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Creativecritical manoeuvres: carrying over, directing, figuring and going outside

Abstract:
Creativecritical approaches to writing – inside the academy and beyond – have proliferated in recent years, with varying stylistics and aims, such as opening new vistas of meaning or expression, resisting or challenging dominant subjects/subjectivities, bringing the political toward the personal, and explicating a journey in thought (commonly within academic research writing). The politics and poetics of creativecritical writing are experimental and transgressive, and as such, creativecritical writing resists taxonomy. Yet trends and patterns have emerged within this nascent field of writing. In this creativecritical essay, I argue that spatiality in language is a key principle of creativecritical writing. By activating and reflecting upon the "intentionality" (Brentano; Merleau-Ponty) of language through literary manoeuvres of carrying over, directing, figuring and going outside, this essay moves through scenes of writing to both argue for and demonstrate these manoeuvres in creativecritical practice. Drawing forward concepts of "performative writing" and its relationship to the real, this article builds upon recent research on the haptics/sensory within writing (Prendergast; Webb) and genre-transgressing writing styles (Mathews's "relationality"; Gibbs's "Live Writing"). In doing so, I present a lateral view of the contemporary scene of creativecritical writing and propose that spatiality – manoeuvring in critical "space" – is a key element of this form.

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The space of writing

1. Seven bodies on stage. Two are alive and the other five are reflections. An enormous mirror covers the back wall of the stage, which is cut through the middle by a transparent plastic screen, parallel to the mirror. Dancers move between mirror and screen, between the screen and the audience, and reflected light between body, screen and mirror casts lines of reflected bodies into illusory, intangible space. Dancers partner each other's reflections [1]. From my seat in darkness, I am spellbound. Yes, here it is, the body displaced, the moving realm of reality and fiction. Like nonfiction writer Paul Auster – yet in another theatre, decade, country, life – as I observe the dance I am *falling through the rift between world and word, the chasm that divides human life from our capacity to understand or express the truth of human life*. When I return home to my desk, I can write again.

Auster, 2012, p. 223

2. In this article I argue that creativecritical writing harnesses the spatiality of language to perform distinct manoeuvres that propel both creative (imaginative, embodied) and critical (philosophical, cognitive/analytical) functions of a text. Creativecritical writing is one categorisation of a traceable movement within creative writing and its scholarship – a movement to hybridise, blend or problematise distinctions between creative and critical modes of writing. In the academy, such writing is often deployed as resistance toward sanctified (read: dispirited) "traditional" research writing (Bartlett, 2006). In contrast to plain academic prose, such "inbetween writing" is characterised by Jenn Webb as "a writing that might satisfy by allowing us to play with language while we wrestle with ideas" (2009, p. 2). Creativecritical writing is distinctly relational, emphasising aesthetic associations and activating spaces of connection across text, art and human experience (Mathews, 2013; 2017).

Creativecritical writing has goals in mind: to open new vistas of meaning or expression, to resist or challenge dominant subjects/subjectivities, to bring the political toward the personal and to journey in thought. Its aims (of course not captured in totality here) are lived: intimately linked to the materiality of the body and our experience of/in language. In evoking four "manoeuvres" of creativecritical writing, and thereby adopting the language of choreographic technique, I emphasise creativecritical writing as a *movement* or *approach* from which follows its various stylistics.

3. Here, at the top of page three, I claim that writing is spatial. I make this claim to bolster my argument that creativecritical manoeuvres operate within such spatiality. Writing is a performance of meaning – a movement between the real and the image – within the space of literature [2]. In other words, there is an inherent "aboutness" to language – it points toward its object in the realm of ideas or entities. In philosophy of mind and language, this pointing is called intentionality, a feature of philosophical debates about how to articulate this world and our experience within it. A word is *intentional*, it activates a *being about, representing* or *directing toward*. A forerunner to continental phenomenology, 19th century philosopher Franz Brentano brought this concept into contemporary philosophy, arguing mental phenomena were characterised by the "intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object, and … reference to a content, direction toward an object … or immanent objectivity" (2015 [1874], p. 92). This concept has been influential for structuralist and poststructuralist literary theory (and, although in storied disagreement, analytic philosophy [3]), echoed within Derrida's grammatology and "White Mythology" (1974), in which he argues against any escape from figurative language. Language in this prominent vein of thought is motioning, in motion: rather than the ruin of clear theorising, metaphor operates within philosophy in the "order of sense and its movement" (Derrida, 1974, p. 73).

In this spatialised field of language, writing activates, performs. Creativecritical writing enacts the performative manoeuvres available to a writer, functioning as "performative writing", as defined by Pelias:

> While playing, it wants its language to remember its limits and its possibilities, to know how each word carries an ideological kick and how each word is marked by its representational failure, to sense how the body languages meaning and meaning languages the body, to turn back on itself to consider its own investments and their material consequences, and to evoke through sense and sensibility everyday and aesthetic performance. (Pelias, 2016, p. 7)

We see the activation of writing's intentionality though creativecritical writers' experimentation with the preposition, a purposeful (often feminist) rescuing these deictic "subclasses of particles" (Wall, 2019, p. 145) and utilising their grammar for thinking, following Sedgwick's "periperformative statement" [4].

Francesca Rendle-Short, in reflection upon memoir: "the body as language of process. *About* throat. *Like* soft palate" (2019, p. 5). Luce Irigaray, in refiguring intersubjective relationships: "I love *to* you" (1996).

4. If writing is a performance, it follows that the performance must be staged.

5. Creativecritical writing activates the materialist ontology that underpins creative practice research. It meets the call of feminist poststructuralists such as Braidotti and Grosz who argue for conceptual and affective creativity. Writing takes shape in affect and flux, as "a system of dynamized and impacting forces rather than a system of unique images that function under the regime of signs" (Grosz, 2008, p. 11).

6. Writer and academic Julia Prendergast explains the process of writing her novel *The Earth Does Not Get Fat* as ideasthetic. Ideasthesia, drawn from Nikolić's "sensing concepts" (2016), is applied to consider how writers sense concepts in "metaphorical and associative ways" (Prendergast, 2019, p. 1). "As we engage ideasthetically with the ideas that underpin narrative," Prendergast writes, "we engage imaginatively with the haptic quality of the idea" (2019, p. 9), suggesting "ideasthesia can be a useful means for understanding meta-level processes in creative writing practice" (p. 1). I am drawn to this idea and the deftness of Prendergast's theorising the unformed-yet-sensed shape of an idea (the "unthought known") that "simmers beneath the surface" of an image or narrative (2018, p. 416).

This study of creativecritical manoeuvres is led by haptic sensing while writing and reading creativecritical works. Treading the boards of women's writing, life writing, creative practice and fictocriticism, I've carried the sense that creativecritical writing is more than its stylistics, yet *what exactly is it doing* on/beyond the page?

I've held this question in mind for years, reading and feeling, sensing the manoeuvres (between sensation and idea) as I encounter them in texts that activate or question the place and power of creative/critical modalities. From Carroll's *Alice* books to Malabou's *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing* (a critical text that announces itself as "both an autobiography and a conceptual portrait" (2010, p. 65), I've adopted haptic sensing as a writer-reader – a reader of a text, who comes to the text with an eye for its composition. Four manoeuvres have taken shape in my mind: carrying over, directing, figuring and going outside. They are not exhaustive. Could they ever be? Are we ever exhausted [5]?

Creativecritical writing

1. I began using the term "creativecritical" during my creative writing doctorate to describe its form of writing that combined creative and critical functions of the PhD and enacted "theory" through creative means (Markidis, 2020). I was writing my experience of an eating disorder, bringing this condition (Pathology? Personality? Propensity?) into critical and auto/biographical consideration. Holding to a separation of theoretical and memoiristic writing was impossible. In fact, it wasn't enough to term this writing "creative-critical", I needed to remove the hyphen, have the words press against each other, threaten to amalgamate.

Even in this closeness, the forward placement of "creative" misleadingly indicates its precedence. What I'm really hoping for is:

ativecriticalcreativecriticalcreativecriticalcreativecriticalcreativecriticalcreativecriticalcreativecritica

2. The stage is a small clearing in a dark room. Seated, we surround the poet. The poet is standing nude, reciting her words, as they are projected upon her body. I've been reading Anne Carson's *The Glass Essay*, and the poet's body appears to me now as another of the Nudes in Carson's work: *I saw it was a human body / trying to stand against winds so terrible that the flesh was blowing off the bones. / And there was no pain*.

Carson, 1995 p. 38

3. Creativecritical writing is many things over time, wearing many guises across literature and philosophical/critical writing. The kind of writing that allows "for transversal lines that may cross between … fields [artistic and philosophical] in practices that are creative and critical" (Ståhl, 2016, p. 221), this writing is "inbetween" and "promiscuous" (Webb, 2009), "creatical" (Mikkilä, 2022) and "outlaw" (Eades, previously Quinn, 2012). We see it in autofiction, metafiction and hybrid essayistic writing. We recognise its Australiasian roots in our longstanding lineage of fictocriticism, which Amanda Nettelbeck defines as "hybridized writing that moves between the poles of fiction ('invention'/'speculation') and criticism ('deduction'/'explication') and thus challenges the distinction between creative and academic genres" (1998, p. 3).

4. Research candidates in my university department are often advised to "put more of you into it" – academic approaches that are theoretically rigorous while accounting for the researcher's positionality are encouraged. Yet when I'm met with research reporting matrices, I must justify creative acts in the objective language of science. In 2024, can we still call creativecritical writing subversive? I think yes and I think no.

5. Slippery things, escaping your grip only to transform and connect elsewhere, words are animate beings, "affect bombs" with lives of their own (Gibbs, 2018, p. 244). Anna Gibbs' explication of "Live Writing" offers a vision of language in its connective, gestural capacity – "a writing in vivo, a writing in the here and now … that carries a little charge, something inarticulable or unidentifiable" (p. 248). Creativecritical writing moves with the gerund – *ing* – in its becoming, essaying and (as introduced by Nicholas Royle) *veering.* Veering, for Royle, is a "physical and phenomenal" theory of literature, "a force or play of forces" (2011, p. 5) which offers "possibilities of a critical writing that veers into the literary or, perhaps, vice versa" (p. 68).

Royle's oeuvre provides ample examples of such literary veering (dare I say, manoeuvring?). His creativecritical article "All Wards" celebrates wordplay of/with Cixous, as a text that dances in and out of language games to argue for the ongoingness (up*ward*, down*ward,* all *wards*) of writing. Homophones of "sick"/"sic" and double-interpretations of "ward" (ward of / ward off) invite the reader to pivot on dual meanings, veering from one interpretation to another. Royle provides an aphorism:

> Beyond sovereignty: the thrownness of every throne.
> (Royle, 2019, p. 248)

This statement offers multiple readings, as is the critical intention of a text that aims to topple the authority (The Law [6]) of language, evidencing Cixous' claim that a final utterance is impossible.

6. The logic of creativecritical writing is a logic of spatiality – we see this in the intimate blending of quotation through texts like Nelson's *Argonauts* and the considered placement of a theoretical quotes alongside autobiographical vignettes in Eades' *All the Beginnings*, though both texts operate with a creativecritical logic beyond proximal citation style – Nelson activating the motif of the "argo" [7] and Eades constructing a body in words.

Manoeuvre #1: Carrying over

1. "Are there any concepts at all that are understood directly, without metaphor?" (2003, p. 56), ask Lakoff and Johnson in their notable text *Metaphors we live by*. The reference from signified to sign is always, they argue, tracing a path of conceptualisation between the nonphysical and physical (p. 53) to offer "experiential gestalts and therefore, new coherences" (p. 235). I suggest here that creativecritical writing intentionally harnesses this movement of metaphor – a *carrying over* of meaning – for its goals.

This motion of carrying over is employed by writers seeking "wi(l)der ways of writing and/as thinking" (Walker 2019, para. 3) making visible the double-play of the real and representative (if we accept such a delineation), transferring meaning across forms. As the function of metaphor is "to give something a different life, a new life" (Donoghue, 2014, p. 2), creativecritical writing takes this creative operation and uses it for critical thinking.

2. Metaphors appear all throughout philosophy (even in Deleuze and Guattari, who openly repudiate the metaphor). Nietzsche, for example, describes language as a web, speakers as spiders: "spiders in our own webs … whatever we may catch in them, it will only be something that our web is capable of catching" (1911 [1881], p. 123).

3. Writer Maria Tumarkin notes the persistent metaphor of memory work as a "digging up" of the past, a "mining" of the chambers of the heart and mind. But, Tumarkin notes, it "doesn't have to involve digging" (2022, p. 104). Tumarkin discusses the critical gestalt brought about by Hilary Mantel's *Giving up the Ghost*, which offers a metaphor of memory as "a great plain, a steppe" (Wardle, 2003, p. 25), in which the past isn't subterranean, requiring excavation – memories are rather laid out in plain sight. "Mantel's image produces a jolt – what do you mean a great plain, a steppe?" asks Tumarkin (p. 104). If remembering isn't excavation, what could it be? The critical frame shifts. With a new conceptual structure carried over from *steppe*, replacing *excavation*, memory takes on a changed shape. The (creative) choice of an alternate metaphor offers a new (critical) conceptual structure.

4. Metaphor, in its Greek origin, means "to transfer" (from metaphorá) or "to carry over" (from metapherō) (Hoad 2003). Creativecritical writing extends metaphor toward transference (expounded by Webb as catachresis). If reading forces an embodiment of the voice of a text, then as readers we engage in transference [8], imbued with sense adopted within the very act of reading [9].

Ania Walwicz makes this transference (self – text – other) explicit in her creativecritical PhD *Horse.* In its opening pages, the narrator announces: "I am a fictocritical construct" (Walwicz, 2018, p. 3). The unstable subject (self) is made a theatre upon which theories of the self are then performed – the repeated "I am" is followed at times with ania (lowercase), and others Dr Freud and Lacan. The space of the creativecritical thesis is "my symbolic field of reading the self, of reading myself, of projection … This is my dream diary. I analyse me" (Walwicz, 2018, p. 4). In reading *Horse,* we take part in the transference of subjectivity, adopting position as the analyst and analysand ("Dr Freud reads me here" (p. 4)), as the fictocritical nonfiction work unfolds.

5. Carrying over and over and over.
I read – carry over – she reads – carry over – you read.

I'm reading Cixous' *The Third Body,* in which
she is reading Wilhelm Jensen's *Gradiva*. You,
you're reading me.

Creativecritical writing might carry over meaning from body to body,
making present the space of relation between you and you and you.

6. Mary Shelley, devastated by the death of her husband, the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, gathers the pages of his unfinished manuscript and sets to work annotating, transcribing and sorting. Perhaps she hoped to reanimate the traces of her departed love by reading his writing, handling the pages his fingertips once touched.

Ninety-six years later, those pages are tucked into a file at the Weston Library in Oxford. Mathelinda Nabugodi, scholar of creativecritical writing, pours over these pages: "a bit cold, stiff, eyes strained wide, trying to decipher and transcribe Shelley's draft" (Nabugodi, 2021, p. 102). In her essay recounting this experience, Nabugodi writes: "it suddenly struck me that I was seeing and doing exactly what Mary Shelley had been seeing and doing in late autumn 1822" (p. 102). In exposing this space of relation in

her creativecritical essay “On Method; or, Mary Shelley and I”, Nabugodi aims to bring academic work to life: “I invite my reader to identify the various relations that permeate this text” to deliver a form of writing that “is itself a situated experience of the world” (p. 104).

7. Scholar Elspeth Probyn identifies a challenge for feminist literary theory: for all this talk of the body, we must recognise its doubledness: “it is both a concept and a real lived thing” (1991, p. 112).

8. Creativecritical writing asks: what is possible in the space between idea and image, concept and representation?

9. I lugged my 20kg backpack all the way to the north of Nottingham, but it was worth it. I am going to see Hélène Cixous. The flesh of Hélène, the Medusa herself. The body that wrote the body, that my body read, calling out *Write yourself. Your body must be heard*. Seated now in a small classroom of scholars. Polite anticipatory remarks. We are here for a symposium on the Unidentifiable Literary Object, the ULO, which is how Derrida characterised his first encounter with Cixous’ writing – a kind of alien abduction. *Who’ll ever be able to read a thing like this?*

Cixous, 1976, p. 880

Derrida, 2006 (trans. in Prenowitz)

Searing pain across my shoulder blades – but don't worry – Cixous will be here soon, to speak soon, seek soon. Who? Cixous.

How do we reckon with the real and symbolic? Scholars in the classroom, we know Cixous’ written body: we know it’s a call to action, an intervention in phallogocentrism, a literary figuration. But to share physical space with The Cixous, what would happen? *What is happening to me? What genre?*

Derrida, 2006, p. 7

At a small stage that fronts the room, the host takes the lectern.

Cixous is unable to attend in-person, will be joining us by phone.

Text beckons life. Derrida and Cixous were preoccupied with the telephone, Cixous often evoking it as a direct line to thought “Now the telephone rings” she recalls “And it's you” (1998, p. 145). For Derrida, for whom thought itself is a kind of telephony, the phone is a “poetico-technical” invention (2006, p. 100). For me, my phone is that hassling device I’m always losing beneath the couch.

10. A note on quotation style. A creativecritical writer might do as they like! Spoiled by choice, in the space between creative and critical writing, *thousands of words are available here. We can bend them to fit the shapes of our bodies and our stories, to encourage new kinds of questions and different kinds of answers*. Yes, you notice this text bending forward in italics, carrying over another's voice, placing it as close as possible to mine, italicising a quotation when I adopt a writer's stance, as I ask that writer to speak directly into the work.

Bartlett, 1998, p. 96

11. With Cixous on the line, our host holds their phone to face the room of scholars. The call is eaten away by static, but audible: birds chirping and a voice. The voice of Cixous! And another: Hélène Cixous is speaking with Eric Prenowitz, and they are, we learn, seated in a garden. Prone to poetic grandeur, I imagine the scene as a Renaissance painting.

Does life beckon text? It was Prenowitz who, a decade before this call, wrote "Crossing Lines: Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous on the Phone", asking how a writer who celebrates the inscription of body into text could also celebrate the disembodied voice.

As the call continues, the philosophers' words, static, birdsong and low hum of the air-conditioning at Nottingham Trent University become a soundtrack and my mind adventures into imagined scenes. In the staged space of the symposium, and here in this text, the phone call operates as a technological supplement and a condition of possibility between *the person and the means of communication, as between the signifier and the signified; between literature and philosophy no doubt: an interstitial being coming into being as its own opening.*

Prenowitz, 2008, p. 131

The Unidentifiable Literary Object of creativecritical writing invites the reader to experience the doubledness of the written world/word. Lives – reading, writing, written, read – are made present in the writing, spatialised as we navigate the call between them.

Manoeuvre #2: Directing

1. A typographic shift might

throw you

to

the page's edge

forcing the eye (I) to move

like a dancer, taking

shape here, tracing

back

here,
moving.

2. Creativecritical writing directs the reader's attention through typographic shift and play. As Lyn Hejinian writes, there is movement at the level of the line: a singular line of writing requires the hand, eye, and mind to travel, as a reader moves like an explorer, mapmaker, or surveyor (2000, p. 131). Hejinian's Language poetry and essaying can be considered creativecritical, with their experimental and avant-garde poetics, frequent referencing of philosophy and social theory, and line breaks and arrangements directing the reader across the page to enact movements in thought.

3. A creativecritical text might split the page in two
forms,
ideas,
columns:

one here another over here

as typographically performed in Derrida's *Glas:* a column for Hegel (philosophy) and another for Genet (autobiography).

4. The book you prise from the shelf is called *Fourth Person Singular.* You were drawn to its title, having read Deleuze on the subject in *The Logic of Sense,* and you hope this much thinner book might offer a condensed approach to pre-individual subjectivity. You open its pages to find poetry: aphorisms and marginalia arranged by prose poems.

By page 43, author Nuar Alsadir (poet and psychoanalyst) has introduced fourth-dimensional space-time via Hawking and Freud. You understand (P) = the ever present now, where past and future events have no hierarchy. The page is mostly dedicated to description of split-second distance in self-perception, where "the perceived *I* has become *not-I*" (Alsadir, 2017, p. 43; emphasis original) but interjecting from a wider margin, in smaller font and lighter tone, is an anecdote. The abutting anecdote recounts treasuring and later forgetting a passage from a book – Alsadir notes that forgotten moment, also, as (P).

As readers of this creativecritical text, we must decide when to direct our attention between its many parts, to consider how the anecdote relates to the rest of the page or book. "Time," writer Nick Makoha surmises in his review of the text, "rather than being a unit of measure, acts as a thread joining these events together into a singularity, which is how the book should be experienced" (2018, p. 16), opening a space of exploration for self-consciousness and the lyric 'I'. The text's creativecritical manoeuvring directs *meaning from body to body, making present the space of relation between you and you and you* as you encounter, as Alsadir intended, the "unspoken before it reaches the world" (Makoha, 2018, p. 19), the position of the fourth person singular.

This essay, four pages ago, discussing a chain of reading.

5. *Thinking off the page: a plane circling its destination, waiting for a signal to land.*

Alsadir, 2017, p. 2

6. A collaboration between writer and architect, Kreider and O'Leary's *Falling* is a creativecritical text evoking gravity through critical, poetic and visual images of buildings, Newton's apple, 9/11, Icarus, the first walk on the moon and slapstick bodies falling. In this text, *falling is both knowledge and activity*.

Lees & Overing, 2019, p. 32

In *Field Poetics*, Kreider and O'Leary offer a poem, which opens with this scene below, revisited by later passages that direct the reader to this word-map and its 'stations' (poet, tree, ruin etc):

ALLEGORY

Characters

Protagonist
Director

Set

Poet	*Tree*	*Ruin*	*Window*	*Pool*
STATION 5	STATION 4	STATION 3	STATION 2	STATION 1
coal	*Polaroid camera*	*pencil*	*clay*	*salt, water, bowl, ink*

Elsewhere, Kreider contextualises her place-poetics as relational, following Roman Jakobson to state the "relation between the word and the world, the question of linguistic reference … is intrinsic for understanding not only works of verbal art, but actually all kinds of discourse" (2015, p. 81)

7. The *directing* of creativecritical writing might be done through digression, shifting the reader into new territory. Unprepared, we might launch into –

Humpty Dumpty is falling off the wall!
He lands on two feet, a master of language.
He announces to Alice, who has encountered him on her Wonderland travels: "When I use a word … it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less" (Carroll, 2014/1871, p. 62).

– and we might return to the essay's thread, having digressed, having followed a white rabbit down a rabbit hole, our forward reading now coloured by the digression. When the author later cites Deleuze's writing on this encounter between girl and egg, in which "significations … must be developed for themselves in the order of language" (1990/1969, p. 18), it will be paired with the digressive passage and the reader might wonder what arises between these two creative and critical points.

The braided essay, a form commonly used to draw together creative and critical writing, operates upon this principle of digression. For nonfiction writer Nicole Walker, braiding allows a meandering of thought toward new conclusions: "The process of pulling together two disparate ideas allows for surprise" (2017, p. 10). "The further apart the threads of the braid," Walker writes, "the more the essay resists easy substitutions and answers" (p. 10) and therefore requires some thinking in between. Sam van Zweden's braided essay *But Still* (2018) moves between autobiographical vignettes and descriptions of the Japanese art of mending to gently find a common thread between breaking, art and care.

8. The *directing* of creativecritical writing might be done through citation:

> 1.[7] The way is hard[8] – We (Richard and myself[9]) run[10] into the 'box',[11] via the only operational door.[12] We are carrying Dave[13] so the only means to open the door is to give it a sharp kick.[14]
>
> (Pearson et al., 2018, p. 62)

The opening paragraph of 'Footnoting Performance' (partially quoted above) is visually arresting and complex. Mass footnoting disrupts the forward-direction of the sentence, scattering attention to the corresponding notes, but also allows its authors to meet their goal: recounting multiple perspectives of an event at once. The article's title is itself footnoted: "The concept herein is to annotate, explicate, expand and gloss a performer's verbatim written memory of the first few minutes of a theatre production, and to reconcile it with other accounts and documents (historical and contemporary, scholarly and creative)" (Pearson et al., 2018, p. 61). The manoeuvre of directing, via citation, within this work allows critical operations of explication, expansion and reconciliation.

9. The creativecritical manoeuvre of directing might imply a citational touchpoint in literature. While direct citation is a requirement of academic text (and, as Wright et al. argue in "Feminist Citational Praxis and Problems of Practice", can resist or sustain power), other citations are subtler treats for the knowing reader. When CJ Hauser, in their memoir *The Crane Wife*, recounts: "Reader, I almost married him", the reader is directed to an implied touchpoint – the famous line, "Reader, I married him" of Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre – and offered a comparative answer to marriage in contemporary life.

Even subtler is Patricia Lockwood's article on Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, evoking in its breathless opening paragraph ("Here it comes striding across the lawn, with its hair in long, curving crimps…" (p. 71)) the voice of Woolf herself. Citation here is homage, community.

If I paused here to offer you a Proustian madeleine, I'd be directing you to a famous text, a cultural touchpoint. You might recognise the reference (does it provide a sense of affinity?) or perhaps not (you are excluded from our ivory tower!).

10. Between the word and the world is an open space of signification.

11. *So much depends then … on distance.* Woolf, 2018/1927, p. 182

Manoeuvre #3: Figuring

1. she is boundless and breaking new ground (skin flared in strobe) bass heavy, lost-found, fluorescent – her dance is musk-flesh bone, faceless and heaving (the turn, the echo) as words drop, weightless and salt-breath-beat delivers her hips to motion and trips, behind (she takes and takes) cursive lines break and cascade to a *smooth open beyond* where dance is freefall, surging exponential, and silent earth hum pulls movement beyond muscle – the dancer, becoming the dance, slips from past to future like ocean on sand – fingers curling, fullness speaking (raw deep presence) she is making her *advance into the bosom of the world, hands in front, capturing the music* she writes in motion with sweat and heat, her limbs cut air (falling and rising) shoulders roll, head tipped, mouth open, *transformation in a roiling sea of chance* – synthetic sensory drum, she becomes inorganic, legs lifted and hands *freeing lines of flight* with abandon, only force, *bringing forth continuous intensities* now, where is she? Now, there is no lonely "I", just movement, movement beyond face and form, pulling thought and motion forward.

Ulmer, 2015, p. 44

Cixous, 1998, p. 21

Rothfield, 2011, p. 205

Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/ 1980, p. 161

2. Figurative language is made distinct from literal language through its rhetorical activity, a "certain lively or good grace set upon words, speeches, and sentences to some purpose" (Puttenham, 2007/1590, p. 243). The modality of the figure is shared between literature and philosophy, as

"literary tropes—figures— … are rooted in our ability to create, imagine, and think anew" (Linghede & Larsson, 2017, p. 292). Philosophers Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway utilise the creativecritical manoeuvre of figuring with their conceits of nomad and cyborg, which go beyond writing craft [10] to activate theoretical incursions within their arguments about possible subjectivities. Braidotti's nomad approaches thought in a shifting and relational manner, not imposing fixed perspective but tracing entanglements across terrains of culture and philosophy to answer "political … epistemological and aesthetic questions" (2002, p. 173). Cyborgs, Haraway writes, "can be figures for living within contradictions … alert to the emergent historical hybridities actually populating the world at all its contingent scales" (2016, p. 102).

3. Picture flowers in a vase. Beyond the vase, a concave mirror. Hidden from your sight is the real bouquet, reflected by that mirror, to meet your eye as an image, which you take to be the vase of flowers itself [11]. Imagine analyst-philosopher Jacques Lacan in his mirror-stage experiments of the 1950s, shifting that vase, the mirror, ever-so-slightly to enact his thought experiment. "I'm schematising," he explains, "developing a metaphor, a thinking apparatus" (Lacan, 1991/1975, p. 79) through which to figure the development of ego, to offer a figure through which self-image takes shape.

Material figurations are common within Lacan's work. His writing on the Borromean Knot – a composition of three rings in which no two alone are connected – spatialised the interdependence of three registers of the symbolic order: the symbolic, imaginary and real. Lacan was fascinated by non-orientable figures and used them in critical material acts of figuring with abstract space (like that which opens in a mirror). In *Seminar XI*, discussing signification, he describes a "loop", a "missile", which "turns around itself" to hit the target of signification in the Real (1998 [1973], p. 182).

4. To demonstrate the play of the symbolic into language, a creativecritical essay might hold an anecdote alongside these figure-experiments of Lacan's. The essay might have opened with such a scene: a writer, perhaps stuck, perhaps blocked, sits in a dark theatre and sees dancing reflections. *Seven bodies on stage. Two are alive and the other five are reflections*. The essay might revisit the dancer, as she moves, *boundless and breaking new ground*, toying with the essay's premise: the space of relation between creative and critical features in writing. Like the cyborg and nomad, the dancer moves between concepts; she moves concepts, she brings theory into practice. She's a character, figured to build (critical) thought.

5. Imagine a PhD thesis. Imagine the document reports to you (reader) that the doctoral candidate has "disappeared", and stand-ins are two "Dramatis Personae" – "Mr Buster Loose" and "Ms Wanda Lusst"– who in a hilarious exchange on the "disappearance" of the writer (Murray), do the important exegetical work of introducing doctoral precents and accounting for the folio nature of the thesis. As they "ask our Congregants and Wit(h)nesses, then, to be mindful that the core Contribution of this Inquiry has gone out, Live, over many Months" (Murray, 2017, p. 64), Mr Loose and Ms Lusst are protagonists, creative figurations undertaking crucial exegetical work that is layered within a multifaceted creativecritical dissertation.

6. Creativecritical writing in the academy is, often, research writing, and is required to perform various functions of exposition and analysis. In such work, figuring can be used to delineate registers of thinking-writing.

7. You're a Higher Degree by Research candidate in creative practice. You're inspired to blend the creative and critical elements of your research into one text, à la Markidis, à la Walwicz, à la Murray. Pen to paper and soon you're backed into the corner of the sentence:

> *I'm writing a creative writing thesis that offers an account of and reflection on experience, in writing. Through this writing, I'm undertaking the research of the project, via writing, which I then must analyse, via writing, within the same text: a work of writing. I am sometimes writing to explore a concept or idea, to do the research, and sometimes writing to recount that exploration and sometimes writing to analyse that, and then writing toward research outcomes.*

Twisted into a Borromean knot. Does this sound familiar?

In such a situation, writing is undertaken on multiple registers, yet the text will (likely) be read as a collective whole. How to adopt a position of reflection and analysis upon the work (a view "from outside") from within the work? This challenge (writing as both the object and subject of research) is common in "blended" creative writing research. Having been a creative practice research candidate myself, then a doctoral research writing advisor and now a supervisor, I recognise this as a common bind. I offer the proposition: find some conscious distinction between the "creative" work of experimentation and "critical" turns of analysis, at least while drafting, lest the **creative** and **critical** read as:

creative

(Unless creative is the point?)

8. How might a researcher employ creativecritical figuring to meet this end, to unknot themselves? Some distinction between modes, perhaps developing character, or shifting point of view with a Woolfian "I-now" and "I-then" [12] as I did to mark temporal shifts in exposition and (as it logically follows) analysis. Perhaps a material setup – a mirror here, vase there, or STATIONS of thought as per Krieder and O'Leary? Figuring, developing a figure for thinking, can set markers through which critical thought and creativity flow.

9. *Figuring opens a space for figuring out. In the course of our figuring, orbits intersect … facts cross-hatch … Lives interweave with other lives, and out of the tapestry arise hints at answers to questions that raze at the bone of life.* Popova, 2019, p. 5

Manoeuvre #4: Going outside

1. Leaving the theatre via an internal stairwell, I stopped at a door I had always presumed to be locked, a door I had passed hundreds of times, yet never opened. To my surprise, the handle did not jolt at my touch; it moved steadily, retracting the unseen lock within. Fingers on the handle, I hesitated for a moment, a breath, then pulled it toward me and stepped forward.

I arrived in a place I had not expected, in what appeared to be a vast room with objects clustered against its edges. Behind a rail: a blackboard with technical terms and measurements, a coffee plunger, a television and sound equipment. Light emanated from the middle of the space. I moved toward the light. I peered over the railing and down, to see scaffold, ropes, lights and suspended walkways. Far below, an empty stage. I was at the edge of a deep space. With an aerial view, I was suspended in the scaffolding high above the stage. The curtains were drawn and I could see out into the vacant theatre. Expectant stillness. Thousands of seats and the low hum of enclosed silence. Huge open space, a pregnant moment.

2. In discussions of creativecritical writing, those of us who deal in genres of creative writing or literary studies might be less inclined to recognise the inherent creativity in critical writing. Yet critique begets creation. What was unseen is made present. Analysis ushers in the as-yet-unknown thing.

Have you noticed this text is frustrated?

It wants to go outside.

Beyond the frame of the stage, out of the bounds of the page, into the space between real and imaginary. It, like other creativecritical writing, seeks the liminal, the sublime.

A tenet of poststructuralist and literary theory is this paradox of "the outside", the (im)possible outside to thought, to writing. Language, the spider's web evoked by Nietzsche, will only catch *what the web is capable of catching* – the sign makes recourse to other signs. It's no wonder the theatre, as a space of representation, has been a matter of philosophical concern for the last half-century. Yet philosophy continues to contend with this paradox, critically seeking the outside beyond the *dusk of writing*, finding new, seeking *metamorphosis*.

Nietzsche, 1911/1881, p. 123

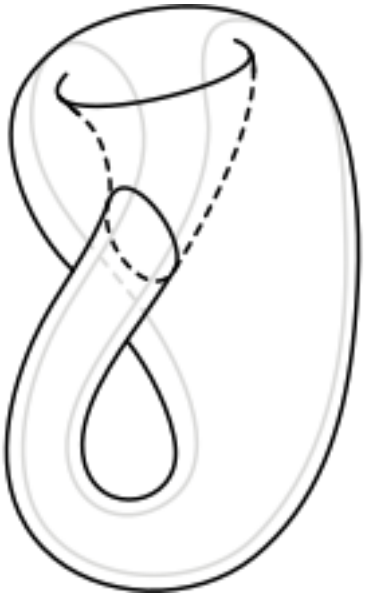
Malabou, 2010, p. 67

3. *critique must always give primacy and privilege to what it critiques, it must internally inhabit what it wants to overcome in order to discover inconsistencies or vulnerabilities from within*

Grosz, 2017, p. 7

4. Creative critique – what can that do?

5. With surface area but no boundary or volume, a Klein bottle is an impossible shape. The inside bends around to become the outside. The hole in the midst of its body opens to the shape's interior, which, at its self-intersection, voids the very body that envelops it. If you moved along its surface, you would never cross an edge to get to the inside – if you continued to move within the shape, you'd be outside.



Beyond marvelling at its (im)possible geometry, the Klein bottle is a material figuration of paradox. It is used in critical theory to explore subjectivity (Žižek, 2019) and adopted within academic research from psychology (Doñas, 2020) to literature (Dukes, 2017) to military design (Zweibelson, 2022).

6. What would a text in the shape of a Klein bottle look like? Could the narrator draw you into the piece, only to offer no story world, no substance? How would this read? Would the characters exit the scene, refusing to do the author's bidding as the story pours out? Would you arrive where you started?

Would it be a novel with a hollow centre, like the morbid alienation of the nameless protagonist of Ottessa Moshfegh's *My Year of Rest and Relaxation,* her attempts to develop a vacant, overly medicated interiority? Or the dialetheic happy/sad disposition of Sylvia Plath's Esther Greenwood (in *The Bell Jar)*?

7. Milan Kundera's novel *Life is Elsewhere* self-intersects with the act of jumping through a window. At its mid-point, the protagonist Jaromil (a writer) wonders what is behind a window and the narration abandons its protagonist to jump through that window, following Xavier (a character of Jaromil's invention) as he dream-hops through a series of nested scenes – a short reprieve before the novel resumes Jaromil's path. The novel addresses its reader (it, too, is a frustrated text):

> Just as your life is determined by the profession and marriage you have chosen, so this novel is limited by the view from the observatory, from which one always sees only Jaromil and his mother while other characters are caught sight of only when they appear in the presence of the two protagonists. I've chosen this way as you have chosen your destiny, and my choice is equally irreparable.
>
> But everyone regrets being unable to live lives other than his own; you too would like to live all your unrealized potentialities, all your possible lives (ah! inaccessible Xavier!) This novel is like you. It too would like to be other novels, those it might have been.
>
> (Kundera, 2000 [1937], p. 229)

8. Elizabeth Costello appears in Judgement at the gate of literature. Like Costello, a writer, a *secretary of the invisible*, we cannot transcend structure. Can we?

9. A brief story in the fiction of mathematics: 1 + 2 = 3

Intentional manoeuvring: a creativecritical vocabulary for practice

1. This essay has outlined four broad manoeuvres – carrying over, directing, figuring and going outside – that are employed within creativecritical writing. Although making a lateral survey of the contemporary field of creativecritical writing, this exercise is not exhaustive. All writing, to some degree, uptakes such manoeuvring in the spatialised (intentional) spider's web of language, yet I argue that creativecritical writing consciously activates these spatialised literary movements to engage the criticality of creative work and creativity of critical thought.

2. Shoot an arrow toward the Real. Follow subjectivity on a drive toward perception, as it *loop turns around itself; it is a missile, and it is with it … that the target is reached*.

Lacan, 1998/ 1973, p. 182

3. Our ability to see, imagine or intend, for Merleau-Ponty, is less like a searchlight (inadequate analogy, he says) and more like an arc: "the life of

consciousness—cognitive life, the life of desire or perceptual life—is subtended by an 'intentional arc' … which brings about the unity of the senses, of sensibility and motility" (1996 [1962], p. 136). Perception builds new meaning "beyond [their] specific significances" in "semantic evolution" (p. 137).

4. Perhaps creativecritical writing is difficult to taxonomise because it is more readily defined as an approach – casting cognition along that missile path or the arc of intentionality – rather than a style. Yet a practice vocabulary identifying these manoeuvres will be useful for creative researchers and writers who must analyse and explain the functions of their work (potentially, as noted, from "inside" the work).

5. Braidotti calls for "theoretical courage" in writing: "more conceptual creativity is necessary, and more theoretical courage is needed in order to bring about the leap across inertia, nostalgia, aporia and the other forms of critical stasis induced by our historical condition" (2014, p. 163). Given the weight of language, *the writer's task is to resist the gravitational pull of the master signifier and oppose it.* Or, Humpty Dumpty might interject, not just to oppose it but to put it to work, to become the master yourself: *When I make a word do a lot of work like that … I always pay it extra*.

Braidotti, 2014, p. 165

Carroll, 2014/ 1871, p. 62

Figures

Figure 1: Page 20, figure of Klein bottle: Wikimedia commons

Notes

[1] The performance recounted here is Company Wayne McGregor's *Tree of Codes*. Notably, it was inspired by a text – Jonathan Safran Foer's artwork/book of the same name.

[2] I am thinking here of Maurice Blanchot's *The Space of Literature.*

[3] The debate between Jacques Derrida and John R. Searle, regarding intentionality and speech acts, is considered an emblematic point of division between continental and analytic traditions of philosophy. Yet, for our purposes, it is useful to note the importance of intentionality to the philosophy of language as a whole. Raoul Moati's *Derrida/Searle: Deconstruction and Ordinary Language* presents an excellent account of the confrontation between the two philosophers.

[4] Anna Poletti explores Sedgwick's concept of the periperformative statement as it applies to life narrative: Poletti, A. (2016). Periperformative Life Narrative: Queer Collages. *GLQ*, *22*(3). 359–379.

[5] In *The Exhausted*, Deleuze discusses Beckett in a test of what it means to exhaust a subject toward a/the limit.

[6] See Jacques Derrida's *The Law of Genre.*

[7] Nelson engages with the literary allegory of the Argo, a ship which, Barthes explains (in *Roland Barthes on Roland Barthes*), was rebuilt gradually until every part had been replaced.

[8] The term is adopted here from its general use in psychology: the subconscious direction of feelings and thoughts from one person to another.

[9] See Michel Foucault's *Technologies of the Self* for his description of reading and writing as self-affecting technologies.

[10] "A figuration is a living map, a transformative account of the self; it's no metaphor" (Braidotti, 2014, p. 179).

[11] Lacan's experiment of the "inverted bouquet". See Lacan, 1991.

[12] Woolf's delineation of "I then" and "I now" in *Sketch of the Past* was a useful figuration during my PhD writing, allowing a scaffold for reflecting on research outcomes. See: Markidis, 2020.

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