

# CHAPTER ONE

## Prelude: The Ways in Which We Write

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Architecture Writing  
Writing Architecture

‘Writing’ is both a noun and a verb, but ‘architecture’ is only a noun; it doesn’t exist as a verb.

As both a noun and a verb, ‘writing’ can team up with adjectives and adverbs.

Architectural Writing  
Writing Architecturally

But as a noun, ‘architecture’ can only work with adjectives.

Writerly Architecture

Semantically, as well as materially, it would seem that architecture is far less flexible than writing, considered, that is, through the perspective of language.

Language. Between a noun and an adjective, there is a lot at stake. In the current education system, which trains students to qualify (or not) as professional architects, architecture’s position in language as noun or as adjective indicates an important distinction. A degree in Architecture allows  you to practise as an architect; a degree in Architectural Studies does not. (But of course many chose the latter precisely because it can be more interesting to study architecture through its adjectival form, and to go beyond designing buildings according to professional codes, to somewhere else entirely).

Architecture  
 Architectural  
 Architecturally

In debates around architecture and research, distinctions can be made between architecture as subject, discipline and method.<sup>1</sup> In bringing architecture and writing together as a pair, writing's role as verb and noun challenges architecture's noun form to think again about its verb form – about the way that it is, about what it is that it does, and how. Between and around the thing of the noun and the way of the verb, how is power distributed?

### Architecture-Writing

Once upon a time I came at the intersection of architecture and writing, with a hyphen in my hand, and I placed it between the two words – making architecture-writing.<sup>2</sup> And then I met Katja Grillner and found she had placed the words the other way around – writing architecture – but left the hyphen out of it.<sup>3</sup> What of it? And then Naomi Stead did things the same way.<sup>4</sup> The ordering . . . the one before the other, or after, thing. And the hyphen of it, or not? And there we were tumbling along, flipping things back and forth, between us, messing about with words, and sometimes hyphens.

So what.  
 Like what.  
 Words matter to architects?  
 Like hell they do.  
 But why?  
 And how?

Because playing with the ways we do things with words can expose the power systems that set the rules for those often-taken-for-granted ways that tell us how things with words are (to be) done. Words can do things, sometimes beyond language, as J. L. Austin has pointed out.<sup>5</sup>

Following conceptualism's collapse of the distinction between theory, criticism and practice, and its interactions with art history and performance, the term art-writing emerged. David Carrier<sup>6</sup> discussed the importance of the writerly aspects of criticism and how the formal qualities of writing were an important part of critical argumentation.

In the literature of art, it is impossible to absolutely separate or entirely distinguish, the arguments of an art writer from the literary structures used to present the arguments.<sup>7</sup>

Influenced by art-writing, I was interested in the writerly qualities of architectural criticism, and in the practice of writing architecturally, in how

one could make architecture in words. This led me to initiate site-writing as a form of situated criticism, and to explore through research and pedagogy the ways in which critics perform their interpretations of works to, for and with others, through written and other languages.<sup>8</sup> And to find out the changes writing can make to subjects, in the world. Even hyphens.

A hyphen can step in as if to banish any claim to hierarchy, and instead to say, look we are in this together, differently and equally. Get over the before and the after – it's just that in sentences written words have to do that, line up in sequences. In architecture, chronologies are not what it is all about, words can come up against each other in all kinds of ways – spatially and materially, as well as temporally. And in fiction, outside the usual ways of the sentence, that's where the fun of this book really begins.

But have we begun?

I think we need to begin again, this time with the other pair.

Ficto-Criticism

Critical Fiction

Here, things appear a bit more straightforward. Apparently. But even if it were simply a reversal of noun and adjective, which it is not . . .

Fiction Criticism

Criticism Fiction

Fictional Criticism

Criticism Fictional

Critical Fiction

Fiction Critical

Critical Fictional

Fictional Critical

Is there anything important to notice about the *ways* of reversing?

Criticism that is fictional

Rather than

Fiction that is critical

It might depend on whether the reader identifies with fiction or criticism as the term that they feel best describes them as writers, or their writing, or the ways in which they do their writing. On the one hand, fiction writers might imagine the ways in which the alternative worlds they offer provide *critical* potential, as in Philomena Mariani's post-colonial collection titled *Critical*

*Fiction*,<sup>9</sup> or Saidiya Hartman's use of 'critical fabulation' as a way of doing decolonial feminist history.<sup>10</sup> On the other, the languages, styles and genres of fiction can offer new ways for reinvigorating criticism, as for example, in Emily Orley and Katja Hilavaara's edited collection, *The Creative Critic*, or H  l  ne Frichot's engagement with the other H  l  ne (C.).<sup>11</sup>

Yet if we take the literary genre CNP, or Creative NonFiction, and start to consider how that has been defined, for example:

It is a genre that answers to many different names, depending on how it is packaged and who is doing the defining. Some of these names are: Literary Nonfiction; Narrative Nonfiction; Literary Journalism; Imaginative Nonfiction; Lyric Essay; Personal Essay; Personal Narrative; and Literary Memoir. Creative Nonfiction is even, sometimes, thought of as another way of writing fiction, because of the way writing changes the way we know a subject.<sup>12</sup>

Things become less clear.

As do the ways we do things.

So coming back to those ways:

Creative Nonfiction is even, sometimes, thought of as another way of writing fiction, because of the way writing changes the way we know a subject.<sup>13</sup>

Another way . . . because of the way . . . changes the way . . . she writes

The simple addition of a 'non', a no, to fiction, (but a yes to creative?), makes me realize that fiction has at least two kinds of way: not only its waywardness, of imagining alternative worlds, of going somewhere other than the ordinary, but also its ways, as in its modes – the stylistic tropes and unfamiliar writing methods it introduces to writers trained in critical academic traditions – like me. Fiction gives access to the I, to subjectivities, to character, plot, story, narration, to point of view, and to different genres – memoirs, essays, diaries . . .

And so perhaps the *facto-critic's* interest is not really in fiction's content, as such, but in its ways, which are often considered creative, rather than critical. Though here I remember (uncomfortably) Kenneth Goldsmith's (rather mean) dismissal of creative writing, and his preference for non-creative writing, for conceptual writing, and now for conceptual poetics.<sup>14</sup>

In brief, Conceptual writing or uncreative writing is a poetics of the moment . . . it employs intentionally self and ego effacing tactics using uncreativity, unoriginality, illegibility, appropriation, plagiarism, fraud, theft, and

falsification as its precepts ... Language as junk, language as detritus. Nutritionless language, meaningless language, unloved language ... language more concerned with quantity than quality.<sup>15</sup>

Unloved language. I find myself torn between the options Goldsmith offers. I don't, I won't, fit easily into that separation he suggests between creative and conceptual. I *love* that language of concepts, the hard-won edges of rigorous thinking, the ways in which words can be cut like diamonds – polished and sparkling. And even if I didn't, Sara Ahmed is close by, and she whispers, gently, but firmly, 'sweaty concepts', reminding me of the bodily labour of thinking:

Sweat is bodily; we might sweat more during strenuous and muscular activity. A sweaty concept might come out of a bodily experience that is trying. The task is to stay with the difficulty, to keep exploring and exposing this difficulty.<sup>16</sup>

Creative NonFiction  
Uncreative Writing  
Conceptual Writing  
Sweaty Concept

Stepping out together. Always in pairs.

*But what of the order?*

Look, I don't know. Sometimes language conventions dictate that. For example, French's *fiction théorique* is English's theoretical fiction. And maybe that is where this story really begins.


Suzanne Lamy's text underscores the changes that have been taking place in 'fiction theory', or as it is called in French: *fiction théorique* or *théoretique* (both terms are used in French). By the way, in French, the emphasis is on fiction, not theory. That is, the noun in French is *fiction*, the adjective *théorique* is what qualifies it. GS<sup>17</sup>

Fiction Theory  
*Fiction Théorique*  
*Fiction Théoretique*

I was on sabbatical last year with the intention of completing a book. Just before I sat down to write, my commissioning editor called to tell me that the publishing house I had worked with for a decade had been bought out by another much larger one. All my books were to be moved from geography and visual culture to an architecture list, and my book-to-be, which was still in the

process of being commissioned, was, well . . . well still in the process of being commissioned. And then my new commissioning editor bought me a coffee, and kindly explained that my book-to-be did not have enough to do with architecture, so it was more than likely not-to-be for quite a bit longer. (Maybe. Listen, I won't get into that here, but I am not so sure, not about the not architecture bit, but the not-to-be bit.) For the time being I was set free from the book-to-be. It turned out that this was a book-*not*-to-be, because I no longer wished to write it. I had fallen out of love. The book-to-be wanted to look back on a period of exhausting activism and confrontation, that quite frankly, I didn't. It was over. But the book-to-be wouldn't listen. You know how it can be. So it was best for us both that things came-not-to-be, in that way.

Free of my book-not-to-be's unwanted demands, I decided to turn my attentions to books-that-most certainly ~~were~~ by other writers. Once I had finished reading Sara Ahmed's *Living a Feminist Life*, my appetite was up and I began devouring. By the time I had consumed pretty much everything Maggie Nelson had ever written, I could see a beautiful future ahead where I was reading other women's writing forever. And the best way to make that future come to be, was to write a book with the books I loved – which turned out to be called 'auto-theories'.<sup>18</sup>

In her writing on auto-theory Lauren Fournier covers a lot of ground, and references some really exciting ideas – like ““life-thinking” (Samatar) and ““theoretical fiction” (Hawkins 263)”,<sup>19</sup> but the phrase and citation that really caught my attention was ““Fiction Theory” (Godard 6)”.  


Fiction theory: a corrective lens which helps us see *through* the fiction we've been conditioned to take for the real . . . Fiction *theory* deconstructs these fictions while *fiction* theory, conscious of itself as fiction, offers a new angle on the 'real', one that looks from inside out rather than outside in (the difference between woman as subject and woman as object). DM<sup>20</sup>

Fiction theory: a narrative, usually self-mirroring, which exposes, defamiliarizes *and/or* subverts the fictional and gender codes determining the re-presentation of women in literature and in this way contributes to feminist theory. BG<sup>21</sup>

Fiction theory: Nicole Brossard uses 'fiction' negatively in *L'Amèr* to imply that fictions or constructs created by the patriarchy and compliant women in which women are made into objects. But her 'fiction théorique' is something else – the text as both fiction and theory . . . KM<sup>22</sup>

DM, BG and KM make it crystal clear that they are bringing fiction and theory together for a reason, and that reason is political, to show how a power structure of domination and oppression, in this case patriarchy, operates through language structures, and that we have to find ways of working with these language structures to reveal the fact that they are not

natural, but constructed, that they structure us, and that through language we can find other options, alternative worlds.

And then comes GS's slash . . .

### Fiction/theory

Fiction/theory: fiction that contains within it a feminist examination, even self-consciousness, regarding the material of the text, the language. GS<sup>23</sup>

Theory done fictionally  
 Fiction done theoretically  
 Fiction and theory set as a pair  
 Sliced apart  
 Drawn together

I was fascinated by the incredible work that these four Canadian feminist literary theorists – Barbara Godard, Daphne Marlatt, Kathy Mezei and Gail Scott – had done in the early 1980s, published in *Tessera*, and their ‘fostering’ of ‘new modes of writing both creative and critical texts which was being pioneered in Quebec’, especially the work of Nicole Brossard, who had written:<sup>24</sup>

Feminist consciousness made me question reality and fiction. For example, when I was writing *L'Amèr*, I felt that I had to move reality into fiction because patriarchal reality made no sense and was useless to me. I also had the impression and the certainty that my fictions were reality they are full of meaning - and that from there I could start a theoretical work. That's why I called the book ‘une fiction théorique’.  
 Nicole Brossard<sup>25</sup>

It struck me that while these feminists involved called the critical writing they were doing ‘theory’, we were now more likely to call such writing ‘criticism’, to think of it as our practice, and as such to consider the ways in which writing is materially made – and as such its poetic and aesthetic qualities. Here Emma Cocker's recent work with ‘critical poetics’ [ ] Joan Retallack's earlier introduction of ‘poethics’ are striking, in experimenting with the poetics of language through play, but also – and at the same time – recognizing the ethical qualities of such experiments. As Retallack writes, referencing the psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott's concept of the transitional space between child and mother and its creative role in subject development:

There, I think, is the location of the essay as wager – in the intermediate zone between self and world, in the distancing act of play. The distance engendered by a poethical recognition of reciprocal alterity stimulates curiosity and exploration.<sup>27</sup>

In his intriguing 1983 essay, ‘Self-Writing’ (~~which I have just discovered~~), Michel Foucault explains in great detail how the Stoics understood the relation between the practice of writing and self-training, in terms, not of the poethical, but the *ethopoietic*:

As an element of self-training, writing has, to use an expression that one finds in Plutarch, an *ethopoietic* function: it is an agent of the transformation of truth into *ethos*.<sup>28</sup>

In Foucault’s late work on ethics, he is interested in rules of conduct and how one forms oneself in relation to those rules. He is concerned with what he calls the ‘*determination of the ethical substance*’ which for him can be found in ‘the way in which the individual has to constitute this or that part of himself as the prime material of his moral conduct’ and ‘the *mode of subjection* (mode d’assujettissement); that is, with the way in which the individual establishes his relation to the rule and recognizes himself as obliged to put it into practice’.<sup>29</sup>

The way in which . . . he writes  
A way with words  
Away with the fairies  
Finding our way with words<sup>30</sup>

A way: a method, style or manner of doing something

Where there is always something (of ourselves) at stake.

## Notes

- 1 Jane Rendell, ‘Architectural Research and Disciplinarity’, *ARQ*, vol. 8. no. 4 (2004): 141–7.
- 2 Jane Rendell, ‘Architecture-Writing’, in Jane Rendell (ed.) *Critical Architecture*, special issue of the *Journal of Architecture* vol. 10. no. 3, (June 2005): 255–64.
- 3 Katja Grillner, ‘*The Halt at the Door of the Boot-Shop*’, in *01.AKAD*, ed. Katja Grillner et al. (Stockholm: AKAD and Axl Books, 2005).
- 4 Naomi Stead and Lee Stickells, ‘Special Issue on Writing Architecture’, in *ATR* (Architectural Theory Review), vol. 15 no. 3 (2010).
- 5 J. L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).
- 6 See David Carrier, *Artwriting* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1987) and David Carrier, *Writing about Visual Art* (New York: Allworth Press, co-published with the School of Visual Art, 2003).
- 7 Carrier, *Writing about Visual Art*, 12.



- ‘Site-Writing’, Sharon Kivland, Jaspar Joseph-Lester and Emma Cocker (eds), *Transmission: Speaking and Listening*, vol. 4, (Sheffield Hallam University and Site Gallery, 2005), 169–76 and Jane Rendell, *Site-Writing: The Architecture of Art Criticism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010).
- 9 Essays in *Critical Fictions: The Politics of Imaginative Writing*, ed. Philomena Mariani (The New Press: 1992), work at the cross-over between fact and fiction in postcolonial writing, using fiction for critical purposes.
  - 10 Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 2019). See ‘Note on Method’. See also Saidiya Hartman, ‘The Anarchy of Colored Girls Assembled in a Riotous Manner’, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 113, no. 3 (1 July 2018): 465–90.
  - 11 Emily Orley and Katja Hilavaara (eds), *The Creative Critic* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018) and Hélène Frichot, ‘Following Hélène Cixous’s Steps Towards a Writing Architecture’, in *Writing Architecture*, special issue of *Architecture Theory Review*, vol. 15, no. 3 (2010).
  - 12 See Barrie Jean Borich, ‘What is Creative Nonfiction: An Introduction’, <http://barriejeanborich.com/what-is-creative-nonfiction-an-introduction>
  - 13 Barrie Jean Borich, ‘What is Creative Nonfiction: An Introduction’.
  - 14 See Kenneth Goldsmith, ‘Conceptual Poetics’ (presented at Conceptual Poetry and Its Others Conference, University of Arizona, Tucson). <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2008/06/conceptual-poetics-kenneth-goldsmith>.
  - 15 See Goldsmith, ‘Conceptual Poetics’.
  - 16 Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 12–13.
  - 17 Barbara Godard, Daphne Marlatt, Kathy Mezei and Gail Scott, ‘Theorizing Fiction Theory’, *Tessera 3 Canadian Fiction Magazine*, vol. 57 (1986): 6–12.
  - 18 See Stacey Young, *Changing the Wor(l)d: Discourse, Politics, and the Feminist Movement*, (London: Routledge, 1997), especially Chapter 3 on the history of feminist autotheory and Lauren Fournier, ‘Sick Women, Sad Girls, and Selfie Theory: Autotheory as Contemporary Feminist Practice.’ *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, vol. 33, no. 3 (2018): 643–62.
  - 19 As Lauren Fournier discusses, ‘Joan Hawkins describes Chris Kraus’s *I Love Dick* (1998) as “theoretical fiction,” meaning not simply fiction informed by theory but fiction in which “theory becomes an intrinsic part of the ‘plot,’ a mover and shaker in the fictional universe created by the author.”’ See Fournier, ‘Sick Women, Sad Girls, and Selfie Theory’ and Joan Hawkins, ‘Afterword: Theoretical Fictions’, Chris Kraus, *I Love Dick* (Cambridge: Semiotext(e), 1997), 263–76.
  - 20 Godard, Marlatt, Mezei and Scott, ‘Theorizing Fiction Theory’, 6–12.
  - 21 Godard, Marlatt, Mezei and Scott, ‘Theorizing Fiction Theory’, 6–12.
  - 22 Godard, Marlatt, Mezei and Scott, ‘Theorizing Fiction Theory’, 6–12.
  - 23 Godard, Marlatt, Mezei and Scott, ‘Theorizing Fiction Theory’, 6–12.
  - 24 *Tessera* was founded in 1981 as result of conversations among its founding editors, Barbara Godard, Daphne Marlatt, Kathy Mezei and Gail Scott, at a York University conference on feminist literary theory in Canada. Their goal

was to foster the development of new modes of writing both creative and critical texts which was being pioneered in Quebec. *Tessera* began publishing in 1984 out of Simon Fraser University and Stong College at York University. The first four issues of *Tessera* appeared as special issues of already established periodicals.' See <https://tessera.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/tessera/article/view/23515/21715>; <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/scl/article/view/8139/9196> and <https://www.archeion.ca/tessera-journal>

- 25 Quoted in Barbara Godard, 'Fiction/Theory: Editorial', *Tessera 3 Canadian Fiction Magazine*, no. 57 (1986): 4–5.
- 26 ~~Emma Cocker's Critical Poetics~~. See <http://www.criticalpoetics.co.uk/>. 'Critical Poetics is an interdisciplinary research group that seeks to stimulate debate, collaboration and innovation among scholars and practitioners whose work is concerned with creative and critical theory and practice. It explores possibilities for the text that are engendered by unconventional, unexpected and cross-disciplinary approaches.'
- 27 Joan Retallack, *The Poethical Wager* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 7.
- 28 See Michel Foucault, 'Self Writing', translated from *Corps écrit*, no. 5 (February 1983): 3–23. See <https://foucault.info/documents/foucault.hypomnemata.en/>, (accessed 28 September 2019).
- 29 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 2, The Use of Pleasure*, [1985] translated by Robert Hurley, (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 26.
- 30 Jane Rendell, 'A Way with Words: Feminists Writing Architectural Design Research', Murray Fraser (ed) *Architectural Design Research* (London: Ashgate, 2013).