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## *Introduction*

### *Creativecritical selves: Interconnection, dialogue, entanglement, love*

#### Abstract:

This article introduces the second of two *TEXT* special issues designed to survey attitudes toward, and enactments of, *creativecritical writing now*. Alongside an attempt to speak to the themes of this issue – the ways in which the creativecritical self is incorporated within networks of other selves – it offers the second part of a conversation between the two editors, Daniel Juckes and Stefanie Markidis, as they reflect upon the composition of the special issue. The transcription of this conversation, which was recorded through Microsoft Teams and then edited for clarity, begins in the introduction to the first special issue: “Creativecritical spaces: Practice, pedagogy, methodology, the ineffable”.

#### Biographical note:

Daniel Juckes is a lecturer in Creative Writing at UWA and Editor at *Westerly* Magazine. He holds a PhD in Creative Writing from Curtin University. His creative and critical work has been published in journals such as *Axon*, *Kalliope X*, *Life Writing*, *M/C Journal*, *Meanjin*, *TEXT*, and *Westerly*. His book *The Moment of the Essay* will be published this year by UWA Publishing.

Dr Stefanie Markidis is a researcher and writer, exploring life writing, poetics and creative practice interventions in non/fiction. She is a lecturer in Creative Writing and Literary Studies at Deakin University, Melbourne.

#### Keywords:

Introduction, creativecritical writing now, creativecritical selves

## Creativecritical Writing Now: creativecritical selves

A thread of intrigue across this collection of papers, the second of two special issues of *TEXT* devoted to the ways in which creativecritical writing is currently being thought on and enacted, is the way in which the critical aspects of creativecritical practice reinforce/strengthen/expand the quote-unquote creative aspects of a work. This citational matrix, which sits around/within/through a piece of writing, helps to expand and explode the self who is writing; the potential here is for the work to be taken productively outside/inside itself – the same is true of the person writing. The textures of that citational matrix are varied, stretching from traditional scholarly work into considerations of how the self is enmeshed, entangled, loves, feels, is.

In “Unhinged, an alliance: creativecritical writing and ecstatic citations”, Maria Gil Ulldemolins and Kris Pint consider what they term “an ecstatic merging” of texts and subjects while also demonstrating part of how the creativecritical mode is itself weird and ecstatic. They write:

“What if the practice of referencing, sourcing, and crediting ... takes us outside ourselves?” (McKittrick, 2021, p. 16). The door, rather than opening, burst, and took with itself words, body and landscape. In exchange, it offered an excess of light. In the blast, an exploded drawing composed itself, the text propelled up in the air so I could see it come apart – de-centered, unhinged (something *awful*) – which in turn, would teach me (us!) how to put it together.

A blast, an explosion, a propulsion – an excess of light. This is the central metaphor of Peter Kirkpatrick’s “Asterism”, which offers a lyric take on the potential described and depicted by Gil Ulldemolins and Pint, and thinks through the constellated construction of subjectivity in the form of a verse letter. Kirkpatrick writes,

let me just say, deep down, I don’t know what  
I am, beyond a kind of asterism;  
beyond an inferential shape picked out

**Daniel**

Yeah. And maybe I’ll be proved wrong in five years’ time...

**Stefanie**

Yeah, maybe. Well, I can repurpose old text, and often do in found poetry. But when I do so, it’s with an eye to that ecstatic revelation – as Murray and Hawkins propose – or that moment, that feeling of coming across something significant, of something new arising. In Wright’s article, the machine offers a new reading of archived text and the writer responds – that’s creativity.

**Daniel**

Which is processual, and that’s what the practice that we’ve been privy to over the course of editing this project does so very well. It offers sometimes evidence of, sometimes results of, a thoroughly *lived* creative practice.

What about, though – what about the other word? What about the critical aspect? How would you approach defining that?

**Stefanie**

Yeah, that’s hard. Sometimes I ask students this: what’s “creative”? What’s “critical”? They say creativity is imagination and criticality is analysis. But when we take a closer look, the distinctions dissolve. Critical thinking can be creative: bringing one idea into position or relationship with another idea, to create a new idea. That’s the building of knowledge, the creation of something from nothing, or from that which it wasn’t.

**Daniel**

That’s what criticism is, isn’t it? Criticism is the thing that you draw from the text you’re encountering. Whether that be an object or body or whatever, criticism is the spark or the notion that is idiosyncratically yours, is creatively...

**Stefanie**

...arisen in you.

from a dim galaxy of memories,  
 joined dot-to-dot by puzzled consciousness  
 to expurgate my being in its best,  
 most flattering pattern, leaving lesser lights  
 for larger magnitudes: far grander stars,  
 with which to cast more hopeful horoscopes  
 and constellate the blankness in between.

Ambiguity here is productive – sought, even: the blankness between is just as important as the pinpricks of light which the researcher-writer puts on the page. The creativecritical mode now, then, (now then!) is one which seeks to develop and complicate the role of the critic; to dwell in blankness and puzzles; to make links; to see patterns; to use the self to see outside the self. The method for doing so often relies on an engagement with more source materials beyond the purely academic. (It must acknowledge a version of everywhere.)

Like Gil Ulldemolins and Pint, Peta Murray and Ames Hawkins think explicitly on ecstasy, and on the potentials of ecstatic citation. In “Awe and broken things: articulating the agony and the ecstasy of creativecritical ‘wrighting’”, they chart encounters with the “ethics of aesthetics”, and offer a thrilling, moving engagement with more of the deep and layered levels of citational practice which the creativecritical allows/necessitates. As their essay moves to and fro across the page, Hawkins writes:

§ The ecstatic as opulent. What scale, what size, what beauty? Where is the sumptuousness, the grandeur, the splendour? In the voluminousness of my libraries, the ones on my shelves and in my head. In their words and ideas. In the constellations upon constellations of the thoughts of Otherwriters who might find their way here to speak with-and-in these ideas I’ve got. Engaging in an embodied not-knowing as a method, tomes are transformed into grimoires. Through a practice of citational divination, quotations are revealed rather than chosen. Offerings. Oblations. Found by finger, felt with third eye.

**Daniel**  
 Yeah.

**Stefanie**  
 When you think about it that way, it’s really hard to distinguish the creative and the critical. But in our work, we have to make those distinctions: is this a scholarly article or an NTRO? We can see how critical thinking is creative and how creative works build critical thought, or have critical affordances, yet we still are required to treat them as distinct.

**Daniel**  
 Why is that?

**Stefanie**  
 Lineage of thought. Scientific reasoning in the Academy. I suppose it goes back to Rationalism: Rene Descartes and *cogito ergo sum*. The mind, consciousness and thought – so, the cerebral – as that which is knowable, true and real. On the other hand we have the body, practice, doing. Ellis is right to call this distinction “increasingly unsatisfactory” in her article.

**Daniel**  
 There’s a quote from Ross Gibson that I think about often where he writes about this distinction. I guess he’s imagining, he’s thinking forward, he’s projecting excitedly about a point at which we can understand an artwork through its own language – its own “argot” (p. 7), he says. Can understand what a thing is doing through the thing itself rather than having the need to translate it, or not necessarily the need, but the requirement to translate it.

**Stefanie**  
 Yes, the requirement.

**Daniel**  
 I think that requirement is one of the things that we butted against over the course of this editorial project. The *thinking* work that a creative piece is doing and whether that was valuable on its own. How

The invoking, and even the offering, of the body here, is inherent to the task, and joyous in the process: “The writing and I are one and the same: desire. An organic orgasmic oracularity decreed.”

The plurality of identity – and perhaps even the plurality of desire itself – is something that Eric Daffron enacts in “Hôtel La Fêlure: a work of fictocriticism”. Daffron is interested in Moroccan male sexuality, and uses a creativecritical form to share thinking in progress on the subject: he sees non-traditional scholarship as a home for ideas-emerging. Perhaps provisionality is another potential of the creativecritical now? Daffron writes:

Rather than an original genius, a fictocritical writer such as Roland Barthes recycles and repurposes others’ words (Nettelbeck, 1998; see also Gibbs, 2005). In fact, the mode trades the singular expert for a writing subject who assumes plural, provisional identities (Nettelbeck, 1998).

Rebecca Ryall, in another fictocritical work, “Borrowed connectivity: a fictocritical enquiry”, considers the complexities, fixtures and fissures of identity from the perspective of a settler-subjectivity within the ravages of colonialism. The task of her work is to use a creativecritical form to call out “clumsy dualism” – to read a forest and its human-made additions complexly. In doing so, she also takes issue with the limits of what she terms “conventional citational practices”:

Conventional citational practices tend to confer cultural specificity to non-white authors only, with the corollary of whiteness going unstated. This paper deploys the decolonial tactic of ‘marking’ all scholars whose work is cited. Marking is a political practice described by Metis scholar Max Liboiron, the purpose of which is to decentre “settlers and whiteness as an unexceptional norm” (2021, p. 3), by culturally and geographically situating *all* scholars whose works are cited as a way of establishing each scholar’s authority to speak. See

the artefact – including the creativecritical artefact – is understood to be valuable is still a big question for the creativecritical.

#### **Stefanie**

It needs to be said that we don’t all agree on what the creativecritical is, and that’s a great thing. But there is still a requirement to articulate what we’re doing critically and that has been a challenge for how we’ve assessed, reviewed and organised this special issue. I don’t know how much we should talk about the peer review process, but often reviewers were split on whether a work was adequately displaying its criticality. There were calls for more context and more scholarly support.

#### **Daniel**

We all come at it differently and people have been trained in their various research disciplines. But there’s potential for the kind of scholarship that happens when working through a creativecritical mode. It’s another example of the *ethic* of this practice because it requires a trust in people. A trust in people doing their work through a method that is rigorous enough, that aspires to be thinking work and feeling work.

#### **Stefanie**

Yes.

#### **Daniel**

The standards should be high. The standards should be rigorous, but within those standards, there is the need for flex and nuance and understanding of other ways of doing rigorous scholarly work.

#### **Stefanie**

Different ways of meeting those standards.

#### **Daniel**

I know that’s not a groundbreaking point to reach, but I think it is an important point to emphasise.

#### **Stefanie**

It takes us back to this question: what are the verbs and adjectives we use to describe “creativity” and

more about citational politics and marking in Liboiron's *Pollution is Colonialism* (2021).

An incorporation of identity and an emphasis on positionality, alongside all the ways we might cite ourselves, place ourselves, refer to ourselves – constellate ourselves, even – is part of creativecritical writing now. The ways in which we can offer this self-citing also expand through the more-than-human world. This is a topic of consideration for Jenny Hedley in “The weight of things: object-oriented mania, citational hoarding and critical-mess literature”. In Hedley's work, the weight of pattern and form allows meaning to emerge; her scholarship is thus felt and thought, and the things which swirl about her are literally citations:

The citational-objects I have collected evidence my relationship to a text and to the many authors who have invaded my memories with their thought-objects, which at any time might degrade from sentence level to word to glyph. Each of these citations influences my life writing as I write affectively, intuitively into their scholarship, knowledges co-mingling so that my thoughts are attributable to many and also to none. I cannot know the outcome before I begin: I am at the mercy of objects and associations, caught up in a processional waltz.

In this sense, the mania of the whole endeavour of research is shown to be a kind of hoarding practice, too. A practice which benefits from an always-commitment to the plural, the complex, the contextual. For creativecritical practice now, the point seems to be – or to value – an embedding of self in research; a serious reading of the self-in-context; an exploring of the potentials of the self to scholarship. This is not, though, a circularising of the self – a turning of the self *into* scholarship. It is a thorough unpacking of what traditional scholarly mechanisms can hide *of* the self; in this sense, the creativecritical now is transparency, drive, ecstasy, thoroughness, throughness – a way of bringing the subject and subjects of research into the orbit of the writing of that research. Hedley again: “By means of craft, which is

“criticality”, respectively? And I like the words you were using before, which don't belong to only one category: thorough, rigorous, thinking, feeling. To those I'd add: engaged, playful, inventive, relational.

**Daniel**

The words need to be there though, right? That list is suggestive of the thing that we're talking about: the practice of research or the practice of being creative. I think maybe there's another separate introduction that we haven't written, which talks about “research” and “creative” as synonymous.

**Stefanie**

I like that. Research as creativity.

**Daniel**

The point is that it's generative, that it produces new knowledge. I think an important aspect of whatever we're terming the creativecritical is that it inspires something else.

**Stefanie**

Something new? Thinking back to the exegesis and creative artefact model, it's often where researchers first encounter the need to critically support their creative practice, and many have trouble with this model. But setting the scene with these two pillars – exegesis and artefact – has been so generative for discussion of what criticality is and what research is. So, I'm echoing your point: we do need the words, even if we don't like them!

**Daniel**

Yeah.

**Stefanie**

We can't say exactly what the creativecritical is. We can't say exactly what critical is, can't say exactly what creative is, but having those words there, it's useful.

**Daniel**

Yeah. That flicks back to those highfalutin points I was trying to make about literature. Good literature has always been a kind of research project in the way that it's

shaped by neuropsychiatrics as much by pedagogy and practice, I invite the porous relationship between citation and personal narrative to ink this page”.

The more-than-human, and entanglement with the more-than-human world, is something Vera Alexander considers in “Creativecritical relations: outgrowing current crises of connection”. In this paper, Alexander writes gardening as a slow, creativecritical act, and considers the affordances of the blending of creative and critical dimensions. Like win Ryall’s work, a green space becomes both metaphor for, and living embodiment of, the ways in which the human is interlocked with nature – not separate from it. Alexander writes,

Garden life writings are not just about a human self, but about the myriad direct and indirect ways in which that self is shaped and transformed in dialogue with its environment. ... The garden itself is a single noun referring to a collective of symbiotic creatures. Gardening shows how individual and collective identities coexist symbiotically, opening a creativecritical perspective on symbiotic rather than competitive forms of knowing and being that emphasis groundedness and local properties.

Dominique Hecq, in “Unleashed: my life as a dog”, takes up the more-than-human theme too, through a reading of her relationship with her dog Artaud. Artaud is named for Antonin Artaud, and his questions, alongside those posed by Jacques Lacan, help Hecq to reposition her dog Artaud as her analyst of sorts. This relationship brings a complex instability to traditional Western notions of intraspecies kinship. Though the questions Hecq tackles are even more ambitious than that: “The fantasy of a dog named after a poet who understands human language is nothing else than the fundamental fantasy: the unchecked connection with the Other.” And, as she notes in her abstract, “‘Unleashed’ ... highlights the shifting, indeed interrupted and illusory, temporal nature of subjectivity, dispelling any sense of certainty utterance such as *I Am*.” The pulverising of the self here, though, is an act of love *for* Artaud.

generative, it makes you spin your thinking back on yourself, it positions you within a problem as it explores the ethical, moral and bodily dimensions of that problem.

**Stefanie**

That’s it. Writing requires you to put something down in words, requires you to think. Foucault calls it a technology of the self. It engages the self, it must.

**Daniel**

Uhuh.

**Stefanie**

Can you write without yourself?

**Daniel**

That’s a big question.

**Stefanie**

That’s the next special issue.

**Daniel**

Don’t make any promises.

**Stefanie**

So what have we found here?

**Daniel**

The fact that you’ve invoked Foucault is indicative, again, that these aren’t new ideas. These aren’t groundbreaking revelations about scholarliness, but what they are is – to go back to that word that I’ve used a lot – ethical. Ethical incursions into debates about scholarship in a research context that sometimes seems to ignore them or value other things. And if we are making space still, if we are constellating still, if we are championing still an embellishing or an acknowledging of the creative and the critical, the positionality implied in that, the thoroughness of method, the rigour of a scholarly creative practice, then that ethical incursion won’t be wasted.

**Stefanie**

We wanted to take the pulse on creativecritical writing *now*. At times we’ve broadened that to creativecritical practice now. That was the agenda: to see what writers and researchers are doing,

Love itself – as banal as it may seem to say, but as true – is a vital thread within this collection of works. Entanglement, framed this way, is also a kind of ecstasy; and the emphasis on the relational takes on questions of the ways in which we might act towards others, alongside the various ways in which love obligates, ensnares, delights and instructs. In “From the ground up: perspectives from ‘Thinking Writing’ classrooms on the critical creative nexus”, Rachel Hennessy, Elizabeth MacFarlane and Jessica Yu write about the meeting of theory and creative practice in the classroom. But to do so they tell personal stories of their own encounters with the way love teaches. Reflecting on a story her father told her, about why he left his study of botany, MacFarlane writes, “Is there a way to dissect and love? Is there a way to love with a razorblade, tweezers and microscope? I guess my response is usually: let me be operated on too. Let the text dissect me.” Yu adds that she craved a way of working which brought love in:

I was looking for some way to express the love I felt for books, reading and writing and the love that had enabled me to sit at my desk and do this. ... [The] violent images of theory felt so dissonant with the love for reading and writing that had compelled me to begin my PhD in the first place and the love given to me by my family that enabled their daughter to sit at her desk and study. I wanted a methodology that felt compelled by love, not death.

Together, Hennessy, MacFarlane and Yu talk to “the ways we might open up creative writing to the act of critical thinking, and the creative to the rigours of critical questioning”.

The final work in this second special issue, curated by Francesca Rendle-Short and Quinn Eades, includes contributions from over thirty others, and is a broad statement on the long history of experimental feminist writing in Australia; it holds at its centre the spirit of collaboration imbued within feminist praxis. It is also a tribute to Ania Walwicz, and speaks, perhaps, to the notion of loving through criticism which Hennessy, MacFarlane and Yu describe. In their introduction to their collaboration,

what we’re all thinking, in this space. It’s not a siloed endeavour. We can’t say it all here now, in a dialogue between you and I, but the special issue across these two parts, touches on all of this. The contributors bring forward many positions, many prospects about, through and with the creativecritical. That’s something we’ve found: creativecritical practice is not just one mode.

**Daniel**

I spend a lot of time complaining about the ways my self has been atomised or fractured or destroyed by late-stage capitalism, because I’m a millennial and that’s what I do. But I guess the reminder in the works we’ve gathered here is that in each of those is a...

**Stefanie**

A full self. The self that you are.

**Daniel**

Maybe what those structures do, the ones I complain about, is silo off sections of the self, but the creativecritical modes we’re encountering are about entanglement and weaving that self back together with its component parts, which include others.

**Stefanie**

Yeah. What I’ve loved about putting this together is that so many of our writers talk about love and hope and care and wholeness, which are often words too earnest for the Academy, but here they are as really strong, critical, creative, embodied propositions.

**Daniel**

Yeah, there’s a satisfying and I hope useful and important acknowledgement of the wholeness of the self doing the research, as opposed to the fractured self doing the research. It’s a research practice, a creative practice, a something practice, that’s suited for some of what the Anthropocene is bringing up.

**Stefanie**

Yeah, great point. That idea of

Rendle-Short and Eades write: “‘We are making a boat, love’ is an exploration of what it means to love each other with and through the troubling of books, attention and thought, and making”. That it is “a collaboration of love, love, this is *love collaboration* in practice”. It is also an invitation:

We invite you, dear reader, to submerge/immerse/drown yourself into/in/inside this work, to let *clouds lit inside where is*. Enlarge the image and text on the screen, if need be, your two forefingers pushing against each other on the mouse board to sink into it, let it take hold, see it for what it is, what it is not, *don’t hunch don’t hold your breath*.

Please, please do! When we first received a copy of this grand tribute to Walwicz, we did the same, and remain a little awestruck by what it manages.

We hope, too, that this special issue, serves a similar purpose: as an invitation. Across this issue and the next, we invite you into creativecritical writing, as it is being practised, right now. We cannot – could never – do justice to the thickness of the field, nor to its awesome depth and lineage – a lineage we are reminded of, joyously, each time we encounter the work of experimental writers who have tackled this creativecritical proposition before us. There are breadcrumbs in unlikely places – traces everywhere.

(Stefanie suggests to Daniel, *Perhaps we could use this article as a model for our introduction: [links to Alison Bartlett’s “Dear Regina: formative conversations about feminist writing”]*. Daniel responds, *I think so, yes! Alison was actually the occupant of the office I’m in right now, before me. I still have some of her journals on my bookshelves.*)

The creativecritical mode, called many things, considered many ways, is a crucial cog in the thinking about and of research. Full stop. We’ve found, through compiling these issues, all kinds of wonders – just as we have encountered trickinesses and pitfalls related to the carrying out of this

facing the future from where we are is important. We don’t know what’s coming next, and one of the best definitions that’s been put forward of the creativecritical, although she refers to it as fictocritical writing, is from Anna Gibbs: it “must be constantly invented anew” (p. 1). Constantly invented anew.

**Daniel**

Yeah, it’s also a necessity of approaching research phenomena. If your research production is unfit for purpose, because it doesn’t reflect the contours of the thing that you’re investigating, then it’s doing that thing – that phenomena – a dirty. It’s not rising to the challenge of what knowledge and art might manage.

**Stefanie**

That’s a fundamental question, isn’t it? How to make your inquiry apparent. To do it justice.

**Daniel**

I agree with you. In this process – the editing, I mean – I think I’ve learned about the difficulties of scholarly mechanisms as we know them for accommodating creativecritical practice.

**Stefanie**

Definitely.

**Daniel**

So it’s a kind of edged learning or knowledge right?

**Stefanie**

Yes.

**Daniel**

You learn new potentials just as you learn the flipside of those new potentials, which are the edifices that try to understand them.

**Stefanie**

And the challenge of working within them.

**Daniel**

Hmm.

**Stefanie**



kind of work within the (yes, we will say it) confines of the contemporary university. We hope, here, you find some kind of inspiration for the work you do – the love-work you do – in the ways in which the creativecritical self might be (shown to be) interconnected, in conversation, ecstatic, plural, exploded, entangled, loved and in love.

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The value of the creative arts within research frameworks

**Daniel**  
Yeah.

**Stefanie**  
There's so much to say. What's the creativecritical? Maybe it's personal, maybe citational, maybe ineffable. Either way, it's a positioning of thinking, writing and being. The works we've collected are a chorus for these ideas, and for that, we thank the authors. We also thank the journal editors, peer reviewers and all of those involved in the composition of this special issue.