop examines the practice of the SI alongside artists of their generation, who were also involved in the production of happenings and other kinds of events, and explores how these practices differently configured the relation of art to politics and everyday life as well as the ways in which contemporary artists construct different situations for various ends. Bishop argues that “the artist is now perceived less as an individual maker of discrete objects than as a producer of situations.”<sup>21</sup> In defining “anti-happenings,” art critic Jan Verwoert writes that the “ethos of a resistant practice implies an exploration of the conditions, situations, and potentialities that lie beyond option menus and the exclusivity of the yes and the no.”<sup>22</sup> Here Verwoert points to the Slovak artist Július Koller, who created a series of small, interruptive acts performed in public and private spaces in the mid-1960s, provoking situations in which the potential for difference became tangible.<sup>23</sup>

The practice of constructing situations in order to provoke critical awareness connects strongly with the literature around life writing, autopoiesis, and self-making, which I am currently researching, as well as the history of feminism’s use of autotheory.<sup>24</sup> While recently reading Sara Ahmed’s *Living a Feminist Life* to learn more about her notion of the “sweaty concept”—a mode of theorization that comes out of the difficulties with which one struggles—I was drawn to her reference to Lauren Berlant’s elaboration of situation as “something which will perhaps matter.”<sup>25</sup> In her essay “Thinking about Feeling Historical,” Berlant writes about two men “in the now”: “A situation has forced them to think. A situation has changed the ordinary into something they can no longer presume. . . . A situation is a state of things in which something that will perhaps matter is unfolding amidst the usual activity of life.”<sup>26</sup>

I wasn’t sure quite what “perhaps matter” meant, but the phrase led me to wonder about the very process of taking notice and becoming aware and how this is an embodied experience. Iris Marion Young, drawing on Toril Moi’s work and existentialist philosophy, uses the term *body-in-situation* to argue that the lived body is a better concept for theorizing subjectivity than gender. Young writes, “The lived body is a unified idea of a physical body acting and experiencing in a specific sociocultural context; it is body-in-situation.”<sup>27</sup>

When Stracey discusses the relation between the situation as a scene for interpretation and a scene of transformation in the work of the SI, she too refers to existentialism in some

The end-of-year show “MA Situated Practice Live,” at the Bartlett School of Architecture, December 2018. Photo: David Roberts.



28. Stracey, 14.

29. Clive Barnett, “On Problematization: Elaborations on a Theme in ‘Late Foucault,’” *nonsite.org* 16, June 22, 2015, <https://nonsite.org/article/on-problematization/>.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid. Here Barnett stresses how subjectivity is not subjection but rather a mode of subjectivation. Frédéric Gros also writes that “the history of the subject, from the perspective of the practices of the self and the procedures of subjectivation, is completely separate from the project, formulated in the 1970s, of the history of the production of subjectivities, of the procedures of subjection by the machines of power.” See Frédéric Gros, “Le souci de soi chez Michel Foucault: A review of *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981–1982*,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 31, no. 5–6 (September 2005): 698. Gros also notes a shift in Foucault’s work on practices of the self, on knowing the self, and caring for the self, see 699.

depth, concluding that the two scenes converge in an understanding that the “constructed situation exists only as a lived experience.”<sup>28</sup> This argument led me to reflect on the relation between *situation* as a noun and *situate* as a verb, something Clive Barnett writes on with respect to Foucault’s processes of problematization. In Barnett’s view, “Problematization is an object of study,” where the “process by which modes of living or modes of self-care become problems.” Problematization is located in the mode of interpretation itself, “in which the task of analysis is primarily to call into question taken-for-granted assumptions and identities and settlements.”<sup>29</sup> Barnett notes that “the most interesting thing about Foucault’s thinking about problems is his particular understanding of the situational emergence of problems and of their manifestation in ‘thought’”<sup>30</sup> and “how experience and thought, understood as functions of practices of reflection, are historically variable, and in turn how thought in this sense is occasioned by uncertain situations.”<sup>31</sup> Barnett argues that in *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault outlines a framework for analyzing the “history of ethical problematizations based on practices of the self,” which might, I extrapolate, be understood as a history of situations that situate.<sup>32</sup>

Such a perspective allows us to understand that wrapped up in the practice of constructing situations is an experiential process of situating oneself in that very situation. These techniques and practices of the self are examined in extraordinary detail in Foucault’s late work, where the “*determination of the ethical substance*” is “the way in which the individual has to constitute this or that part of himself as the prime material of his moral conduct,” and in which he argues that “the *mode of*

33. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 26. Emphasis original.

34. Michel Foucault, "1 February 1984, First Hour," in *The Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others II: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1983–4*, ed. Frédéric Gros, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 6.

35. Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself: A Critique of Ethical Violence* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 26.

36. My colleagues in this experiment were James O'Leary, with whom I wrote the course, David Roberts, Henrietta Williams, Polly Gould, Jan Kattein, Emily Stone, and Claire McAndrew, who teach in the program. See <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/architecture/programmes/postgraduate/ma-situated-practice>.

37. See <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/architecture/situated-practice-projects>. Students gave live performances based on their work: For *Given Table*, Kai-Wen Chen transposed scenes from the everyday life of restaurants he had worked in by inviting viewers to participate in tasks relating to the preparation and consumption of meals. In *Objects removed for study*: "A reading of the tablets," Rafael Guendelman Hales discussed his sculptural work, in which a fragment of an object from the Library of Ashurbanipal, present in the British Museum, was recreated by a group of women from the Iraqi community in London, with invited guests. Martina Fernanda Amato read her prose poem *La Memoria Familiare/The Familial Memory* in Italian and English. For *Live The Life You Have Always Imagined*, Pranati Satti introduced her film and tour of the Elephant and Castle development in London, drawing out issues with the way the building industry is being marketed today through audio tours and walk books. While in "Let's Predict the Bartlett's Future," from her tarot stall, Anastasia Balykina, as Annabel, performed site-predictions from her special *Metropolis Arcana*.

38. I also noted Victor Burgin's "Situational Aesthetics" (1969), the work of Robert Smithson in the 1960s and 1970s, Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1974, English translation, 1991), and Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980, English translation, 1984), then Donna Haraway's "Situated Knowledges" (1988), Miwon Kwon's *One Place After Another* (2002), my *Art and Architecture* (2006), and Claire Doherty's work as curator of "Situations" and editor of the collection of the same name (2009).

*subjection* (mode d'assujettissement)" is "the way in which the individual establishes his relation to the rule and recognizes himself as obliged to put it into practice."<sup>33</sup> Foucault does stress that "the role of this other person . . . is indispensable for telling the truth about oneself."<sup>34</sup> But Judith Butler, in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, faults Foucault for "not making more room explicitly for the other in his consideration of ethics."<sup>35</sup>

In an attempt to further explore the relation between site-specificity, situations, and situatedness through pedagogical processes and practice, I have been developing, with James O'Leary, David Roberts, and Henrietta Williams, a new master of arts program called Situated Practices, which was launched at the Bartlett School of Architecture in September 2017.<sup>36</sup> The exhibition of the first cohort of graduating students consisted of in situ presentations at the Bartlett in December 2018<sup>37</sup> and ended with a conversation in which we critically considered the cultural history and political geography of the conceptual terms and practice typologies concerning site and situation that underpin the Situated Practices program. We drew on materials extracted from course bibliographies written by staff, project definitions written by students, and excerpts from our *non-fixed Manifeste* written together during a workshop led by Roberts, which included architecture, art, books, concepts, dates, events, keywords, locations, moments, people, sites, thematics, typologies, urbanism, and works.

This discussion gave me an opportunity to think theoretically and historically about the conceptual shifts that had led me from concerns with situating site specificity (critical spatial practice) to situated criticism (site-writing), and from there, into deeper investigations of practices and qualities of sites, situations, and situatedness. I decided to physically map out a set of references in order to create, in the gallery, both a chronological timeline and a diagram, and to address how conceptual mapping itself can be a form of situated practice. To do this, I discussed the difference between a temporal and a spatial mapping of concepts: the diachronic mode introduces one concept after another; the synchronic situates concepts in spatial relation to one another.

A typical diachronic mode might take the form of a chronology that conceptualizes changes to spatial practices or to the evolving of core concepts over time – a graph with time as its *y* axis – that is typical of visualizations of the historical development of formal styles, such as one might see at the front of art history books or in museum introduction panels.

A collaborative diagram made during "MA Situated Practice Live," The Bartlett School of Architecture, December 2018. Photo: David Roberts.



39. Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," in *Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (London: Pluto Press, 1985), 31–42. First published in *October 8* (Spring 1979). See the interesting discussion of this essay in Spyros Papapetros and Julian Rose, eds., *Retracing the Expanded Field: Encounters between Art and Architecture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014), 1–46. Krauss adopts the term *expanded field* from Robert Morris to define extended physical and mental terrain for understanding "sculpture" and uses a technique called the "Klein" group to reposition contemporary sculpture in relation to positive and negative aspects of landscape and architecture, thus identifying three new sculptural conventions: "site constructions" (landscape and architecture), "marked sites" (landscape and nonlandscape), and "axiomatic structures" (architecture and nonarchitecture).

To demonstrate this, I performed a series of steps that marked out time, stopping at key points to recite the name of a particular book or artwork and its publication date, which is important for the theoretical framing of the program, starting with Eco's 1962 "Open Work," and ending with the students' show.<sup>38</sup> This presentation took a chronological walk through the key concepts for the course, ordered (following Kwon's *Once Place After Another*) as one reference after another.

I then moved to a synchronic approach, and referred to perhaps the most classic synchronic diagram in recent art history, the semiotic square in Rosalind Krauss's 1979 essay "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," in order to show how one can map concepts using spatial rather than temporal coordinates.<sup>39</sup> I went on to describe a synchronic diagram I had made to define the term *critical spatial practice* as a meeting of

40. Starting with the theory–practice relation, I discussed my intention to transpose the key qualities of Frankfurt School critical theory – self-reflection and social transformation – into critical notions of spatial practice, named as tactics in the work Michel de Certeau and representational spaces in Henri Lefebvre. One way of distinguishing these practices in the art–architecture relation might be through definitions of program – the requirement that design focus on function on the one hand, and art’s apparent freedom from use on the other. For the public–private relation, I focused on the tension between these terms, as well as the contradictions within the terms themselves: the *private* as both control (e.g., property ownership), and freedom of the individual; the *public* as democratic and/or as state repression, with the commons located as a place between them. See Jane Rendell, *Art and Architecture: A Place Between* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007) 10.

41. See Robert Smithson, “Towards the Development of an Air Terminal Site,” *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (June 1967).

42. Miwon Kwon refers to Bhabha’s concept in “One Place after Another: Notes on Site Specificity,” *October* 80 (Spring 1997): 85–110.

43. See Haraway, “Situated Knowledges.”

44. Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 61. Haraway credits the introduction of this term to M. Beth Dempster.

three axes (or dialectic pairs): public and private, theory and practice, art and architecture.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, I reflected on what kind of synchronic diagram might best be used to map the concepts key to defining situated practice. I suggested that we also imagine another three-way crossing point, where the first axis highlights the role of the political in the public–private dialectic; the second axis considers Robert Smithson’s notion of a site/non-site dialectic,<sup>41</sup> with site-specific works or live performances marking one end and the documentation of such works in a gallery setting, or *non-site*, as Smithson terms it, the other. Considering the movement back and forth between site and non-site, performance and documentation, could allow us to think of sites not just in their singularity but also in their relationalities, bringing to mind Homi K. Bhabha’s notion of “relational specificity.”<sup>42</sup> Situated practice’s third conceptual axis refers to the importance of processes of self-reflection as a mode of subject formation and the need to consider where we are in the situations we construct, often with others, as practitioners. Rather than refuse notions of objectivity and simply replace these – perhaps rather naively – with subjectivity, I recommended learning from Haraway’s understanding of objectivity as partial and positioned, and her argument that knowledge is situated, thus highlighting the interactive field that exists between subjectivity and objectivity.<sup>43</sup>

In her 2016 book, *Staying with the Trouble*, Haraway reconceptualizes the Anthropocene as the “Chthulucene,” an epoch in which the human and nonhuman are inextricably linked, and makes a strong claim for what she calls “sympoiesis,”<sup>44</sup> or making-with, to replace processes of autopoiesis, or self-making. Today, any reworking of the “construction of situations” calls for much deeper engagement with processes of both autopoiesis and sympoiesis, recognizing that subjectivities are made and unmade through situated and situating practices. In the case of the development of my own situated practice, the sites and situations I experience continually remake me and the way I am able to make relations with other sites and subjects.

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