

To and Fro/Tours and Detours: Writing between Sites and non-Sites.

Jane Rendell

From someone who loves to travel, to meet new people and visit new places, I took the difficult decision not to visit Guimaraes, not to attend the conference in person, and so not to meet my hosts, the organisers and the other participants. I made my choice as part of a bigger project, where over the past few years I have been doing my best to reduce my carbon footprint. Yet two months later, I find myself still full of regret, at all those conversations I was not able to have, the artworks I will now never see: at the points of contact that have not been made. While my spoken words addressed the space between speaker and listener, now my written words traverse the gap between writer and reader. In writing I am travelling the distance between you and me, the sites we occupy and the tours and detours we might take between us.

Starting out with Robert Smithson's dialectic of site and non-site on the other, and Sigmund Freud's two topographies on the one hand, this essay will trace the tours and detours of a writing, which moves to and fro between inner and outer worlds. Reflections on my childhood homes are woven with a more theoretical commentary on spaces of encounter in art criticism, I return to these memories and extend them in connection to themes of threshold and sanctuary for 'To Miss the Desert', a response to Nathan Coley's Black Tent (2003). Phrases from 'To Miss the Desert' are re-made as refrains, for 'You Tell Me', which explores the theme of topological fiction in the work of Jananne Al-Ani, Tracey Moffatt, Adriana Varejão and Richard Wentworth. And in what is perhaps a final transformation, for two-part text installation An Embellishment: Purdah, I arrange twelve 'scenes' of equal length from 'To Miss the Desert' on the page of a book to match the twelve panes of glass in the gallery window where the word purdah is written repeatedly. I describe this process as 'site-writing', where acts of writing and re-writing are worked and re-worked across site and non-sites, making patterns to and fro between critic and artwork, essay and reader, you and me.¹

Between Sites and Non-Sites

In 1965 to 1966 artist Robert Smithson worked as a consultant artist for an architectural firm called TAMS on designs for Dallas Fort Worth Airport. The project alerted him to ways of working outside the gallery, to consider how art works might be viewed from the air and to think about how to communicate aspects of exterior works to passengers in the terminal building. This latter aspect he termed the 'non-site'. He says:

I was sort of interested in the dialogue between the indoor and the outdoor ... I developed a method or a dialectic that involved what I call site and non-site ... (it's a back and forth rhythm that moves between indoors and outdoors).²

Smithson's first non-site, 'A Nonsite (an indoor earthwork)', later retitled 'A Nonsite, Pine Barrens, New Jersey' (1969), consisted of bins filled with sand taken from the runways of a little-used wilderness airfield laid out in a hexagonal pattern in the gallery with a photostat map and a text that read:

31 subdivisions based on a hexagonal 'airfield' in the Woodmansie Quadrangle – New Jersey (Topographic) map. Each subdivision of the Nonsite contains sand from the site shown on the map. Tours between the Nonsite and site are possible. The red dot on the map is the place where the sand was collected.³

In his 'A Provisional Theory of Non-Sites' from 1968 Smithson proposed that:

Between the actual site in the Pine Barrens and The Non-Site itself exists a space of metaphoric significance. ... Let us say that one goes on a fictitious trip if one decides to go to the site of the Non-Site.⁴

My site-writings are non-sites, of a kind, remakings of sites through textual construction. This essay operates in the place of my fictitious trip from London to Guimaraes: sites are imagined through the representational forms of their non-sites, as if I were there and you were here.

Between Sites and Off-Sites

In the last decade in the UK, many contemporary galleries have adopted the term 'off-site' to describe the commissioning and curatorship of works situated outside the physical confines of the gallery where, in a strange reversal of Smithson's concept, the gallery is the 'site'. 'Off-site' works are commissioned within the gallery system but for locations outside the physical envelope of the gallery, sometimes, but not always, under a different team of curators from those who oversee the internal spaces of the gallery. 'Off-site' programmes can be initiated for pragmatic reasons, for example when gallery premises are being refurbished or repaired. They can also be included as part of an ambition to encourage socially engaged practice, since there is an expectation, not always made explicit, that off-site works should be, in general, more accessible to the general public and aligned with the needs of an educational programme.

I will briefly mention one artwork by Adam Chodzko commissioned by Camden Arts Centre as part of a two-year programme of off-site projects, called 'North London Link', where artists work with local communities during a period of time in which the gallery was being refurbished. Chodzko's intervention, *Better Scenery* (2000) consisted of two signs, one located in the car park of a new shopping centre, the O2 Centre, in Camden.⁵ And the other in the Arizona Desert. The plain yellow lettering on the black face of each sign gives clear directions of how to get to the other sign. Both sets of directions end with the phrase: 'Situated here, in this place, is a sign which describes the location of this sign you have just finished reading.'⁶ The signs point only to each other, their relationship is entirely self-referential; they make no attempt to relate to their immediate context. And in speaking only about where they are not, Chodzko's signs critique the ethos of site-specificity and accessibility behind many off-site programmes.

Site-Writing

An interest in 'site-specificity' has developed an understanding of site beyond indicating the physical location of a work but instead in relation to performance and ethnography. Indeed, self-critique, along with culture, context, alterity and interdisciplinarity, have been noted, and here I am referring to Hal Foster's key essay in *Return of the Real*, as aspects of anthropological research to impact on fine art practice.⁷ And in *One Place after Another*, Miwon Kwon points to Homi Bhabha's concept of 'relational specificity'. Akin to James Clifford's notion of site as a mobile place, located between fixed points, Bhabha's concept

suggests an understanding of site that is specific but also relational.⁸ Perhaps relational specificity provides a useful way of thinking about the relations between sites: their particular qualities and circuits of connection.

My practice of site-writing takes criticism to be a form of situated practice and suggests that the changing sites the critic occupies – emotional as well as conceptual, physical as well as ideological, private as well as public – perform critical attitudes.⁹ Art historian and critic Claire Bishop has suggested that it is the ‘degree of proximity between model subject and literal viewer’, which may ‘provide a criterion of aesthetic judgement for installation art’.¹⁰ Although she does refer in passing to the processes of writing criticism in terms of the implications of not experiencing the work first-hand,¹¹ Bishop does not discuss the critic as a precise category of viewing subject. I suggest, however, that with his/her responsibility to ‘interpret’ and ‘perform’ the work for another audience, the critic occupies a discrete position as mediator between the artwork and the audience. For my part, I argue that it is the situatedness of the critic which plays a key role in determining the performance of his/her interpretative role.

By repositioning the artwork as a site, I investigate the spatiality of the critic’s relation to a work, adopting and adapting Howard Caygill’s view of criticism where discriminations and judgements may be both partial and performed.¹² Caygill asserts that: ‘for immanent critique that the criteria of critical judgement be discovered or invented in the course of criticism’,¹³ and that ‘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.’¹⁴

Critics from feminist and performance studies have also expressed an interest in the performative qualities of criticism. Gavin Butt ‘call[s] for the recognition of an “immanent” rather than a transcendent, mode of contemporary criticality’ which is ‘apprehended within – and instanced as – the performative act of critical engagement itself’.¹⁵ Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson, for example, take issue with the tradition that the interpreter must be neutral or disinterested in the objects, which s/he judges, and posit instead that the processes of viewing and interpreting involve ‘entanglement in intersubjective spaces of desire, projection and identification’: ‘Interpretation, like the production of works of art, is a mode of communication. Meaning is a process of engagement and never dwells in any one place’.¹⁶

I explore the use of prepositions in order investigate how variations in position might shift the relation between the critic and her object of study from one of mastery – the object under critique – or distance – writing about an object – to one of relation – writing to the object.¹⁷ As philosopher Michel Serres has said of prepositions:

That's prepositions for you. They don't change in themselves, but they change everything around them: words, things and people.¹⁸

The question of how one relates to an other is at the heart of psychoanalysis. As psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin writes:

An intersubjective theory of the self is one that poses the question of how and whether the self can actually achieve a relationship to an outside other without, through identification, assimilating or being assimilated by it.¹⁹

In thinking about the other in criticism and psychoanalysis, for Jean Laplanche, the message imparted to the subject by the other is an enigma both to the receiver but also to the sender of the message: the 'messages are enigmatic because', he says, they 'are strange to themselves.'²⁰ For Laplanche the critic or recipient-analyst is involved in a two-way dynamic with the enigmatic message: s/he is poised between 'the enigma which is addressed to him, but also the enigma of the one he addresses, his public'.²¹

To and Fro

In Freud's 1915 paper 'The Unconscious',²² he employs the term repression or *Verdrängung*, also translated as displacement, to describe 'a process affecting ideas on the border between the systems Ucs. and Pcs. (Cs.)'.²³ In psychoanalysis repression is linked to repetition. In 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', Freud tells the story of a game invented by his grandson at the age of one and a half, where he would throw objects away from him, including a wooden reel, saying 'ooo', and then pull them back, saying 'da'. Freud understood him to be saying 'fort' and 'da', the German words for 'gone' and 'there', and theorised his actions as a way of dealing with the absence of his mother to whom he was very attached.²⁴

In their commentary on Freud's work Jean Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis posit that the 'defining property of the symptom' can be located in the manner in which it reproduces 'in a more or less disguised way' elements of past conflict, and the ways that 'the repressed seeks to "return" in the present, whether in the form of dreams, symptoms or acting-out'.²⁵

Repetition can be understood as an acting-out of repressed feelings stored in the unconscious. The temporal structure of deferred action, *nachträglichkeit* in the German original, *après coup* in the French translation, provides one way of understanding the distinction between conscious and unconscious, how one is separated from, but returns in the other. Laplanche's neologism 'afterwardsness' embraces the double temporal direction central to the concept of *nachträglichkeit* – through what he calls the to and fro.²⁶

Literary critic Mary Jacobus has described 'the scene of reading' in terms of the relation, between the inner world of the reader and the world contained in the book.²⁷ I suggest that criticism involves a movement between inside and outside: works take critics outside themselves offering new geographies, new possibilities, but they can also return the critics to their own interior, to their own biographies. This double movement suspends what we might call judgement in criticism, and instead constructs a series of interlocking sites relating critic and work, essay and reader. This site-writing takes a tour to and fro across boundaries between inner and outer, private and public, critic and work, self and other.

Travelling the Distance/Encountering the Other²⁸

The distances we travel are physical and psychic. The others we meet on route take the form of places, objects and people. They may be our children, critics, friends, lovers, parents, readers, teachers or students. But often that most distant other encountered in travel turns out to be a lost part of ourself.

The Games We Never Played

I was born in Al Mahktoum hospital, Dubai in the 'Middle East'. As a girl I lived in Sudan, Afghanistan and Ethiopia. My movements followed the pattern of my father's work. Unlike many children in similar situations, I was not put into a boarding school at the age of 11, but came back to live in England with my mother and sister. I say 'came back'. The phrase implies that I was returning to somewhere I had already been. But I had never lived in England before. It was my father's country of origin, not mine.

Once the women were back at home, my father continued to traverse the drier areas of the globe. He is a hydrogeologist – a man who looks for water and brings it to the surface for people to wash and drink. He does this in lands that are not his own, that he was not raised in, that are strange to him and with people whose languages and customs are not kin, but that he has had to learn anew.

Secretly I have always been rather relieved in confessional conversations around the academic dinner table that my relationship with colonization is with acts of kindness. My father had skills that allowed him to locate water under a brittle crust, and so he used his knowledge to help. He is a gentle and unassuming man who seldom takes the high ground. So why am I uneasy?

I remember nights spent capturing insects on cold stone floors. Our house was not grand. In western terms, it was a shack, but unlike many other houses we had lived in it had a stone floor, running water and a tin roof that seldom leaked. While my parents were out, a Tigreanean man stood at our gate. He was our watchman. I was uncomfortable around this tall black man with his hardened feet and long white robe and stick. My younger sister played with him, but I kept myself at a distance.

At that time all Westerners had guards positioned at their gates. Was it because a Western family had recently been ambushed nearby by Tigreanean rebels? Or was it to suggest that we were important enough to protect? I am still embarrassed of the fact that we employed Africans as servants to look after our house and us. 'Why?' I ask my parents now. 'It was the custom then', they say.

If it is a custom, it is one that shames me. I never played with the watchman. I never travelled that distance. Do the games we never played make me a colonizer too?

Feminist Academics come with Baggage

My early childhood made me into a traveller. For years I travelled physically all the time. My work simply provided money for a trip. And I never went to the same place twice. Recently I have been moving frequently, but not been travelling in the same way. I still get lost, it is just that my body stays still. Through reading, writing and teaching I loose myself in other

people's heads. In my office with students streaming through the door, or in the library with my head in a book, or at home with my fingers on the keyboard, I am endlessly on the move.

Moving is not strange to me, both physically and emotionally, I am most comfortable in transit. Being in motion provides a sense of stability – having already left but not yet to arrive. This place has a familiar feel and it seems I am not alone. Postmodern feminism is full of stories of women's travels. Their written work speaks of displacement. But there is much at stake. Movements vary in political dimension. Not all journeying is to be celebrated.

First in one place then in another, I take my baggage across the frontier into a new land – to unpack among strangers; only to find the things I have brought have lost their intended purposes and have to be imagined anew.

And I am not alone, many feminist writers are drawn to the unknown territories of new disciplines. To be interdisciplinary is to be between places. But is the interdisciplinary operator the one who maps the tears and mends the rifts, the places where things have come apart, who sews the overlaps and fixes the joins, the places where things come together? Or has she arrived from elsewhere, as a foreigner in town? Does she aim to match the values of here with those of there, or allow herself to be changed by her new surroundings? To travel the distance is to transform as well as transgress.

Caress

For me, the critic is a travel writer, always going far from home, invited as a guest into someone else's place. To enter the territory of another necessitates movement out of one's own – it involves trust on both parts. To engage with something imagined by another is also to journey, from what is already known towards what is as yet unknown. To encounter another requires a willingness to connect, but also to let go, to take risks. Some critics travel like tourists, crossing vast territories but remaining unchanged. Others are constantly pulled out of the familiar toward the strange, impelled by a desire for transformation – a total emersion in the other – in order to return anew to the self.

Does the varying distance between a critic and her objects make different subjects? Can shifting subjectivities influence the space of criticism? The 'correct' critical viewpoint is commonly assumed to be one of objective judgement, requiring a distinction between the

critic and the object she is critiquing and implying that distance is sufficient to establish disengagement. To be a subjective is a pejorative term, it accuses the critic of having lost her sense of judgement, to have become so engaged in the other, so close, that distance, and thus objectivity, has collapsed.

But criticism can be a form of writing, which negotiates the very space of the distance between one and another. It is a working between at least two sites: one is already known while the other is yet to be explored. As I travel the distance towards you, I turn around to look back at myself and see that I have already disappeared from view.

* * *

To Miss the Desert²⁹

The bathroom has a floor of polished marble, black, interwoven with white veins. Perched on the toilet, with her feet dangling off the ground, she traces the white lines with her gaze. She keeps alert for cockroaches, at any time one might crawl through the cracks around the edge of the room and into the blackness.

14 Floor Finishes Location G6

Lay new flooring 300 mm x 300 mm terracotta unglazed tiles with sandstone colour groat 10 mm wide joints.

All tiles to be laid out from centre line.

Finished floor level to match G5.

All the floors are marble, smooth and cool, laid out in careful grids, except for the big golden rug next to the sofa. She likes to follow its intricate patterns with her feet, like paths around a secret garden. But if you dance around the edge of the squares, you mustn't be silly enough to fall in, who knows what could lie in wait for you in an enchanted garden?

Along one edge of her garden are a number of small rooms. These are home to Gullum and Kareem. Gullum is tall and fair skinned, with light hair and green eyes. Kareem, is shorter, stockier, with darker skin, hair and eyes. They have fought each other in the past, and they will fight again, when the Soviets come to Kabul, and then again, when her own people

search the Hindu Kush to wipe out all evil. But for now, there is no fighting, once the sun has gone down, they sit and eat together.

He is a man with property and wives. Inside the walls of his house are sunlit orchards with trees full of dark purple fruit. A group of women dressed in different shades of red watch them arrive. Some have covered their faces, but she can still see pink nail varnish on their toes. As her family draws closer, the women disappear.

14 Floor Finishes

Location 1.5 and G5

Forbo Nairn lino sheeting 1.5 mm to be laid on 6 mm wbp ply sub floor.

Ply and lino to run under appliances and around kitchen units. Colour tba by client.

Aluminium threshold at junction with G2, G6 and 1.1.

They sit upstairs, in a long veranda overlooking the garden, the only furniture is a carpet laid out in a line down the middle of the room. Important men from the village, all in turbans, sit cross-legged around the edges of the carpet and eat from the dishes laid out between them. Her mother, her sister and herself are the only women. As they walk back down through the dark house to leave, she sees a pair of eyes watching her. The eyes belong to a girl, a girl with the hands of a woman, a woman who glints with silver. Later she learns that this is Kareem's youngest wife, once a nomad, who carries her wealth in the jewels on her fingers.

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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.³⁰ The curator Gavin Wade had read a piece of my writing, where I questioned whether it was possible to 'write architecture', rather than 'write about architecture', and so he asked me to 'write a tabernacle'.³¹ I felt that the text in the bible had already written the tabernacle, so I decided to write *Black Tent*.

Black Tent consisted of a flexible structure, a number of steel-framed panels with black fabric screens stretched across them, and smaller 'windows' inserted into them.³² *Black Tent* moved to 5 sites in Portsmouth reconfiguring itself for each location. My essay echoed aspects of *Black Tent*,³³ each of its 5 sections was composed around a different spatial

boundary condition, such as ‘around the edge’. Yet in order to critique Coley’s choice of sanctuary as a specifically religious and judaeo-christian one, my choice of spatial motif was the secular sanctuary of home.³⁴

Like the squares, the voice of my text was two-sided, setting up a dynamic between private and public sanctuary. One remembered a childhood spent in various nomadic cultures in the Middle East. The other adopted a more professional tone by taking texts from construction specifications I had written when designing contemporary sanctuaries – a series of community buildings for different minority groups.³⁵

* * *

You Tell Me³⁶

In *On Histories and Stories*, writer A. S. Byatt examines her fascination with ‘topological fictions’, fictions where the term topological means ‘both mathematical game-playing, and narratives constructed with spatial rather with temporal images’.³⁷ She names certain works by Primo Levi, Italo Calvino and George Perec as the most interesting examples of this kind of writing. For me, these authors have different ways of making topological fictions, while Calvino often uses combination and permutation as strategies for constructing the shape of stories, Levi might draw on existing empirical structures, such as the elements, to determine the narrative, and Perec’s detailed taxonomies of actual places are frequently re-organised to produce fictional spaces.³⁸ In discussing his own interest in ‘topological fictions’, Calvino refers to a review by Hans Magnus Enzensberger of labyrinthine narratives in the work of Jorge Luis Borges and Robbe Grillet, where Enzensberger describes how, by placing narratives inside one another these authors make places where it is easy to get lost.³⁹

The theme of topological fiction is apparent in the works of Richard Wentworth, Adriana Varejão, Tracey Moffatt, and Jananne Al-Ani selected for the exhibition *(hi)story* (2005).

The writing I produced in response to their work is a topology – it writes the sites of thresholds and proximities – the boundary spaces of my engagement with the four artists whose work invited me in, drawing me close to tell me stories of places. Some I entered through my imagination, others by remembering, travelling back to my childhood in the Middle East. These were journeys both external and internal, they took me outside myself, offering new geographies, new possibilities, but they also returned me, altered, to myself, to

my own biography. Moving to and fro across the sites which separate and join critic and work, this motion is related to previous encounters back and forth. Voices from 'Travelling the Distance/Encountering the Other' and 'To Miss The Desert' return as repetitions, as echoes.

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They tell each other stories, back and forth, from behind their hands, the words slip like cherries, full and glossy. They pass them from one to another.

Along the horizon he paces, back and forth, a tiny figure, smoking.

Once the women were back at home, my father continued to traverse the drier areas of the globe.

They speak of an absent man.

A tiny figure, smoking, on the dry crust of the earth.

He is a hydrogeologist – a man who looks for water and brings it to the surface for people to wash and drink. He does this in lands that are not his own, that he was not raised in, that are strange to him and with people whose languages and customs are not kin, but that he has had to learn anew.

Lips part and then come together. Words blow, in gusts.

On the dry crust of the earth, lacerated with cracks, scarred by the sun.

He is a man with property: land and wives. Inside the walls of his house are sunlit orchards full of dark purple fruit. Among the trees his wives sit. Dressed in shades of red, some of the women have covered their faces, others have painted their toes nails pink. From a distance, the women watch them arrive, disappearing inside as they draw closer.

Hands flicker. The patterns they gesture echo the flutter of speech.

Scarred by the sun, as the day shortens, his shadow grows longer.

The guests are taken upstairs to a long veranda overlooking the garden. The only furniture here is the carpet laid out in a long line down the middle of the room. Men in turbans sit cross-legged along the edge and eat from the dishes laid out in front of them. They are invited to sit down and eat – the only women – her mother, her sister, herself.

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A curtain of black obscures my face.

You tell me a story of how she taught the Sheik's niece English. She was allowed to go inside the harem, and saw that underneath their burqas the women wore make up and perfume. For her labours, she was offered a gift. She asked for a gold leaf burqa, the costume only the wives of the sheik can wear.

I brush my hair. I drag the brush through the long dark strands, again and again.

For her entrance, and her mother's bother, the sheik sends his apologies. 'Sorry', he said, 'so sorry it isn't a boy'. For a boy he would have sent a watch, but for the girl, a tiny gold coffee pot on a gold chain.

You cannot see me, but from behind my veil of hair, I can see you.

Born on the eve of the haj, I am a hajia. I will never have to make the journey to Mecca.

Or so you tell me.

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Al-Ani's 'The Visit' (2004), explores the spatial qualities of emotional tension, relating 'Muse' (2004) an isolated male figure traversing a flat desert plane to 'Echo' (1994) that place where 'Muse' is referred to, yet absent from. [61] As in 'She Said' (2000) where words are

exchanged, whispered behind cupped hands along a chain of five women, the presence of another sounded through speech serves as a reminder of what is not there. This boundary or threshold space that separates yet binds individuals, is articulated by a veil of hair in 'Untitled' (2002) a visual barrier continually inscribed between the viewer and the brushing subject.

An Embellishment: Purdah

For *Spatial Imagination in Design*, an exhibition at the Domo Baal Gallery, London, I reconfigured *To Miss the Desert*, into 12 scenes, laid out in the exhibition catalogue as a grid of squares three wide by four high in response to the pattern of the twelve panes of glass in the west-facing window of the gallery looking onto the street. Here I repeatedly wrote the word 'purdah' in black eye liner.

In the Middle East, the term purdah describes the cultural practice of separating and hiding women, through clothing and architecture – veils, screens and walls – from the public gaze. The particular manifestation of this gendering of space varies depending on location. In Afghanistan, for example, under the Taliban, when in public women were required to wear a burqa, in this case a loose garment, usually sky-blue, that covered them from head to foot. Only their eyes could be seen, the rims outlined with black kohl (but perhaps only in a westerner's imagination) looking out through the window of an embroidered screen.

Responding to the window as a boundary condition, articulating the interface between inside and outside, one and another, I called my two part text installation, *An Embellishment: Purdah*. For *An Embellishment: Purdah* in repeatedly writing the same word across the glass, focusing on its precise formation, again and again, I recalled my school days writing out sentences, aiming to make my handwriting as small as possible so that, as a left-hander, I did not smudge the ink. In trying not to spoil the perfect letters formed of liquid kohl, I realised that I was writing from left to right, writing against the flow of an Arabic or Persian text.

Repetition is the acting out of that which has been repressed in the unconscious. Artist Sharon Kivland has pointed out that:

Repetition, for Freud, is the incessant exposure to horrible or upsetting events and circumstances, the compulsion to repeat an act when its origins are forgotten. Unless one remembers the past, if events are suppressed, something is returned in one's actions.⁴⁰

In taking the form of an adornment or embellishment, repetition, as a kind of remembering, can also be linked to reminiscence. Kivland's account continues:

And while the analytic process may not aim at reliving past experience, at feeling the same emotions of the past, this still happens. In reminiscing, stories are embellished, made better or worse, and so occupy a register of the imaginary.⁴¹

I imagined that for *An Embellishment: Purdah* when the sun set the writing would, like a rug, form a pattern on the gallery floor, where the viewer's shadow, facing west (away from Mecca), would be cast behind him/her. In early January, the time of year that the work was installed, the sun was too low in the sky to create the intended shadow, yet other unexpected effects were produced which resonated with the concerns of the piece. To perform the writing I had to stand in the window, my face screened, occupying a position behind a veil that I had not imagined. As night fell, light from the inside the gallery illuminated my body.

Iranian director Moshen Makhmalbaf's film *Kandahar* (2001) tells the story of an Afghan woman journalist living in Canada who travels back to Afghanistan when her sister writes from Kandahar to say she is going to kill herself before the next solar eclipse. The female protagonist's journey is at times filmed from behind the veil she is wearing, offering western audiences a view out from the interior, so reversing the usual media representation of the camera imaging a covered faceless figure.⁴²

An Embellishment: Purdah does not make a judgement on the veil; rather it wishes to show how things seem quite different depending on who and where you are. From inside the gallery and outside on the street – by day and by night – the work changes according to the position occupied. Sometimes transparent, at other times opaque, revealing then concealing, this embellishment or decorative covering invites the viewer to move to and fro between the places he/she can see.

¹ This essay is a rearrangement of material taken from Jane Rendell, *Site-Writing: The Architecture of Art Criticism*, (London: IB Tauris, 2010), many thanks to the publisher for allowing me to reproduce it.

² “Earth” (1969) symposium at White Museum, Cornell University, in Jack (ed.) *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 177–87, p. 178.

³ Robert Smithson, quoted by Suzaan Boettger, in Suzaan (2002) *Earthworks: Art and the Landscape of the Sixties* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), p. 67.

⁴ See for example, <http://www.robertsmithson.com/essays/provisional.htm> (accessed 14 January 2013).

⁵ See Adam Chodzko, *Plans and Spells* (London: Film & Video Umbrella, 2002) pp. 40–41 and Adam Chodzko, ‘Out of Place’, John Carson and Susannah Silver (eds) *Out of the Bubble, Approaches to Contextual Practice within Fine Art Education* (London: London Institute, 2000) pp. 31–36.

⁶ Chodzko, *Plans and Spells*, pp. 40–41.

⁷ Hal Foster, *Design and Crime (and Other Diatribes)* (London: Verso, 2002) p. 91.

⁸ James Clifford, ‘An ethnographer in the field’, interview by Alex Coles, in Alex Coles (ed.) *Site Specificity: The Ethnographic Turn* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2000) pp. 52–73.

⁹ 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*, v. 14, n. 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. See also Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) and bell hooks, *Yearnings: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*, (London: Turnaround Press, 1989).

¹⁰ Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005) p. 13, p. 131 and p. 133.

¹¹ Bishop, *Installation Art*, p. 10.

¹² See Hal Foster’s discussion of critical distance and identification for example in Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2001, pp. 223–6.

¹³ Howard Caygill, *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 34. See also p. 79.

¹⁴ Caygill, *Walter Benjamin*, p. 64.

¹⁵ Gavin Butt, ‘Introduction: The Paradoxes of Criticism’, Gavin Butt (ed) *After Criticism: New Responses to Art and Performance* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), p. 7.

¹⁶ Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson, ‘Introduction’, Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson (eds) *Performing the Body/Performing the Text* (London: Routledge, 1999) pp. 1–10, p. 8

¹⁷ Jane Rendell with Pamela Wells, ‘The Place of Prepositions: A Place Inhabited by Angels’, Jonathan Hill (ed.) *Architecture: The Subject is Matter* (London: Routledge, 2001) pp. 131–158. See also Jane Rendell, *Art and Architecture: A Place Between* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), pp. 150–151 where I discuss the potential of the phrase ‘I love to you’, deriving from the work of Luce Irigaray, for art criticism.

¹⁸ Michel Serres, *Angels: A Modern Myth* (Paris: Flammarion, 1995) pp. 140–7.

¹⁹ Jessica Benjamin, *Shadow of the Other: Intersubjectivity and Gender in Psychoanalysis*, London: Routledge, 1998), p. 80.

²⁰ Cathy Caruth, 'An Interview with Jean Laplanche', © 2001 Cathy Caruth. See <http://www3.iath.virginia.edu/pmc/text-only/issue.101/11.2caruth.txt> (accessed 3 May 2006).

²¹ Jean Laplanche, 'Transference: its Provocation by the Analyst' [1992] translated by Luke Thurston, *Essays on Otherness*, edited by John Fletcher (London: Routledge, 1999) pp. 214–233, p. 224.

²² Sigmund Freud, 'The Unconscious' [1915] *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914–1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, translated from the German under the general editorship of James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957) pp. 159–215, pp. 173–176.

²³ Freud, 'The Unconscious', p. 180. See also Sigmund Freud, 'Repression' [1915] *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914–1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, translated from the German under the general editorship of James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957) pp. 141–158, pp. 141–158.

²⁴ Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' [1920] *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVIII (1920–1922): Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology and Other Works* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955) pp. 1–64, pp. 14–15.

²⁵ Jean Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Karnac and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1973) p. 78.

²⁶ See Jean Laplanche, 'Notes on Afterwardsness' [1992] *Essays on Otherness*, edited by John Fletcher (London: Routledge, 1999) pp. 260–265, p. 265. These notes are based on a conversation between Jean Laplanche and John Fletcher that took place in 1991.

²⁷ Mary Jacobus, *Psychoanalysis and the Scene of Reading*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 18.

²⁸ The following text is based on Jane Rendell, 'Travelling the Distance/Encountering the Other', David Blamey (ed.) *Here, There, Elsewhere: Dialogues on Location and Mobility* (London: Open Editions, 2002) pp. 43–54 but radically shortened and reworked.

²⁹ The following text is based on Jane Rendell, 'To Miss the Desert', Gavin Wade (ed.) *Nathan Coley: Black Tent* (Portsmouth: Art in Sacred Spaces, 2003) pp. 34–43 but radically shortened and reworked. The current version is taken from Rendell, *Site-Writing*.

³⁰ Nathan Coley's fascination with places of religious worship runs through his practice. An early work, *Fourteen Churches of Münster* (2000), comprises a street plan and the view from a helicopter circling fourteen churches in the city: in the Second World War allied bomber pilots were issued with an order to target them. *The Lamp of Sacrifice, 161 Places of Worship, Birmingham* (2000) and *The Lamp of Sacrifice, 286 Places of Worship, Edinburgh* (2004) consist of cardboard models of all the places of worship in the towns listed in the *Yellow Pages*, have been argued to express the premise of Coley's work – that architectural forms remain empty contained until socially occupied. See Martin Herbert, 'Nathan Coley, Fruitmarket Gallery Edinburgh', *Art Monthly*, n. 278 (July–August 2004) pp. 35–37, p. 36. More recent projects, such as *There Will Be No Miracles Here* (2006) Mount Stuart, Isle of Bute, question the passivity of architecture especially in current religious conflicts. One part of the exhibition – *Camouflage Mosque, Camouflage Synagogue, Camouflage Church* – comprises three models covered in 'dazzle' camouflage, a technique applied to ships during both World Wars as protection from attack. See Andrea Schlieker, 'Negotiating the Invisible: Nathan Coley at Mount Stuart' at http://www.haunchofvenison.com/en/#page=london.artists.nathan_coley

³¹ Jane Rendell, 'Writing in Place of Speaking', Sharon Kivland and Lesley Sanderson (eds) *Transmission: Speaking and Listening*, v. 1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University and Site Gallery, 2002) pp. 15–29, p. 26.

³² The use of black occurs in a number of other works by Coley from 2002, such as *Black Maria*, see endnote 52 below, and *I Don't Have Another Land* (2002) in which a black-painted metal model of the M&S building in Manchester Arndale Centre, blown up by the IRA in 1996, is presented with a line from a Jewish folk song as its title and across the space where its windows should be.

³³ Coley's *Show Home* (2003) curated by Locus +, and commissioned by North Tyneside Council, a replica of a traditional rural cottage, also moved sites, this time in Tyneside over a three-day period – a marina, a suburban housing estate and a school playing field surrounded by security fences. See <http://www.showhome.org.uk/> (accessed 3 July 2008) and Paul Usherwood, 'Nathan Coley: North Shields', *Art Monthly*, n. 268 (July 2003) pp. 46–47. Coley's interest in the potential significance of a work's location is present for example, in the placing of *Show Home*, on the roof of the City Arts Centre, Dublin, adjacent to its financial centre at a time when property prices were surging. For Coley's commentary on the position of his own practice with respect to the current discourse on art and site-specificity, see 'Nathan Coley in Conversation with Claire Doherty', Claire Doherty (ed.) *Thinking of the Outside: New Art and the City of Bristol* (Bristol: University of the West of England and Bristol Legible City in Association with Arnolfini, 2005) pp. 30–37, p. 31.

³⁴ Coley's interest in sanctuaries has been related to their role as places of refuge outside state control. See Nathan Coley, *Urban Sanctuary: A Public Art Work by Nathan Coley* (Glasgow: The Armpit Press, 1997) which comprised a series of interviews with eight people including a policeman and a feng shui practitioner where the artist asked each person what the term sanctuary meant to them and documented their answers.

³⁵ Coley's work has examined the representation of architecture through different kinds of media simultaneously, for example, *Minster* (1998) an installation in The Tate Gallery Liverpool, consisted of slide projected images of a non-conformist chapel in Liverpool's Toxteth, a recorded lecture of a guided tour of York Minster and an explanatory pamphlet describing the correct procedure for establishing a tabernacle or portable sanctuary. See Nick Barley (ed.) *Leaving Tracks: Artranspennine98, an International Contemporary Visual Art Exhibition Recorded* (London: August Media Ltd., 1999) pp. 78–81.

³⁶ The following text is a reworked version of Jane Rendell, 'You Tell Me', an essay written for *(Hi)story: Jananne Al-ani, Tracey Moffatt, Adriana Varejão and Richard Wentworth* (2005) Kunstmuseum, Thun, n. p. The words in italics have been taken from 'Travelling the Distance/Encountering the Other' and 'To Miss the Desert', earlier parts of *Configuration 2: Back and Forth* and altered to fit their new site.

³⁷ A. S. Byatt, *On Histories and Stories* (London: Vintage, 2001) pp. 139–141.

³⁸ See for example, Primo Levi, *The Periodic Table* (London: Penguin Books, 2000); Italo Calvino, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* (London: Vintage Classics, 1998); and Georges Perec, *Life: A User's Manual* (London: Collins Harvell, 1992).

³⁹ Hans Magnus Enzensberger, 'Topological Structures in Modern Literature' *Sur* (May–June 1966) referred to by Calvino in Italo Calvino, 'Cybernetics and Ghosts', *The Literature Machine* (London: Vintage, 1997) pp. 3–27, p. 25.

⁴⁰ Sharon Kivland, 'Memoirs', Rendell, Hill, Fraser and Dorrian (eds) *Critical Architecture*, pp. 143–149, p. 145.

⁴¹ Kivland, 'Memoirs', p. 145.

⁴² Samira's Makhmalbaf's *At Five in the Afternoon* (2003) made by Moshen Makhmalbaf's daughter, also focuses on the life of women in Afghanistan.