



ASSEMBLY

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Julie Marsh

Filmmaker & Researcher

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INTRODUCTION

William Raban

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Here, at the Jamme Masjid on Brick Lane, Julie Marsh shares her latest exploration of site-specific artwork using ingeniously constructed camera motorised rigs to first film the space and then to play back those same images in a captivating encounter with the one-to-oneness of time and space. Julie's artistic practice has matured over the last 7 years where her installations have been made and shown in such varied locations as a cave in Dorset, an old meat factory in Prague and a railway works in Poland. In this latter work, the monitor drifts slowly across the surfaces of an abandoned railway carriage thereby alluding to past conditions and patterns of work in the former socialist state. The tracking shots across derelict and decaying textures of the railway carriage are also reminiscent of films by Andre Tarkovsky where his camera delicately lingers across paintings, tiles and objects lying beneath a shallow pool of water such as in *Mirror*, (1975) for instance.

The audience are invited to resolve the complex space-time puzzle between time of recording and time of projection. There is something beguiling and uncanny to these artworks where the digital moving image hovers improbably above its 'real' counterpart. Whether the installations are made in a remote Romanian monastery (*Pestera*, 2015) or now here in the Jamme Masjid on Brick Lane, the choice of places of worship serves to accentuate the transcendental aspects of the work to reveal a state of being free from the constraints of the material world.

In developing her practice, Julie has coined the term site-integrity to describe the process of using the same motorised rig to film the location and to play back the recorded image onto the same surfaces of the site. This is essentially a performance art practice where the camera/playback technology, the artist herself and the audience become engaged in the completion of the artwork together. One of the radical aspects of Julie's practice is that there is a direct social engagement with new audiences specific to the chosen site venturing beyond the 'hallowed' domain of the art gallery.

SITE-INTEGRITY

Dr. Julie Marsh

Filmmaker & Researcher at the Centre for Research
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Site-integrity is a working methodology, a site-specific and collaborative research practice, which questions the traditional comprehension of space and presents it as dualistically experienced and represented. Non-haptic, non-temporal ways of representing place have come to dominate contemporary practice. Site-integrity implicitly performs involvements *in*, as opposed to observations *on*, site. It attempts to take account of increasingly non-, or perhaps *more-than*-, representational understandings of site. By situating the viewer in the centre of a changing live space, there is never a point of fixed representation.

Doreen Massey's *For Space* (2005) argues that place is unrepresentable, since in order to fix a representation of space one needs to extricate it from the temporal. Site-integrity builds upon this notion via an understanding of place as emergent, relational and beyond representational regimes. Site-integrity does not present an idea or image of what a site is or can be. Rather, it creates an opportunity for audiences to experience their own relationship and reading of it. This focus on the 'present' repositions the act of representation from its retrospective or projective dimensions towards that, which is physically encountered and is *experiential*.

Site-integrity re-presents recorded material back in the place it was filmed using a motorised rig, defining spatial position and context. This enables an exact transfer of scale and time as the image maps the architectural site. In *Film Art Phenomena* (2003), Nicky Hamlyn describes the kind of spectator awareness that comes from site-specific re-projection as: "a kind of matching of the world with its representations or, rather, a bringing of the two into critical conjunction" (Hamlyn, 2003, p.53).

As the title of this research suggests site-integral artworks are informed, shaped and determined by the political, aesthetic, geographical and institutional discourses present in site. The motorised rig is used as both a creature of autonomy and a source of possibility through which site materiality might be found and shared. It provides this research with an objective viewpoint and a technological ability to go inside somewhere physically restricted,

distant or forbidden. Site-integrity differentiates from other modes of site-specific practice through a dynamic material exchange that occurs between site, artist, machine and audience. It proposes that it is possible to witness the process and film simultaneously, without being reduced to either the material or the metaphysical.

Site-integrity is reliant upon the physical presence of the viewer for activation, concerned with the *experience* of site through material and temporal images in situ. It could be argued that each site simultaneously becomes an impromptu studio space, a place of contemplation, research, action, interaction, production and event. Thinking about practice in terms of event, therefore, is not simply the unfolding of a sequence of activities within a 'privileged' and territorialized space of the gallery; the art experience needs to be rethought, or re-experienced, in terms of a changing live space.

Site-integrity at Brick Lane Jamme Masjid

Made in collaboration with Brick Lane Jamme Masjid community, *Jamaat* (2018) (Arabic: *جماعة*) (meaning Assembly) is made and exhibited respecting the religious and cultural rules of the mosque. *Jamaat* comprises of two simultaneous installations, one in the main prayer hall and one in the female prayer room. The mechanical recording device is used as an anonymous eye; in a culturally sensitive environment such as the mosque, the objectivity of the machine allows entry to a place that is forbidden for a female non-Muslim.

In *Jamaat* the camera is not permitted to film in front of the people praying, nor can it show their faces. Subsequently, an automated rig is constructed to film from above, at a constant speed from the entrance to the Mihrab. The pre-recorded footage of the Jamaat prayer is then projected back into the architectural space using the same automated device. The controlled motorisation of the projection mirrors the movement of the recorded image, which gives the effect of only the frame moving through physical space,

constantly revealing and concealing the actual site below. The projected image appears to be multi-layered, as the image of the carpet maps with the real carpet, whereas the bodies in prayer become ghostly illusions.

Jamaat questions how the projected image relates to the real space and how the experience of the real space is mediated by the image. Both installations bring forth a very precise relationship between body and space, helped by the fact that the people it addresses are coming to worship and therefore invested in the place. It could be argued that there is already a form of site-integrity in the mosque because of the religious and social practices that happen there. How much are the religious practices responsible for defining a mosque?

Jamaat has found a way to connect and engage the prayer spaces, allowing access for men and women to both spaces. Each installation functions as a self-making apparatus, in turn, making a broader argument about the triumph of lived space over representational space. At the end of the residency, the Jamme Masjid invite the general public into the main prayer hall and female prayer room, providing an opportunity for Muslims and non-Muslims to experience *Jamaat* first hand via the site-performances.

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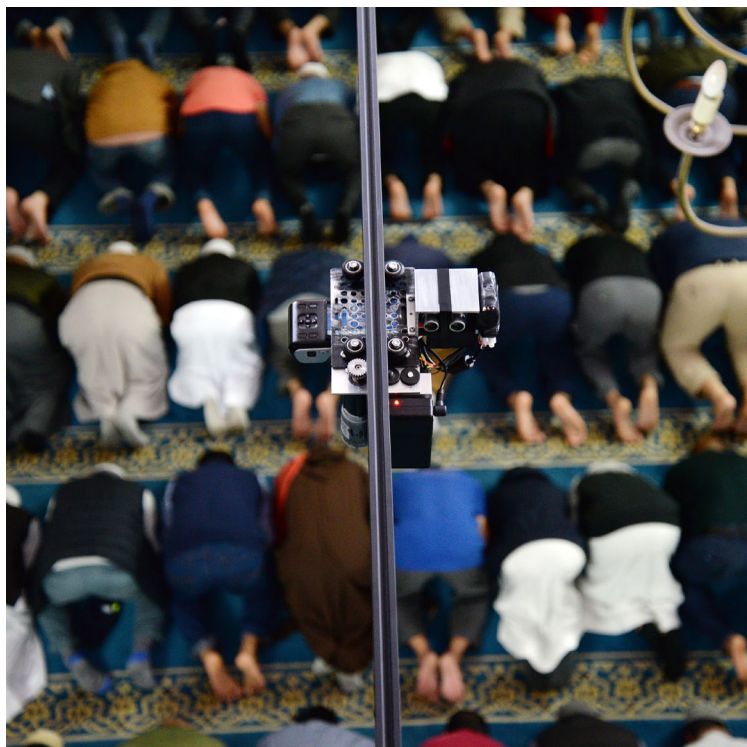




















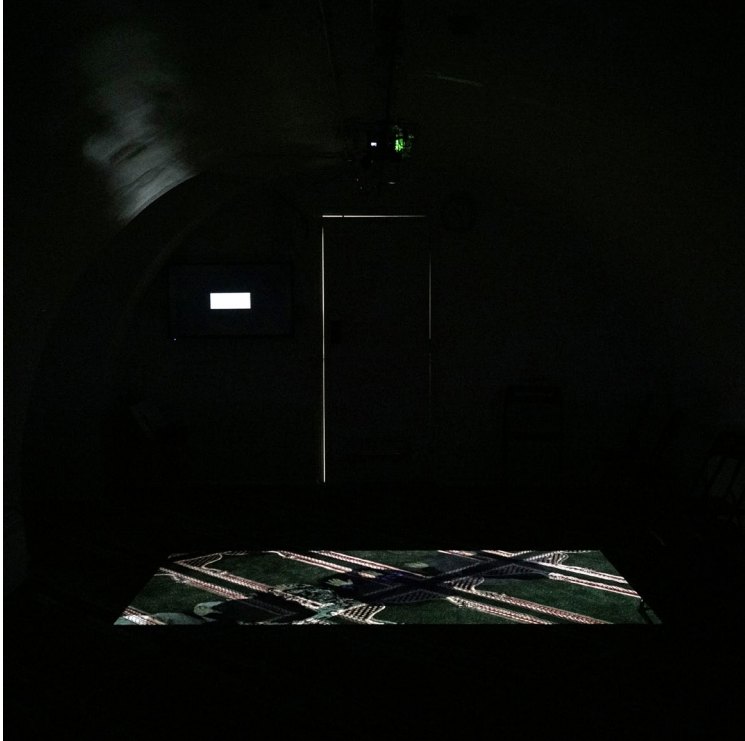


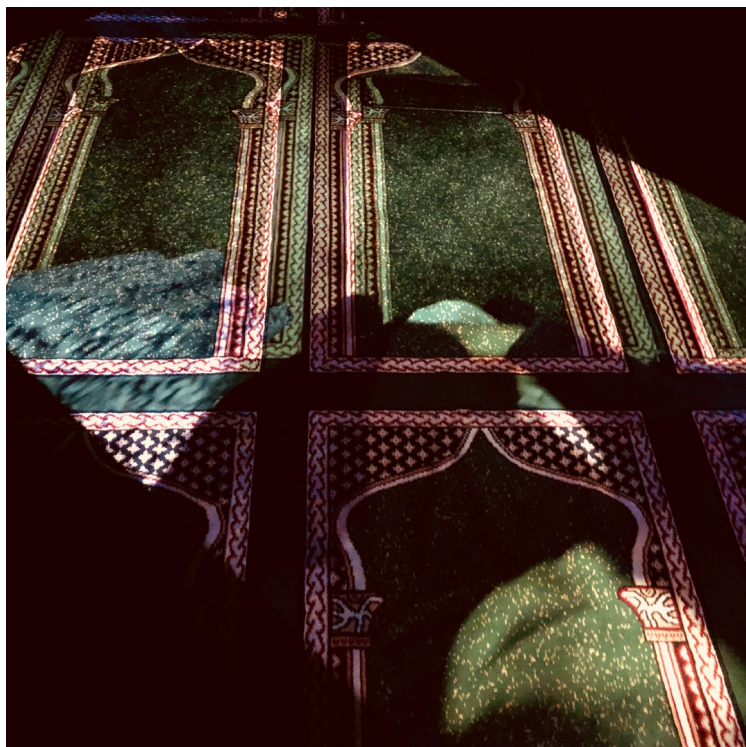


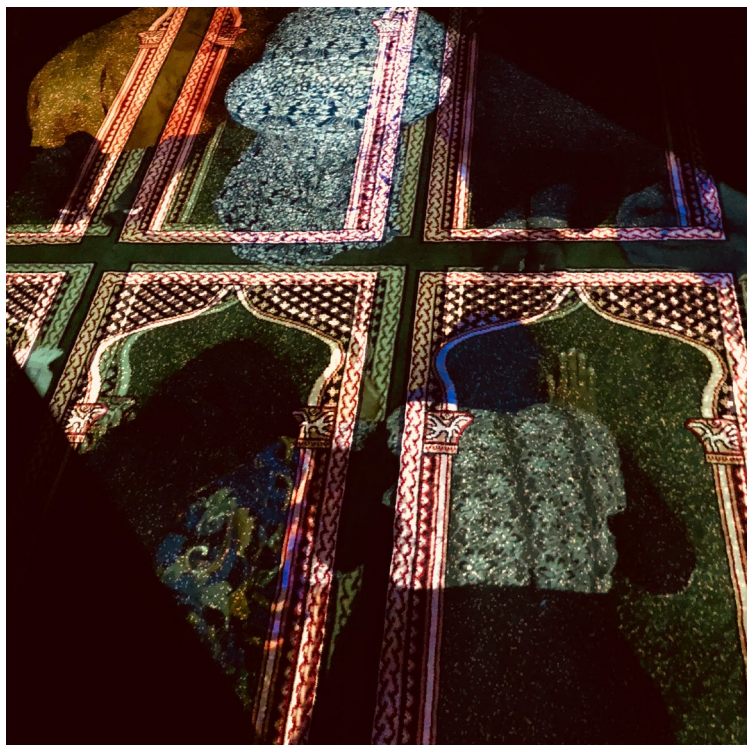


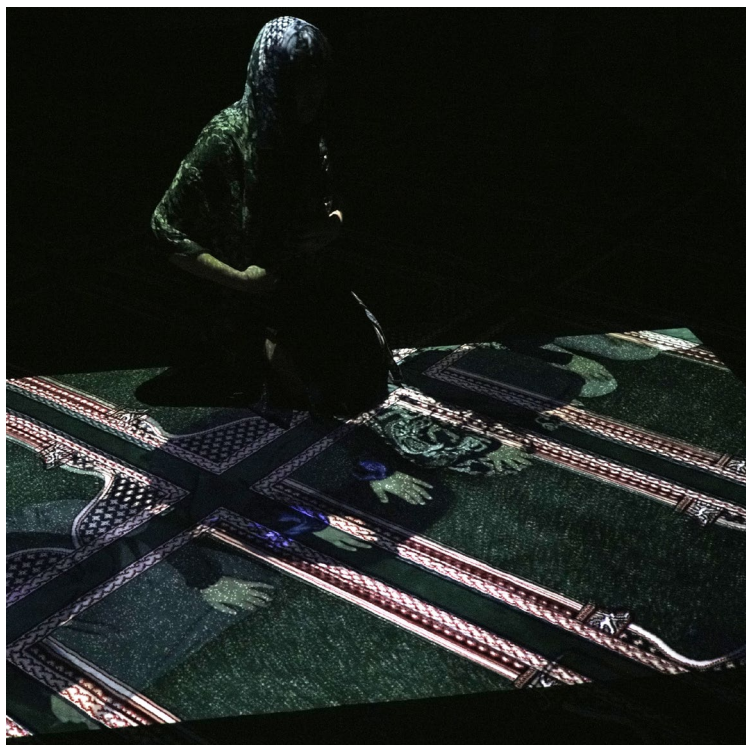












THE MOST VIGILANT WITNESS

**Dervla Zaynab Shannahan
& Naima Khan**

Co-Founder & Trustee of the
Inclusive Mosque Initiative

The Inclusive Mosque Initiative (IMI) is often framed by mainstream media as an example of “good”, or more likely “acceptable”, British Islam as elements of what we do fit an idea of what is commonly (and inaccurately) regarded as European/Western progress. We have, for example, female imams, we encourage participation in the mosque from LGBTQ Muslims and their families and perform interfaith marriage ceremonies, celebrating all types of families. Our values are based on our conception of Allah as a benevolent God who knows us in all our stages, encourages us to challenge injustice, and emulate the example of prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him) who fought for the oppressed.

Mosques in the UK sit within a wider unhelpful discourse that likens them all to each other, making any one mosque representational of the many. Because the Inclusive Mosque Initiative is not attached to a building and we are female-led, we are freed from some of the generalisations that other mosques face. Without a permanent space we move between wheelchair accessible buildings in London and we don’t often get the chance to examine how our nomadic mosque transforms each building we move to which is why *Jamaat*, which explores how a space is used, is so beguiling.

We admit when we first heard about the project, it sounded voyeuristic. While there is an outsider element to *Jamaat*, one that we think the artist, Julie Marsh, responsibly locates herself within, it is an artwork that offers much more to the users of the mosque space than potential disconnected voyeurs. We were hesitant to write about a project taking place so specifically in another mosque and one that has the potential to encourage the consumption of Muslim aesthetics, but the site integrity of the piece and the permission we received from Brick Lane Mosque to contribute to the discussion means that we can build links and create a sense of solidarity while maintaining the specificity of what’s portrayed. If *Jamaat* were to be shown in a gallery, it would take on an entirely different meaning, one we wouldn’t be comfortable with. However, the bird’s eye view used to create the footage – fittingly called the “god-shot” in the film industry – shows us ourselves in a

unique and unfamiliar way that's worth experiencing. The participation and observation in *Jamaat* exist in tandem and remind us of one the names of Allah: Ar Raqib – the most vigilant witness, watching the world over which She has sovereignty.

Site-integrity attempts to avoid fixed representation and with *Jamaat*, it succeeds. Not only is the footage specific to Brick Lane Mosque but also the individuals who enter the prayer space jump from the surface of the projection, particularly in the women's prayer space where there are significantly fewer participants. We witness the fluidity of the congregation and can appreciate the uniqueness of the people who make up the group. In that sense, the projection only tells part of the story. Within the space exist the stories of the people who will pass through it, and what is the space without the people?

FROM REPETITION TO REPRODUCTION

Dr. Matt Webber

Social Anthropologist at
University College London & SOAS

The most obvious starting point, for an anthropologist writing about the Brick Lane Jamme Masjid, is to reflect on the history of the building and the communities for which it has formed a central site of meeting, worship, and friendship. In the years since 1743, when it was first constructed, it has been a Huguenot church, a Wesleyan chapel, a Jewish synagogue, and now a mosque. Throughout these changes, however, the physical building has remained relatively unchanged. This raises a question: what was it, precisely, that changed each time the building was given a new name, and what stayed the same? One answer is that throughout its life, and in each of its manifestations, the building has been a site of prayer and worship, albeit of different kinds.

Understanding prayer has proved somewhat difficult for anthropologists. Famously, Mauss never finished his doctoral thesis on the subject (republished 2003), and he remains one of the only anthropologists to have tackled it. His unfinished thesis, however, attempts to build an encompassing definition of prayer by focusing attention on its social aspects. Whilst sometimes understood as representing a personal request from an individual to a deity, Mauss (and, later, others) have understood prayer as an inherently social phenomena, and explored the ways in which it re-produces the communities it forms part of, and mediates human relationships within them.

In the context of Islam, some scholars have noted that it is precisely the repetition of the Salat prayers that gives them their power, and that far from rendering such prayers meaningless, it is this repetition that makes them powerful (Haeri, 2013). Others have described repetitions and patterns at a larger scale: what El Guindi (2008) calls the rhythm of Islam, whether this be manifest in the daily prayers, or the yearly rising of the Shawwal Moon. Whatever their temporal extent, however, each of these patterns of repetition mediate between individuals and their deities, between individuals themselves, and ultimately reproduce the community they form part of.

This community is not a fixed object, but is continually in the process of being made and re-produced by ritual. *Jamaat* (2008), as an artwork, extends this same insight to the building in which these prayers take place. The Jamme Masjid cannot be represented, it is suggested, because the acts of worship that take place within it are constitutive to its existence. For this reason *Jamaat* should not be regarded as a representation of a space, and still less one of individual worshipers, but rather as an attempt to reproduce the mosque as it actually exists. Both the building and the community it forms part of are re-assembled each time the piece is displayed, each made and re-made in a relational process between audience, film, the worshipers, and building.

Perhaps, in this sense, the use of the building as an art space also represents the reproduction of another, wider community: one that includes not just the worshipers at the mosque, but also the rituals of those interested in art, whose act of worship is to be found in the communal experiencing of artworks, and whose community is sustained by this social experience.

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